INSPIRED SPEECH IN EARLY MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

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When we contemplate the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism we are bound to be struck by the significance of the creation of scripture that accompanies the movement: the new production of sūtras signals a religious revolution. It is not merely the content of these sūtras that is of significance, but the very fact of their coming into being. The broad religious issue at stake here is that of the reception of revelation¹ by the community in ways that are open as opposed to closed. In a closed tradition the truth is seen as revealed at a particular point in time through a particular individual or group of individuals; beyond this individual or group (in either space or time) revelation is inaccessible. In an open tradition these restrictions on access to the truth are denied. In this article I shall try to work towards an understanding of the shift from a closed to an open tradition that I believe is indicated in the rise of Mahāyāna. The attempt will be made to discover the extent to which the two traditions (pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism) in fact see themselves as closed or open, and to find the means whereby the shift in question took place. The method adopted will be to investigate the contribution made to the articulation of revelation by the ‘founder’ (the Buddha) on the one hand, and by the members of the community, contemporary with and subsequent to the founder, on the other hand. Since revelation was preserved chiefly in sūtra, most of our effort will go into determining the means whereby sūtra was generated. The two concepts that prove to be most crucial to this analysis are the word of the Buddha’ (buddhavacana) and ‘inspired speech’ (pratibhāna).

Mahāyāna Buddhism first becomes visible to the historian as a movement centred around the public expounding of texts. These texts were called ‘sūtras’² and were taken as true and authoritative by those who recited and expounded them. When traditional Buddhists began to take the movement seriously one of their main criticisms was that these alleged sūtras were spurious; they could not be accepted as Buddhist sūtras because they were not the word of the Buddha and hence not grounded in his wisdom and enlightenment. Many responses were
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given by members of the new movement to the traditionalist attacks. Generally speaking such responses included the claim that the Mahāyāna sūtras were indeed preached by the Buddha and were hence as legitimate as the accepted canon. One might well gain the impression, therefore, that both the attackers and the defenders agreed on the fundamental point that sūtra must be the literal word of the historical Buddha and disagreed only on what specific texts fulfilled this requirement. But did the early Mahāyānists really believe that their texts were the speech of the ‘historical’ Buddha? Is the dispute merely a disagreement over particular historical facts? Examination will show that the matter is more complex than this, and that it involves a fundamental religious shift implicating the view of history and revelation.

It will be convenient to begin by determining the initial status of the requirement that sūtra be the literal word of the Buddha. To what extent and in what sense is this requirement acknowledged in the traditional canon? Next, it will be found profitable to explore the canon further regarding one of the means of sūtra production that is found to deviate somewhat from the buddhavacana paradigm, namely that of ‘inspired speech’ as indicated by the use of prati-bhā constructs. Finally, the notion of inspired speech in early Mahāyāna will be investigated, chiefly as found in the Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines), an early sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom group.

Sūtra as the word of the Buddha

It is clear that in the early days of Mahāyāna the conviction was common that sūtra had to be the word of the Buddha. The Astasāhasrikā warns the devotees of the perfection of wisdom that they must be prepared to hear this sūtra rejected and reviled on such grounds by both traditional Buddhists and other Mahāyāna groups. The attack by the traditionalists, which is of more immediate importance to us, is described as follows:

Furthermore, Mara, the Evil One, may come along in the guise of a Shramana, and say: ‘Give up what you have heard up to now, abandon what you have gained so far! And if you follow this advice, we will again and again approach you, and say to you: “What you have heard just now, that is not the word of the Buddha. It is poetry, the work of poets. But what I here teach to you, that is the teaching of the Buddha, that is the word of the Buddha”.’

There are several things worthy of note here. First, the words of the traditionalists as quoted allude to a canonical utterance, and with their ring of orthodoxy probably represent accurately the attacks made on Mahāyāna. Second, the attack is obviously viewed as very dangerous. The passage casts the traditionalists in the role of Māra, the prime tempter and enemy for Buddhists. The efforts of
these monks to call Mahāyānists back to orthodoxy were seen as a terrible temptation which a member of the new movement (a bodhisattva) must reject at all costs. If he gives in he is a backslider. Finally, we are favoured with a clear expression of the issue under debate at the time, namely that of authorship versus revelation. The new sūtras are dismissed as poetry, the work of poets’ (kavyāṃ kavyam), to which is opposed buddhavacana, the truth as perfectly revealed (uncovered, opened up, displayed) to the community by the Buddha. Other early Mahāyāna works attest to the same same traditionalist criticism in much the same terms, so we are left in no doubt as to its prevalence.

Is this understanding of sūtra evidenced in the canon? No doubt the classic canonical statement of what sūtra is, of what qualifies as sūtra, is found in the accounts of the First Council in the Vinaya. The statement is given in narrative form as follows.

After the death of the Lord a council is convened at Rājagṛha in order to collect and recite the dharma (sūtra) and vinaya. The council is to be attended only by those who are utterly pure and have reached the highest goal (Arhatship), yet Ānanda, who was the Buddha’s personal attendant and therefore heard and retained the Buddha’s discourses, has not yet reached the goal. It is to everyone’s relief that he attains it at the eleventh hour and joins the council. When Mahākāśyapa directs the collecting and arranging of the sūtras Ānanda is the chief witness called upon. According to some of the accounts he verifies the context and arrangement of the sūtras, while in others he actually recites the entire collection of sūtras from memory. (Further witnesses, themselves arhats, are called upon to verify the accuracy of his recollections.) At the conclusion of his task the sūtra-pitaka is considered established and the door to further production of sūtra closed.

The main point of the account is to show that the truth revealed by the Buddha has been transmitted to the community in a perfect and final state. The council is the medium for this transmission and hence must be perfectly pure. It is especially important that Ānanda have such purity since he is the chief medium; his attainment of Arhatship is crucial, for it is not enough that he be learned (bahusūtrata—‘one who has heard much’): he must be able to give what he has heard undistorted and unsullied. Ānanda’s function is that of a clean receptacle.

In connection with the above point the accounts also aim to define the revelation, to give the criteria that permit something to be counted as dharma (or sūtra). And here we find the buddhavacana requirement strongly expressed. Sūtra is portrayed as ideally the direct record of the Buddha’s speech. The accounts of the First Council differ on a good many points, but in the later and more developed accounts this buddhavacana ideal is put forth very resolutely. In one version, for example, the gods, seeing that Ānanda is about to recite the sūtras, say to one another, ‘Be it known, good sirs, that the noble Ānanda is about to proclaim the sūtra, the dharma, spoken by the Tathāgata. We must listen attentively.’ In another account, when Ānanda gives the opening formula of his sūtra recitation the arhats, deeply moved, say, ‘With our own eyes we
have beheld the World Honoured One [Bhagavat]; now we hear his words’.\(^{13}\) Having recited all of the sūtras, Ānanda says (according to the same account), ‘All of this dharma that I have retained in my memory is what was spoken by the Buddha, who has now gone to Nirvāṇa’.\(^{14}\) In one version the two points—the finality of the arrangement of sūtra and the definition of this sūtra as the word of the Buddha—are neatly summed up at the conclusion of Ānanda’s recital:

Then Mahākāśyapa said to Ānanda, ‘There are just this many sūtras in the āgamas, beyond this there are none.’ Having said this he descended from the high seat. Then the Venerable Kāśyapa addressed the great gathering: ‘Be it known that the sūtras spoken by the World Honoured One have now all been assembled.’\(^{15}\)

Yet despite the buddhavacana definition of sūtra implied in the Council accounts, all of these accounts, not expecting the more developed ones, show an awareness that Ānanda was not a direct witness to all of the Buddha’s sermons and, more importantly, that not all of the discourses that form the basis for the sūtras were in fact spoken by the Buddha.\(^{16}\) Some, for example, were spoken by various disciples. These facts are admitted because they are obvious to anyone who reads the sūtras, but they are not made much of; the second point, in fact, is often acknowledged very briefly and left in obvious disharmony with the buddhavacana criterion so stoutly championed elsewhere in the narrative.

The ideal, to sum up, is this. The Buddha revealed the truth on various occasions; his discourses were directly witnessed and retained; these discourses were then rendered to the council in a perfect state and there bound together, so to speak, in a final and closed corpus, the sūtra-pitaka, which represents the revelation as possessed by the community. The fact that some sūtras do not record the word of the Buddha remains to cast its shadow.

Professor Lamotte suggests that we not take the buddhavacana definition in a narrow sense. He remarks:

Le Dharma [exposé dans les Sūtras] est à proprement parler Parole du Buddha (buddhavacana), mais cette définition n’est pas à prendre au sens restreint. A en juger d’après les explications fournies par tous les Vinaya les uns après les autres—Vin. des Mahāsāṃghika (T 1425, k. 13, p. 336 a 21); Vin. des Mūlasarv. (T 1442, k. 26, p. 771 b 22); Vin. pāli (IV, p. 15); Vin. des Dharmagupta (T 1428, k. 11, p. 639 a 16); Vin. des Sarvāstivādin (T 1435, k. 9, p. 71 b 1)—le Dharma est ce qu’est énoncé par le Buddha, sans doute et avant tout, mais aussi par les auditeurs (śrāvaka), les sages ermites (ṛṣi), les dieux (deva) et les êtres apparaîtrels (upāpāduka).\(^{17}\)

This statement is perceptive but, like the Council accounts, leaves certain questions unanswered. If the Buddha’s word is the model, how can the dharma
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(and hence sūtra) be that which is spoken by this assortment of beings (śrāvakas, sages and so on)? What is the connection between the model and the alternatives? Under what circumstances are those other than the Buddha admitted to speak words acceptable as sūtra? The problem is not solved by reference to Lamotte's sources for in fact these sources differ significantly from one another in their definition of dharma, he having chosen the widest of the definitions (that from the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya) for his exposition.¹⁸

In the end, of course, the surest method of investigating this issue is to study the sūtra-pitaka itself. I am not here interested in attempting to determine how many sūtras, as a matter of historical fact, record the Buddha's speech and how many record the speech of others, but rather in the more manageable question of what the sūtras themselves say about the matter.

It is found that the great majority of sūtras do indeed present themselves as giving the Buddha's words directly. There is, however, a significant number of sūtras that encapsulate the words of others. These may be divided into three types: (1) discourses that expand and interpret buddhavacana; (2) straightforward sermons or remarks that have no such obvious relation to the Buddha's word; (3) creative, spontaneous and inspired utterances.

The first category is of great importance to the tradition.¹⁹ Discourses by the Buddha can be either in brief or in detail,²⁰ and it is only wisdom such as characterizes the greatest disciples that allows the brief utterances to be interpreted and transformed into detailed discourses. Śāriputra is the most famous for his abilities in this area.²¹ We see here the establishing of a process whereby disciples of the Buddha can open up or extend buddhavacana. The apparent newness of such a discourse, it is implied, is deceiving: it is merely the natural unfolding, in light of the wisdom of the disciples in question, of what the Buddha has himself revealed.

The second category embraces a good many sūtras, many more than the preceding category.²² The great majority of the discourses in question are given by a select few Great Disciples (such as Śāriputra, Ānanda, Mahākāśyapa, and Mahāmaudgalyāyana), though occasionally we hear from lesser monks and nuns, laypeople, gods, and so on. As far as content is concerned this is a very mixed group, and the utterances range from virtual repetition of standard doctrinal material, most of which apparently has its origin in the Buddha, to comparatively free and creative speech that is less directly dependent on standard formulas and on words of the Buddha. In terms of the present research it is these apparently creative speeches that intrigue us, for we wonder how they can be related to the buddhavacana criterion.

In pursuing this same problem category (3) utterances are of exceptional importance, and for this reason they will be studied separately in the next section of the paper. Obviously, to the extent that people other than the Buddha can give creative and spontaneous speech that does not rely on his formulations, speech that can be acceptable as the basis of sūtra, the requirement that sūtra be buddhavacana is thrown in doubt, and the claim that the tradition sees itself as
closed is made questionable. In attempting to isolate this category of utterances I have had recourse to a simple criterion, namely that the passage must contain a prati-bhā construction. This criterion does not do the job perfectly, giving up a group consisting of all such utterances and only such utterances as are creative, spontaneous and inspired, but there are some advantages in exploring the use of one construction in depth, and the procedure will be found to yield interesting results.

We must now return to our earlier problem, namely: How are such utterances by those other than the Buddha, which we have now arranged in three categories, related to buddhavacana? Is it, in fact, necessary that there be any link at all to the Buddha? These questions are, in part, Buddhological questions, and they require Buddhological answers. The canon firmly insists on the fundamental difference between the function of the Buddha as teacher and the function of other teachers of dharma. When a Buddha arises in the world (a rare event) he, having by himself penetrated the world with his insight, makes the truth known to others (imam lokam... sayam abhinna sacchikatvā pavedeti); he is the trainer of the human steer (purisa-damma-sārathi), the teacher of gods and men (satthā deva-manussānam); he teaches the dharma (dhammam deseti) and reveals the pure way of life that accords with it (brahmacariya pakāseti). When others, even the greatest disciples, teach the dharma, they teach what was first made known by him. To be sure, they teach it only after they have personally verified it by their own experience, but their personal realization itself stems from arduous training in the Buddha’s teaching. The distinction is sometimes expressed in Buddhist texts through the common symbolism of the wheel of dharma: the Buddha has set this wheel in motion, while the function of his disciples is to keep it rolling. Here is another way of articulating the distinction (from the Gopakamoggallāna Sutta):

‘Is there even one monk, Ānanda, who is possessed in every way and in every part of all those things of which the good Gotama, perfected one, fully Self-Awakened One, was possessed?’

‘There is not even one monk, brahman, who is possessed in every way and in every part of all those things of which the Lord was possessed, perfected one, fully Self-Awakened One. For, brahman, this Lord was one to make arise a Way that had not arisen (before), to bring about a Way not brought about (before), to show a Way not shown (before); he was a knower of the Way, an understander of the Way skilled in the Way. But the disciples are now Way-followers following after him.’

Given this Buddhological framework it is no surprise that the community defines dharma (and hence sūtra) as ideally the word of the Buddha, and it should also come as no surprise to learn that the Buddha is given a position of
control over *all* expressions of *dharma*. For this is found to be the case. In brief, utterances by people other than the Buddha are accepted as the basis for *sūtra* only with his certification.

Three types of certification may be distinguished: approval after the event, approval before the event, and authorization of persons.

The first works as follows. Someone gives a discourse; the hearer of the discourse subsequently repeats it verbatim to the Buddha; the Buddha gives his approval of it. He commonly gives his approval by saying that under the circumstances he would have said precisely the same thing. In some cases he even repeats the discourse word for word when giving his approval. In these ways he transmutes the utterance after the fact into *buddhavacana*.

By certification before the event I refer to formulas whereby the Buddha invites someone to give a discourse on his behalf. Even where such discourses are not followed by certification after the event (as they frequently are) it is evident that they are to be considered as ‘*buddhavacana* by permission’.

Even with these two types of certification taken into account there still remain a fair number of *sūtra* discourses left uncertified. But it will be found that the individuals responsible for such discourses, almost always the Great Disciples, have on various occasions been so praised by the Buddha with respect to their wisdom and ability as to be considered authorized by him to speak *dharma*, their words certified in advance.

All of the three categories of utterance listed earlier receive certification by one or another of these means, even category (1) utterances with their obvious inherent connection with *buddhavacana*. And when all three modes of certification are taken into account there remain very few *sūtras* in the canon that are based on discourses presented as neither given by the Buddha nor certified by him. Of all the canonical definitions of *dharma* noted by Lamotte in the passage cited earlier, I am, therefore, most favourably impressed by the following one from the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya*:

By ‘*dharma*’ is meant that which the Buddha has spoken and that which the Buddha has certified. By ‘that which the Buddha has spoken’ is meant that which the Buddha has personally and with his own mouth spoken; by ‘that which the Buddha has certified’ is meant that which the Buddha’s disciples or others have spoken and which has been certified by the Buddha.

Now it is evident that all of these certification schemes formally require that the Buddha be present in the world, that he be accessible to certify. After his death the first two forms of certification become impossible and after the death of the Companions, the Great Disciples who have received personal sanction from the Buddha, there is no possibility of *dharma* being preached under the third sort of certification. *Sūtra* production must here come to an end.

The findings of the present section may be summarized as follows:
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(1) At the time of early Mahâyâna the view that sūtra must record buddhavacana was used by traditional Buddhists against the new Mahâyâna productions.

(2) Rather strong and literalist statements of this position can in fact be attested in canonical sources, such as in some of the accounts of the First Council.

(3) A look at the sūtra-pitaka, however, shows a more complicated situation. Here buddhavacana is still the ideal but can be extended through the process of certification to include the utterances of others.

(4) Such certification assumes the Buddha’s presence in the world.

Prati-bhâ in the sūtra-piṭaka

In exploring the limits of creative and independent speech as presented in the canon, the third group of utterances listed earlier, that of inspired speech, is of exceptional importance. In ancient India, as elsewhere, there was a recognition of the existence of a process whereby the reception of intuition or insight is directly linked with the faculty of expression. The seer and the poet belong to the same family to the extent that they are participants in this process.31 Of the terms used in India to capture this dual activity of unimpeded reception and expression, some of the most interesting are the prati-bhâ constructions, including various verbal forms from the root bhâ and prefix prati-, as well as the noun pratibhâna. A passage from Gonda’s The Vision of the Vedic Poets will serve to introduce the concept as issue:

A term of no mean interest in this connection is pratibhâ ... It etymologically belongs to prati-bhâ—‘to shine upon; come into sight, present oneself to’ but also ‘to appear to the mind, to flash upon the thought, occur to, become clear or manifest’ ... It usually denotes ‘a sudden thought, “ein aufleuchtender Gedanke” (Petr. Dict., a quick understanding or insight’, then also ‘presence of mind, wit, genius’, ‘boldness, audacity’, ‘fancy, imagination’. The substantive pratibhâna-, moreover, means ‘obviousness, intelligence, presence of mind; quick-wittedness, brilliance’. In Buddhist texts the association with ‘readiness in speech’ is perhaps more marked, hence ‘presence of mind, brilliance, inspiration’, especially as manifested in speech ... [emphasis mine]32

The following remarks should contribute in some measure to the understanding of the use of the expression, and hence the understanding of inspired speech, in the Buddhist canon.

Of the roughly two dozen occasions I have noted where prati-bhâ (= Pali paṭi-bhā) constructions are used in the sūtra-piṭaka (excluding occurrences of pratibhāna = Pali paṭibhāna), over two-thirds fall into two equally common categories:
(a) Someone is invited (usually by the Buddha) to have something ‘occur’ or ‘be revealed’ to him, whereupon he gives a doctrinal, prose discourse. For example:

Now on that occasion the Exalted One was seated surrounded by monks, the day being the sabbath. And when the Exalted One for much of the night had instructed, stirred, fired, and gladdened the monks with a talk about dhamma, on looking round and seeing that the order of monks was perfectly silent, he called to the venerable Sāriputta, saying: ‘Sāriputta, the order of monks has banished sloth-and-torpor. Let some dhamma-talk occur to you. [paṭibhātu taṁ Sāriputta bhikkhūnam dhammi-kathā.] My back aches. I will ease it.
‘Very well, sir’, replied the venerable Sāriputta to the Exalted One.

Then the Exalted One had his robe spread fourfold, and lying on his right side he took up the lion-posture, resting foot on foot, mindful and composed, fixing his thoughts on rising up again.

Thereupon the venerable Sāriputta called to the monks, saying: ‘Monks, your reverences’.

‘Yes, Sāriputta, your reverence’, replied those monks to the venerable Sāriputta, who said:

‘Your reverences, whosoever hath not faith in good states...

Sometimes the discourse thus given is followed by ‘certification after the event’, as in the case just referred to, where the Buddha says at the conclusion of Sāriputta’s sermon: ‘Well said! Well said, Sāriputta!’ (Sādhu sādhu, Sāriputta!), and then goes on to repeat the sermon in full.

(b) Something spontaneously ‘occurs’ or ‘is revealed’ to someone and he gives notice of this; after having been invited (usually by the Buddha) to give expression to his inspiration he gives a verse of praise. For example:

Then the venerable Vangīsa, arising from his seat, and draping his outer robe over one shoulder, bent his clasped hands saluting toward the Exalted One, and said: ‘It is revealed to me, Exalted One! it is revealed to me, Blessed One!’ [Paṭibhāti maṁ Bhagavā paṭibhāti maṁ Sugatā tī.]

And the Exalted One said: ‘Be it revealed to thee, Vangīsa’. [Paṭibhātu taṁ Vangīsā tī.]

Then the venerable Vangīsa extolled the Exalted One in his presence with suitable verses:

To-day on feast-day, for full purity,
Five hundred brethren are together come.
Such as have cut their fetters, cut their bonds,
Seers who are free from rebirth and from ill.
All we are sons of the Exalted One;
No sterile chaff may amongst us be found.
I worship him who strikes down craving's dart.
I greet the offspring of the sun's great line.37

Outside of these two categories most of the instances of prati-bhā constructions involve either similes occurring to people, or things being revealed (clear, evident, manifest) to the Buddha.

From the passages quoted representing the two major categories it can be seen that it would be misleading to suggest that all prati-bhā constructions indicate inspired speech in a strong sense. Only utterances of the second type, with their greater degree of spontaneity and emotional depth, can be taken without hesitation as involving inspiration in the generally accepted sense of the word. In fact, one could argue that prati-bhā speech is either doctrinally rich, as in (a); or inspired, as in (b), but not both. I believe, however, that it is legitimate to use the term 'inspired speech' for both sorts of utterance provided we are careful not to confuse the two or overlook their differences. It is convenient to be able to employ a single English term to refer to what is expressed with a single term in Sanskrit (and Pali); besides, the two sorts of construction are significantly related, for they indicate, first, that according to this literature the Buddha not only permitted but invited religious speech from his followers, and, second, that it was not merely considered acceptable but highly desirable that such speech have the quality of spontaneity.

Yet the two constructions do imply different views of inspiration. Most importantly, the spontaneity that each sort of speech is supposed to have arises from different sources. Two passages may be quoted to help explain this, one referring to the Buddha, who is the ideal category (a) speaker, and one referring to the monk Vaṅgīśa, who is the model for category (b) speech. The first is from the Abhayārāja-kumāra-sutta, wherein Prince Abhaya converses with the Buddha:

‘Revered sir, if those who are learned nobles and learned brahmans and learned householders and learned recluses approach the Tathāgata and ask a question they have constructed—has the Lord already reflected in his mind on this, thinking “Whoever, having approached me, questions me like this, then, asked thus, I will answer them thus,” or does (the answer) occur to a Tathāgata immediately? [udāhu ṭhāṇso v’etaṃ Tathāgatam paṭibhāññu?]

‘Well then, Prince, I will ask you a question in return. As it may please you, so may you answer it. What do you think about this, Prince? Are you skilled in the various parts of a chariot?’

‘Yes, revered sir, I am skilled in the various parts of a chariot.’

‘What do you think about this, Prince? If those who have approached you should ask thus: “What is the name of this particular part of the
chariot?" would you have already reflected on this in your mind, thinking: "If those who have approached me should ask thus, then I will answer them thus," or would (the answer) occur to you immediately?"

"Because, revered sir, I am a renowned charioteer, skilled in the various parts of a chariot, all the particular parts of a chariot are fully known to me, so (the answer) would occur to me immediately."

"Even so, Prince, if those who are learned nobles and learned brahmans and learned householders and learned recluse approach the Tathāgata and ask him a question they have constructed, (the answer) occurs to the Tathāgata immediately. What is the reason for this? It is, Prince, that the constitution of dhamma is fully penetrated by the Tathāgata, and because of his full penetration of the constitution of dhamma (the answer) occurs to the Tathāgata immediately."

[Śā hi rājakumāra Tathāgatassa dharmadhātū suppatti-viddhā yassa dharmadhātuyā suppatti-viddhattāṭhānasov'etam Tathāgatam paṭibhātī.]

This passage asserts that the essential truths are continually open or accessible to the Buddha, so that he is able to answer any question concerning them immediately and unselfconsciously. He is, so to speak, in a state of constant clarity. Note that the pratibhiṇa construction suggests both this clarity or receptivity and his ability to speak without hesitation. In both respects the Buddha is the model, and it is to this that he calls others. When he asks them to 'let it be clear' (pratibhātu) he is not asking for a carefully prepared sermon but is asking that they speak from their own hard-won state of mental clarity. The states of mind in question here, which are chiefly involved in category (a) constructions, fit within the wisdom rather than the faith tradition in Buddhism and are portrayed as the fruit of ardent and progressive cultivation in morality, asceticism and meditation; such states, when achieved, are permanent and reliable, and may be called upon whenever necessary. Hence the Buddha need not wait for his Great Disciples to become 'inspired': he can ask them to 'let it be clear' (that is, speak fluently from clarity of mind) without fear that they will come up dry.

The second passage to be quoted concerns Vangīsa, the other model speaker. On one occasion, after he has given verses of praise for the Buddha, the latter asks him: 'Say now, Vangīsa, were these verses of praise for the Buddha, the latter asks him: 'Say now, Vangīsa, were these verses thought out by thee beforehand, or have they been revealed to thee just on the spot?' (Kinmu te Vangīsa imā gāthāyo pubbe parivitakkita udāhu thānasov'etam patibhānti ti?) Vangīsa replies, 'Nay, lord, these verses were not thought out by me beforehand; they were revealed to me just on the spot.' The Buddha then expresses his approval of such spontaneous versifying. As in the previous case, therefore, the ideal is not a laboriously and self-consciously constructed utterance but the free movement of the mind. But the inspired speech (pratibhāna) of Vangīsa is not the same, and has not the same source, as that of the Great Disciples whom the Buddha invites to give extemporaneous sermons. Not only is Vangīsa not an arhat when he gives his poetical out-
bursts, but one actually gets the impression that he is having some trouble adapting himself to the monastic life. His pratibhāna comes not from outstanding wisdom or enlightenment but from his faith and his ability as an extempore poet. Before joining the Order he was a professional kavi, wandering from town to town ‘drunk with poetic inspiration’ (kāveyyamatta); when he heard the Buddha preach he left the world, and his trade, to strive as a monk. With him he brought his gift of inspired versifying, which he used to praise the Buddha and his chief disciples as well as to encourage himself to his task. Inspiration is not his usual state of being but comes upon him at specific times, usually when he is moved by faith.

To sum up, we have in the sūtra-pitaka two major sorts of prati-bhā construction, which refer to two sorts of creative speech by people other than the Buddha, this speech being acceptable under certain circumstances as the basis of sūtra. These two kinds of creative speech share the important characteristic of coming freely from a state of mind different from, and higher than, the normal. They differ in these respects: the first kind tends to be connected with mental states that are ideally open to all who strive correctly, permanent, and indicative of wisdom; the second kind tends to be connected with mental states that arise from an inborn faculty (a natural gift), that are sporadic, and that are indicative of faith.

It must be remembered that however great and of whatever kind one’s pratibhāna, in order to be acceptable as sūtra one’s utterance had to be certified by the Buddha. Personal pratibhāna is hence subordinate to buddhavacana, and is in fact authoritative only when transformed into extended buddhavacana. One can see this position set forth in the Uttaravipatti Sutta, where the monk Uttara, who has preached a particular doctrine, is asked by Sakka (Indra), ‘What then, sir—is this the venerable Uttara’s own patibhāna or the word of the Lord, the Arahat, the Fully Enlightened One?’ Uttara’s reply concludes with the words, ‘whatsoever be well spoken, all that is the word of the Exalted One, arahant, the fully awakened One, wholly based thereon is both what we and others say.’

It will be noted, however, that despite this bowing down to buddhavacana, the Uttaravipatti exemplifies a tendency in the understanding of buddhavacana that actually weakens it as an historically defined concept. For there is serious ambiguity in the statement that ‘whatsoever be well spoken, all that is the word of the Exalted One.’ This can mean that all of the good things in the tradition come from the Buddha, but it can equally well imply that buddhavacana is being redefined to mean ‘whatsoever be well spoken’, rather than meaning the actual words of Gautama. In other words, we may be witnessing a tendency to have buddhavacana defined as that speech which is of the greatest spiritual worth. This tendency is seen in other canonical statements aimed at giving criteria whereby to determine what is scripture. According to the ‘Great Authorities’ (Mahāpadesa), for example, the status of the utterance in question is to be determined by checking it against existing dharma and vinaya to see if it harmonizes in import. If it does, it may be accepted; if it does not, it must be rejected. Formally, the buddhavacana ideal is again carefully upheld, but, despite some minor concern for the honesty of the transmitter and consequent
accuracy of the historical transmission, the drift of the scheme is to promote a model of buddhavacana based on meaning rather than history. Finally, there is the famous and beautiful passage from the Anguttara Nikāya:

‘The doctrines, Upāli, of which you may know: “These doctrines lead one not to complete weariness (of the world), nor to dispassion, nor to ending, nor to calm, nor to knowledge, nor to the awakening, nor to the cool [nibbāna]”—regard them definitely as not Dhamma, not the discipline, not the world of the Teacher. But the doctrines of which you may know. “These doctrines lead one to complete weariness, dispassion, ending, calm, knowledge, the awakening, the cool”—regard them unreservedly as Dhamma, the discipline, the word of the Teacher.’

Again there is no formal challenge to the buddhavacana criterion—the point of the scheme is to determine what is the word of the Teacher (or ‘teaching of the Teacher’, satthusiṇa)—but now there are no historical checks at all and we are left with a purely functional understanding of buddhavacana.

Before we conclude that traditional Buddhism had no sense of history, we should remember that the sūtra-pitaka was in fact established as a stable body of literature quite early; after its establishment changes in existing sūtras tended to be minor and conservative, and little new sūtra was generated. The conviction that the time when the Buddha revealed the truth was past and that no such revelation could come again (at least for a very long time) was, therefore, powerful. Hence it is fair to say that the concept of buddhavacana, historically understood, put strong limits on the contribution people’s pratibhiṇa could make to the corpus of revealed truth. By and large, then, the religious community did indeed see itself as belonging to a closed tradition.

Inspired speech in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā

In early Mahāyāna the relation between buddhavacana and pratibhāna is seen in a radically new way. Although one may sometimes get the impression that nothing crucial has changed, a closer look reveals a startling break with traditional Buddhism. Herein, this issue will be addressed largely in the context of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā. This text is generally considered the earliest of the existing sūtras of the Perfection of Wisdom group and, in fact, one of the most ancient Mahāyāna sūtras we possess. The defence of sūtra status found in it, as well as the understanding of the role of inspired speech, should not be taken as representative in every respect of early Mahāyāna—surviving texts from the period show great diversity, even on major doctrinal points—but they are nonetheless important as constituting one of the most sophisticated and systematic attempts to work through the problem.

One of the crucial passages is that which opens the sūtra. After the introductory formula the following words occur:
The Lord said to the Venerable Subhuti, the Elder: May something be clear to you, Subhuti, on the subject of perfect wisdom and on behalf of the Bodhisattvas, the great beings—how the Bodhisattvas, the great beings, may go forth to perfect wisdom! [Tatra khalu bhaga-vān āyu-ṃtanti Subhūtiṃ sthaviraṃ āmantrayate sma: pratibhātu te Subhūte bodhisattvāṇāṃ mahāsattvāṇāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ ārabhya yathā bodhisattvāḥ mahāsattvāḥ prajñāpāramitāṃ nirvāyur iti.]

Thereupon the Venerable Sariputra thought to himself: Will that Venerable Subhuti, the Elder, expound perfect wisdom of himself, through the operation and force of his own power of inspired speech born of wisdom, or through the Buddha’s might? [Atha khalu āyuṃtataḥ Śāriputrasya-itaḥ abhavat: kim ayam āyuṃvān Subhūtiḥ sthavārā ātāmiyena svākeṇa prajñā pratibhāṇabala-dhānena svākeṇa prajñā pratibhāṇabala-dhiṣṭāḥ anena bodhisattvāṇāṃ mahāsattvāṇāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ upadeksyaty utāho buddhānubhāveneti?]

The Venerable Subhuti, who knew, through the Buddha’s might, that the Venerable Sariputra was in such wise discoursing in his heart, said to the Venerable Sariputra: Whatever, Venerable Sariputra, the Lord’s Disciples teach, all that is to be known as the Tathagata’s work. For in the dharma demonstrated by the Tathagata they train themselves, they realise its true nature, they hold it in mind. Thereafter nothing that they teach contradicts the true nature of the dharma. It is just an out-pouring of the Tathagata’s demonstration of dharma. Whatever those sons of good family may expound as the nature of dharma, that they do not bring into contradiction with the actual nature of dharma. 49

This passage begins the Aṣṭasāhasrikā and all that follows in the text is to be read in light of it. It is a careful statement on the vexed issue of the Buddha’s word versus independent and creative speech, and it is made with the status of this sûtra (and, probably, of Mahāyāna sûtras in general) in mind.

The Buddha immediately invites one of his disciples to speak. The central problem of the text, which is that of how the bodhisattva can become intimate with the perfection of wisdom, is to be set forth not by the Buddha but by someone delegated to speak on his behalf. Being now familiar with prati-bhā constructions as used in earlier Buddha literature, we know that when the Buddha invites Subhūti to speak, with the words ‘may it be clear to you’ (pratibhātu te), he is asking that a (doctrinal) discourse flow freely from Subhūti’s purified consciousness. The invitation constitutes a certification before the event and indicates that the discourse is a form of extended buddhavacana. Two important points are, therefore, immediately suggested by the use of this construction: (1) the sûtra (and, perhaps, all Mahāyāna sûtras) is not simple buddhavacana but extended buddhavacana, that is, it is the speech of people other than the Buddha but is certified by him; 50 (2) this certified speech is the most independent and creative sort recognized, that which comes freely from, or through, the disciple’s mind.
The next section of the passage gives Śāriputra’s thoughts. He represents traditional Buddhism and puts into words its doubts about Mahāyāna; he wonders, in effect, whether Mahāyāna’s authoritative discourses are not simply poetry and the work of poets. Does Subhūti, he asks, speak on his own authority and through his own power of extempore speech (pratibhāna) or through the power and authority of the Buddha? The question is not new to us, for we have seen it expressed in almost identical terms in the Uttaravipatti Sutta, to which there is surely an allusion here.51

Subhūti’s answer, which concludes the passage, is likewise close to what is found in the Uttaravipatti Sutta. In the latter we are told that ‘whatsoever be well spoken, all that is the word of the Exalted One, arahant, the fully Awakened One, wholly based thereon is both what we and others say’, while in the Aśṭasāhasrikā we are told that ‘whatever ... the Lord’s disciples teach, all that is to be known as the Tathagata’s work [tathāgatasya puruṣakāro]’, and we are assured that whatever these disciples teach ‘is just an outpouring [niṣyando]’ of the Tathagata’s demonstration of dharma’. The notion of the verification of the Buddha’s dharma by the disciples as referred to in this passage raises serious questions about both the canonical and the Mahāyāna understanding of buddhavacana. If the disciples verify the dharma for themselves, it is indeed natural that ‘thereafter nothing that they teach contradicts the true nature of dharma’ (and the true nature of reality), but in this case it seems unnecessary and even misleading to say that what they teach is the Tathagata’s work or an out-pouring of his demonstration of dharma, except in a very indirect sense (that is, in the sense that their training and verification depend upon the Buddha’s teaching). This leads us to consider the possibility that the process seen subtly at work in the canon is carried further in the Aśṭasāhasrikā: buddhavacana (or the Tathāgata’s demonstration of dharma) is not so much that which has been spoken by a particular individual at a particular time as it is that which is of the highest value from the religious point of view. We should not be surprised to find a shift in the meaning of buddhavacana in Mahāyāna, inasmuch as the movement is built in large part around a different vision of the Buddha.

The problem we are grappling with is that of the relationship of buddhavacana, both simple and extended, to historical fact, as seen by the Mahāyānists. The early Mahāyāna sūtras certainly portray the Buddha as preaching, as do they continually show him certifying the speech of others (note the familiar sādhu, sādhu kulaputra—‘well said, well said son of good family!’): How did Mahāyāna view the relationship between these ‘fictional’ events and historical reality? Is it simply a case of this religious community certifying its own productions by putting concocted words into the mouth of the Buddha? Is it, after all, nothing but a case of forgery?

It takes little reflection to realize that when the early Mahāyānists defend their sūtras as buddhavacana they do not mean by this that these texts are the speech of ‘historical Buddha’. There is no attempt made to have people believe
this. Although their sūtras are in some respects modelled on the old sūtra form it is the deviation from the old sūtras that is more striking—if they are forgeries they are very poor ones. If deception were the aim we could expect a decent attempt at protective mimicry: the new texts should be fit into one of the āgamas of the sūtra-piṭaka, they should be made to harmonize in style and length with the traditional sūtras, and they should certainly not proclaim themselves as new revelation! In order to see how the Mahāyānist views the situation, therefore, we need to dig more deeply. Let us begin by investigating early Mahāyāna views on the presence of the Buddha, for in the canon this presence was seen as prerequisite to all buddhavacana, whether simple or extended. This will then be followed by a discussion of the dharma-preacher, the inspired speaker who played such an important role in the origins of this religious movement.

There are two main positions taken with regard to the presence of the Buddha, which I shall call the theistic and the non-theistic. Roughly speaking, these may be said to belong to the faith and wisdom traditions respectively.

The theistic viewpoint can be found to some degree in all early Mahāyāna sūtras but is most boldly championed in the Lotus Sūtra (Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra). The Buddha, it is held, is still present, has never gone away. Only the faithful are aware of this. For this group of people the holy presence of the Lord is recaptured, the sacred time when the Buddha walked among men and talked to them is sought and realized. The religious quest becomes a striving to hear the Buddha (and other Buddhas), to see Him, to be near Him. Śākyamuni Buddha and the countless Buddhas who support him are, therefore, fully present and capable both of speaking and of certifying what others say. Not only can sūtra legitimately be produced, but this revelation supercedes that given through the Buddha’s corporeal form; that was the first turning of the wheel of the dharma, this is the second.

The non-theistic viewpoint is central to the Aṣṭasāhasrikā and is hence of more concern to us here. It must first be acknowledged, however, that the theistic and faith-dominated attitude is by no means lacking in the sūtra. The requirement that the words of the text be certified is felt strongly, and there are assurances that this requirement is met through the continual presence of the persons of Śākyamuni and other Buddhas. More specifically, the following points are made on the subject of the required presence of the Buddha, some of which need not imply theism but some of which probably do:

(1) Those who now pursue the perfection of wisdom do so because they were (in a previous lifetime) in the Buddha’s presence during his career in the world. Furthermore, while he was alive the Buddha knew what would happen in the future: he knew and saw the individuals who would one day seek perfect wisdom and he rejoiced in them (approved, certified them).

(2) Those who now study the perfection of wisdom in this world have been reborn here from other world systems, where they were in the direct presence of
other Buddhas and heard from them the perfection of wisdom. They are, therefore, not only persons once in the presence of Śākyamuni, but also persons fresh from experiencing the presence of other Buddhas.

(3) These other Buddhas not only supported them in the past, but continue to do so. The followers of the perfection of wisdom are known, seen, protected and upheld (hence, of course, certified) here and now by these Buddhas.

(4) While Śākyamuni was, formally speaking, supposed to have passed away, his continued presence was an experiential reality to this group of people, and occasionally the text breaks out of the formal structure and proclaims that He is still accessible to assist and support (and thus to certify).

(5) One may hear and see these persons (the various Buddhas) in dreams and visions and thereby be assured of their presence and approval.

These points show the extent to which the Mahāyānists in question met the certification problem in a way reminiscent of the Lotus Sūtra. I suspect that a certain degree of theism is, in fact, indispensable to the religious structure found in the Āsūtras; nevertheless, it is generally given a role that is subsidiary to, and merely supportive of, a quite different solution to the problem of certification and presence, one which is basically non-theistic. We can get to this solution by asking two fundamental questions and seeing how the Āsūtras answers them. The questions are: Is there that which is even more worthy of attention and honour, even more rightly regarded as authoritative, than the Buddha? and, Did the Buddha appoint a successor to whom one could turn after his passing away? The answer given to the first question is: That by means of which the Buddha (and all Buddhas) became enlightened—that by virtue of which he became buddha—fulfils these conditions. And this is none other than liberating wisdom (or the perfection of wisdom, prajñāpāramitā). Liberating wisdom is hence the mother of the Buddhas, the guide of the Buddhas, and so on. The function of a Buddha is precisely to make known such wisdom to others, and this function implies its priority. The answer to the second question is: The Buddha refused to appoint a human successor, saying instead that the dharma would succeed him. The essence of the dharma is, again, liberating wisdom. The two points converge here. The Buddha arose in the world because of his training in the perfection of wisdom; after his passing away one must take refuge in that very perfection of wisdom. ‘For he will understand that in the past, when he was a Bodhisattva, the Tathāgata trained in the perfection of wisdom; that also he should train in it; that she is his Teacher. When the Tathāgata is present in the world and when he has disappeared into final Nirvana, the Bodhisattvas should betake themselves to this very perfection of wisdom.’

The implication of these statements is that although the Buddha is no longer with us in the flesh he has, so to speak, given us a Comforter, which is the perfection of wisdom. This means that the door to revelation is not closed, for it can come from this present and accessible liberating wisdom. Great care is taken in the text to have a complete transfer of functions from the Buddha to the perfection of wisdom, so that what the former once did the latter now does.
fection of wisdom is in fact the Teacher, and turns the wheel of the dharma. Inasmuch as it manifests all of the essential functions of the Buddha, through it the Buddha lives on. ‘One should consider, Ānanda, that as long as the perfection of wisdom is current in the world the Tathāgata still abides, the Tathāgata still teaches the dharma.’70 ‘One should consider those beings who hear . . . the perfection of wisdom, Ānanda as living in the presence of the Tathāgata.’71 It follows that when the text refers to ‘the Buddha’s words’ it does not primarily refer to what Gautama said in the sixth or fifth century B.C. but to the fresh revelation obtained via perfect wisdom. But how can the perfection of wisdom, which is not a person, speak? And how can it certify the speech of others? It does so through the medium of the dharma-preacher.

A thorough treatment of the dharma-preacher (dharma-bhāṇaka)72 is out of the question here. Many of the mysteries of the origins of Mahāyāna are bound up with this figure, and it will be some time before the facts have been sorted out. Yet several of his main functions seem clear. Sociologically described, they are: to win converts to the movement, to train the converted in accordance with the main principles of the movement, and to promote and organize the central cult of the movement.

The initial task of the preacher is to raise up bodhisattvas. This means, among other things, winning people to the group that constitutes Mahāyāna. The conversion occurs through the evocation of a particular religious experience, that of ‘the rise of the aspiration for Buddhahood’ (bodhicittotpāda). This experience defines Mahāyāna as a group, for one who has had it is a bodhisattva and belongs to the Mahāyāna, while one who has not had it is no bodhisattva and no member of the movement. When we speak of the spread of Mahāyāna in this early period we are speaking of the progressive evocation of this experience among people. The principal setting for conversion seems to have been that of the sermon or discourse, involving the preacher and his group of hearers. The preacher, himself inspired, would attempt to bring about bodhicittotpāda in his hearers. It is likely that this dynamic was a source of much religious fervour in the early stages of the movement.

It is further evident that conversion became a self-perpetuating process. A bodhisattva, one converted to the movement, had as one of his prime tasks the saving of others, and the saving of others came to be thought of as bringing of them to Buddhahood.74 This meant that the sacred duty of all bodhisattvas was to set people on the path to Buddhahood—to give them the gift of bodhicitta. Hence, in theory, every member of the movement was called to be a preacher (which perhaps explains the expression bodhisattva dharma-bhāṇaka used occasionally as if the former implied the latter.)75 In reality, some people took the task to heart more than others, but the movement became, in any case, thoroughly evangelical.

If the hearers were already bodhisattvas, the preacher’s task was to instruct them in the fundamentals of Mahāyāna and guide them through the dangers that faced the newly converted. These dangers were many. There was the danger of
traditional Buddhists, who tried to convince the bodhisattvas of their folly, the danger of rival Mahāyāna groups with different scriptures and methods; there was the moral danger of bitterness and ill-will toward those outside the group as well as of pride among the converted who, having undergone a radical identity change, now fancied themselves great beings (mahāsattva) with nothing further to accomplish. But the greatest of dangers was that essential to bodhisattva-hood, that which all bodhisattvas had to undergo, namely, journeying in birth and death. In a religion that had been dedicated to helping everyone leave off wandering (samsāra) through the rebirth process, this journey was looked on with fear and revulsion, and those who undertook it willingly were widely regarded as fools. The preacher had a part to play in instructing the bodhisattva in how to travel through rebirth without becoming lost (and without forgetting that he was a bodhisattva, which was a possibility acknowledged), so that he could eventually mature to full Buddhahood.

There were several specific cults in which the early Mahāyānist s were involved, including the relic-cult, the bodhisattva-cult and the book-cult. Although the dharma-preacher was probably important to all of them, it is with the last one, the cult of the book, that he is especially connected.

There was almost certainly such a thing as Mahāyāna before there were Mahāyāna sūtras, but we know little about it. As the movement first becomes visible to us it is closely tied with its own texts, which are clearly meant to supercede the body of traditional Buddhist sūtras. There are some obvious reasons why the Mahāyānists would be tempted to abandon the traditional sūtras. These latter were quite useless for inspiring people to the bodhisattva path since they did not recognize this as a generally valid course of action and, in fact, were directed toward teaching people how to put an end to the journey in birth and death with the greatest possible speed (the aborting of the bodhisattva). Likewise, they were useless as instruction manuals for the converted. The Mahāyāna sūtras were definitely seen as filling these needs. In addition, however, there were social and emotional needs to be met, and the new sūtras became installed as objects of worship, concrete and appropriate symbols of the new movement. Indeed, as Mahāyāna first appears to us (in, I believe, its secondary stage of development) it is less a single movement than ‘a loose federation of a number of distinct though related [book-] cults, all of the same pattern, but each associated with its specific text’. The reactualized presence of the Buddha, whether theistically or non-theistically conceived, was concretely symbolized by the physical book in which the sūtra was recorded; just as the Buddha was felt to be present in the stūpa that held his relics, and as worship at the stūpa enabled one to enter sacred space and time, so was it with the ritual centred around the book, which at least some Mahāyānists wished to see rival relic-worship.

Now the dharmabhāṅaka seen in the early Mahāyāna sūtras is most commonly a preacher with a text. Each sūtra proclaims itself as the ultimate expression of the dharma, so that by ‘dharma-preacher’ is meant primarily the
preacher of the sūtra in question. That is, when the Lotus Sūtra praises the dharmabhāṇaka it is praising the Saddharmapundarikabhāṇaka, the preacher of the Lotus Sūtra. So the question naturally arises as to the precise function of the preacher with regard to the sūtra. Without attempting a final solution to this very complicated problem, I would suggest that three different roles of the preacher can be distinguished. First, there is the preacher as the bearer of the physical book in which the sūtra is written. He carries the book and promotes its function as the central symbol in worship. As the bearer of a sacred object that is the concrete manifestation of the Buddha, he is himself sacred. ‘He carries the Tathāgata on his shoulder, Bhaisajyagarāja, who after having copied this Dharma-paryāya and made a volume of it, carries it on his shoulder. Such a one, wherever he goes, must be saluted by all beings with joined hands, must be honoured, respected, worshipped . . . ’87 In this case the sanctity and authority of the preacher are entirely dependent on the book. Secondly, however, there is the preacher as a repository of the sūtra, a repository distinct from and on a par with the physical book. The dharmabhāṇaka, having memorized the text, can recite it without reference to the book, and his importance, while still derivative, is here dependent on the sūtra which he bears in his mind rather than on the sacred object he carries.88 Lastly, there is the dharmabhāṇaka as one who acts independently of the sūtra. He can, for example, act as a teacher and a scholar;89 it is when he is acting as an inspired speaker, however, that what he says is truly authoritative. Through his inspiration he gets directly in touch with, and communicates, the truth that the sūtra itself tries to communicate. This is especially clear in the Aśvatsattvā. The bodhisattva Sadāparudita, for example, is told when searching for the perfection of wisdom: ‘If you practise thus, son of good family, it will not be long before you hear the perfection of wisdom, either from a book or from the person of a monk who is a dharmabhāṇaka, and that person from whom you hear the perfection of wisdom you should regard as your Teacher.’90 The dharmabhāṇaka in question here is not simply one who has memorized this particular sūtra (though he may well have done this), but one who has within him, so to speak, the perfection of wisdom itself. When Sadāparudita finally finds his dharmabhāṇaka (Dharmodgata) he does not find a mere reciter but an extempore speaker who rocks his hearers with inspired speech born of his intimacy with liberating wisdom. This particular school of Mahāyāna certainly did not make the mistake of reducing the perfection of wisdom to a particular sūtra: the perfection of wisdom could be expressed in eight thousand ślokas, or in twenty-five thousand ślokas, or in more than twenty-five thousand or less than eight thousand.91 Or it could be expressed by the inspired preacher.

The precise nature of inspired speech depends upon the religious framework in which the inspiration occurs. It has been suggested that both theistic and non-theistic structures are found in early Mahāyāna. Within the former the inspired speaker, the dharmabhāṇaka, is primarily one who achieves communion with the divine persons, for whom he then acts as a channel and messenger. He
attempts to live open to the sacred realm; the Buddha appears before him in visions and dreams, comforting him and assuring him that he acts correctly, and he intermingles with devas and other supernatural beings, receiving their help and protection. He hears the Buddha expound the dharma and he catches the true meaning. When he preaches, his accuracy and fluency are assured by Buddhas and devas. His exegesis of his text is given authority by the Buddha, who guarantees the validity of his interpretation. Thus supported he may answer all public challenges and questions confidently and without hesitation.

He is the deputy or messenger of the Buddha; more, qua bearer of the holy word, he is the Buddha incarnate. He is to be treated with great respect, and those who spurn him and his message are doomed. It is thus that the dharma-bhāṇaka appears, for example, in the Lotus Sūtra, where he is both a transmitter of the sūtra and an extempore speaker.

In the Aṣṭasāhasrikā the situation is somewhat different. As has been argued, this text belongs in large part to a non-theistic wisdom tradition. In accordance with this the notion of inspiration is somewhat different from that just described. It will be remembered that at the opening of the sūtra the Buddha asks that Subhūti ‘let it be clear’ (pratibhātu), and that in this way the latter is made the instrument of extended buddhavacana. In fact, Subhūti’s words are certified by the Buddha in all of the three ways discussed earlier. Without question he is the model dharma-preacher for this text. As Sāriputra says, ‘In the first rank of the preachers of dharma should the Venerable Subhuti be placed.’ Hence it will pay to consider more closely his function and chief characteristics.

Here is what characterizes Subhūti’s speech: in style, it is fluent and brilliant; in content, it is rooted in the perception of the emptiness of all things. When asked by the Buddha to preach to the bodhisattvas about the perfection of wisdom, he replies, ‘I who do not find anything to correspond to the word “Bodhisattva”, or to the words “perfect wisdom”,—which Bodhisattva should I then instruct and admonish in which perfect wisdom?’ Likewise, witness the following exchange with the devas:

Then those Gods thought: What should one wish those to be like who are worthy to listen to the doctrine from the Holy Subhuti? Subhuti read their thoughts, and said: Those who learn the doctrine from me one should wish to be like an illusory magical creation, for they will neither hear my words, nor experience the facts which they express.

Gods: Beings that are like a magical illusion, are they not just an illusion?

Subhuti: Like a magical illusion are those beings, like a dream. For not two different things are magical illusion and beings, are dreams and beings. All objective facts also are like a magical illusion, like a dream. The various classes of saints, from Streamwinner to Buddhahood, also are like a magical illusion, like a dream.
Gods: A fully enlightened Buddha also, you say, is like a magical illusion [sic], is like a dream? Buddhahood also, you say, is like a magical illusion, is like a dream?

Subhuti: Even Nirvana, I say, is like a magical illusion, is like a dream. How much more so anything else!

Gods: Even Nirvana, Holy Subhuti, you say, is like an illusion, is like a dream?

Subhuti: Even if perchance there could be anything more distinguished, of that too I would say that it is like an illusion, like a dream. For not two different things are illusion and Nirvana, are dreams and Nirvana.

Thereupon the Venerable Sariputra, the Venerable Purna, son of Maitrayani, the Venerable Mahakoshthila, the Venerable Mahakatyayana, the Venerable Mahakasyapa, and the other Great Disciples, together with many thousands of Bodhisattvas, said: Who, Subhuti, will be those who grasp this perfect wisdom as here explained?

Thereupon the Venerable Ananda said to those Elders: Bodhisattvas who cannot fall back will grasp it, or persons who have reached sound views, or Arhats in whom the outflows have dried up.

Subhuti: No one will grasp this perfect wisdom as here explained... For no dharma at all has been indicated lit up, or communicated. So there will be no one who can grasp it.107

Sāriputra describes Subhūti’s ability well when he says that ‘in whatever way he may be questioned, he finds a way out; he does not swerve from [the correct teaching about] the true nature of Dharma, and he does not contradict that true nature of Dharma’.108 Again, Śakra says, ‘Whatever that holy Subhuti may expound, that he expounds with reference to emptiness [śūnyatām ārābhya], and he does not get stuck anywhere. The holy Subhūti’s demonstration of dharma does not get stuck anywhere, no more than an arrow shot into the air.’109 In response to this comment by Śakra, the Buddha affirms that ‘whatsoever Kauśika, is clear to Subhūti the Elder is clear to him from the standpoint of emptiness’ (yad yad eva hi Kauśika Subhūteḥ sthāvīrasya pratibhāti tat tad eva Kauśika śūnyatām ārābhya pratibhāti).110 And in the same passage he affirms that one who speaks thus speaks the dharma, the Buddha’s word.111 In other words, it is through such pratibhāna that buddhavacana is transmitted to the community.

Through the figure of Subhūti, therefore, the following ideal inspired speaker is suggested. The inspired speaker, the preacher of dharma, is one who has personally realized the emptiness of things and who, because this perception is continually open to him, can speak with complete freedom and fluency on any occasion, revealing the true nature of the world to others directly from his own vision. In this way he teaches others how to carry out the bodhisattva task, for this task not only remains a valid and serious business despite the apparently
nihilistic emptiness-perception, but can in fact be successfully completed only with the help of such perception. A bodhisattva who tries to make the journey in birth and death without this vision will never succeed. Thus the dharmabhāṇaka fulfils one of his most important roles, that of helping bodhisattvas through samsāra to Buddhahood. Furthermore, since what the text refers to as intimacy with the perfection of wisdom (and skill in means, upāyakauśalya) is precisely this ability to carry out the bodhisattva task while standing in emptiness, the preacher’s function is that of communicating perfect wisdom, bringing it to life, giving it flesh. In the theistic inspiration contexts the divine person speaks through the preacher; in this non-theistic context the preacher personifies, or brings to personhood, the source of truth and successor to the Buddha, which is liberating wisdom. Since liberating wisdom has taken over the function of the Buddha, what the inspired preacher reveals on behalf of it through his pratibhāṇa can be considered buddhavacana.

The issue of the preacher as an inspired speaker, as opposed to a mere reciter, arises again here. On the one hand the dharmabhāṇaka is portrayed in the early Mahāyāna sūtras as a preacher with a text, while on the other hand the ideal dharma-preacher suggested through the figure of Subhūti is strictly an extempore speaker. Which of these corresponds better to historical reality? I shall not attempt to answer this difficult question here, beyond suggesting that both figures represent historical types but from different periods. Subhūti represents, I believe, an early type of dharma-preacher, whereas the bodhisattva dharmabhāṇaka, who is often mentioned and to whom much of the exhortation of the early sūtras is addressed, is a more recent arrival. But it is important to note that even the latter figure is not a mere reciter; he too has need of pratibhāṇa, as the following passages show.

And further, Kauśika, the son or daughter of good family who repeats this perfection of wisdom will be approached by many hundreds, thousands, and hundreds of thousands of gods, out of their desire to hear the dharma. And those gods, listening to the dharma, will have a mind to bring pratibhāṇa to that dharmabhāṇaka. Even when the dharmabhāṇaka has no desire to speak the gods, out of respect for dharma, will have a mind to induce pratibhāṇa, so that that son or daughter of good family will feel impelled to speak.

This Subhūti, should be known as the first act of Māra, namely that pratibhāṇa will not arise in the bodhisattvas, the great beings, who speak the perfection of wisdom, until a long time has passed. And that pratibhāṇa will be scattered as soon as it is born.

And this too, Subhūti, should be known as an act of Māra against those bodhisattvas, the great beings, namely that when the deep perfection of wisdom is being spoken, taught, indicated, explained, learned, recited,
repeated or even simply written down, many pratibhānas will arise, which will cause confusion of thought.\textsuperscript{115}

Pratibhāna is seen here as a previous yet fragile possession, which is not controlled by the preacher but comes to him, or does not come to him, depending upon whether he is under the influence of the gods or the Evil One. Although the gods do not speak through him, they are given an important role in bringing inspired speech to him, a role that has little precedent in Buddhist literature but many precedents in non-Buddhist Indian religion.\textsuperscript{116} As for Māra, he can either suppress inspiration or use it against the preacher, in the latter case having him overwhelmed with pratibhānas (a rare instance of the plural form, possibly implying that the term refers only to the receptive power of the mind here, as suggested in Conze’s many flashes of insight’).\textsuperscript{117}

It will be remembered that in the canon two types of prati-bhā construction were found, which corresponded to two different understandings of inspired speech. Neither the clear distinction in construction nor, more importantly, the distinction in understanding of inspiration has survived entirely intact in Mahāyāna.\textsuperscript{118} This much of the distinction, however, remains: a state of constant clarity attained through ascetical, moral and meditational practice can be distinguished from an occasional state of self-transcendence in which truth discloses itself and flows through one freely, finding immediate expression in language, In the Āstasāhasrikā both are pictured. Subhūti typifies the first, while the bodhisattva dharmabhāṇaka being instructed to go out and preach, with his delicate pratibhāna as just described, typifies the second. Whether this is the difference between the ideal and the actual or between two different ideals is hard to say, but I cannot help but feel that the latter is more likely the case, and that Subhūti is the older and progressively less powerful ideal. That is, in early Mahāyāna there is a tendency, especially in the faith tradition (to which, for example, the Lotus Sūtra belongs), to abandon the gradual clarification of the mind attained through meditation and asceticism for moments of vision, ecstasy and inspiration. If this is so, the sort of inspired speech referred to in the canon with type (b) constructions, sporadic or occasional inspired speech, rises in Mahāyāna to a position of much more prominence than it had in the canon.

However important this pratibhāna, it remains true that the bodhisattva dharmabhāṇaka generally has a text—a Mahāyāna sūtra. I suspect that things were different in the earlier stage to which the figure of Subhūti belongs. The earliest dharma-preachers of Mahāyāna very likely had no Mahāyāna sūtra (though they may have had a text of a different kind); on the contrary, it was probably through them that the sūtras first made their appearance. Much of the Āstasāhasrikā, for example, may well record the discourses of dharma-preachers or, what comes to much the same thing, may be modelled on such discourses. Likewise, the dharmabhāṇakas probably continued to play a major role in the ongoing generation of sūtras within Mahāyāna. If this is so (and I shall
not attempt to prove it here), Mahāyāna has brought about a truly radical shift in the relationship between buddhavacana and pratibhāna: no longer is buddhavacana the truth that once came to the community, to the formulation of which the pratibhāna of people other than the Buddha contributed a small part (as extended buddhavacana) but beyond which such pratibhāna no longer has any authority; rather buddhavacana is that which comes to the community now and comes not otherwise than through pratibhāna.

No religious tradition, of course, is completely and indiscriminately open to new revelation. The valuing of any particular formulation will inevitably result in its exerting some degree of influence on, and control over, further formulations. But once the door had been opened in the early stages of Mahāyāna it was never completely closed. As long as Mahāyāna survived in India it continued to generate new sūtras, the total number of which is almost staggering. East Asian Mahāyāna was more cautious, but even here, in an altered form, the tradition remained open in certain sects. Beyond a doubt Mahāyāna wrought a lasting religious revolution.

The present section may be summarized as follows. In the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, 'the word of the Buddha' means primarily the truth as revealed to man. One seeks this truth not by determining what a particular fleshly being once said, but by gaining access to it here and now. The non-theistic option presented to us in this connection is that such truth comes through liberating wisdom. One can become intimate with this wisdom, embody it, put it into words. The person who does this—the dharma-preacher, the inspired speaker—is the delegate of liberating wisdom and is hence presented as a speaker of extended buddhavacana.

One could protest that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā continues, like other Mahāyāna sūtras, to speak of the Buddha, and shows him saying things (and certifying things) that he never in fact said. Most importantly, is it not this fictional Buddha who abdicates to the perfection of wisdom? Is not the abdication, and the religious structure that goes with it, simply the production of the community? The answer to this is two-fold. First, it is undoubtedly true that in Mahāyāna the appropriate means of expressing truth in scripture was seen to be story, not history. That is in keeping with the complete break with historical consciousness that Mahāyāna makes. Hence one must be prepared to look for truth symbolically expressed rather than in one-level descriptions of fact in Mahāyāna sūtras. Secondly, I believe that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā presents itself as, and in fact is, not the result of mere authorship but of the pratibhāna of dharma-preachers who felt themselves inspired by, and speaking on behalf of, liberating wisdom.

Conclusion

The Mahāyānists certainly did not ignore traditional Buddhist terminology and concepts, but they used them in a new way. As is often the case with revolutionaries, many of the terminological and conceptual resources available to them were in the tradition with which they were breaking. One still finds the word of
the Buddha and the certification of the Buddha given a central place in sūtra, therefore, but these were understood in a way that led to the recognition as script­
tual of words quite unacceptable according to these criteria as traditionally for­mulated. While formally revelation is still said to come through the founder, in fact it now comes through members of the community, who feel they can gain direct access to the truth.

In Mahāyāna we see both a re-assertion of pre-Buddhist religious structures and a reflection of newer developments in Indian religion (such as devotional­ism and avatāra mythology). In its valuing of story over history, its revering of divine persons, and its insistence that revelation can never be shut off—that it can break through at any time via inspired men and women—Mahāyāna is much more typical of Indian religious systems than is traditional Buddhism. Within the context of Indian religion it is not the affirmation of the continuing presence of the divine Buddha in the Lotus Sūtra that strikes one as odd, but the small voice in the Kathāvatthu protesting, ‘Was he not born at Lumbini?’ Perhaps it is the very rarity of ‘historical consciousness’ in Indian religion, and the fact that one feels this attempt to maintain a closed tradition was doomed from the start, that makes the Kathāvatthu utterance seem rather tragic and pre­cious. At the same time, of all the attempts made in early Mahāyāna to open the tradition to the recognition of new revelation without changing the essentials of the religion, that of the Perfection of Wisdom school is surely one of the most impressive.

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Notes

1 Three expressions used in this paper should be explained at the outset. ‘Revelation’ refers to the uncovering, disclosure, discovery, becoming clear, of truth that liberates or saves; it is also sometimes used as a synonym for ‘the revealed truth’. The term thus used need not entail theism. ‘Traditional’ Buddhism (as well as ‘traditionalist’) refers to pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism. In using this term I adopt the position of an observer contemporary with the rise of Mahāyāna. It is from such a standpoint—certainly not from the present day perspective—that it makes sense to distinguish this group as traditional. Finally, the term ‘canon’ is used herein, with some reservations, to refer to the body of scripture (the Tripitaka) acknowledged by this traditional Bud­dhism.

2 I am not here interested in the semantic range of the term ‘sūtra’ for Buddhists during the period in question. It is quite possible that they would have acknowledged the existence of sūtras within non-Buddhist religious traditions, referring in such cases to a literary genre. I am concerned only with sūtras that they regarded as
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authoritative. To avoid the continual use of such awkward expressions as ‘canonical sūtra’, ‘scriptural sūtra’, ‘Buddhist sūtra’ and so on, I speak simply of sūtra.

3 In later times many Mahāyāna apologists were not above claiming that the Mahāyāna sūtras had been kept in secret places till conditions in the world of men were favourable, at which time they were brought forth. See, e.g. Tārānātha’s account in Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, trans., Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.) Tārānātha’s History of Buddhism in India, Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study 1970, p. 98.


5 SN II, 267 and AN I, 72–73. (This is noted by Conze, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines, p. xiv.) Reference to the Pali Canon is to the Pali Text Society’s edition in Roman script (with occasional normalization of spelling).

6 The passage in question (AP, 328–329) says that the bodhisattva who is thrown into anxiety and doubt by the traditionalist criticisms is not ‘irreversible’ (avinirvānatiṣṭha), which means, sociologically considered, that he is a backslider.


8 Reference to the Buddhist scriptures in Chinese is to the Taishō edition of Watanabe and Takakusu (T in the notes). The accounts of the First Council are found in the following places:

- **Theravādin Vinaya: Cullavagga, Section 11 (Pañcasatikā-Khandhaka)**
  - Mahīśāsaka Vinaya: T 1421: vol. 22, 190 ff.

Translations of the main parts of these accounts (excepting that from the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya) can be found in Jean Przyluski, Le Concile de Rajagṛha, Paris, Paul Geuthner 1926–1928. My account of the story is a generalized one that is accurate for most versions. Although I believe the buddhavacana criterion for sūtra to be implicit even in the oldest accounts, which are certainly pre-Mahāyāna, it does become more explicit in the later accounts, which may well be post-Mahāyāna their present forms.

9 The term ‘dharma’ is often used to refer to sūtra in the early literature, and this usage is customary in the accounts of the First Council.

10 Ānanda recites the entire sūtra-piṭaka in the Mahāsīṁghika and Mūlasarvāstivādin accounts, and apparently also in the Sarvāstivādin account.

11 Ānanda is referred to as a ‘receptacle of the dharma’ in the account of the First Council given in the Introduction to the Ekottara Āgama preserved in Chinese (T 125: vol. 2, 549, c 11).
14 Ibid., c 25. My translation.
16 See, e.g., T 1425: vol. 22, 491, c 20 ff. (Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya version) and T 1451: vol. 24, 407, b 23–24 (Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya version).
18 The narrowest of the definitions is that from the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya, quoted below, p. 7.
19 This method of expanding buddhavacana is one of the foundations of Abhidharma. It is also found in Mahāyāna texts as one means of justifying the production of Mahāyāna sūtras. Examples of this sort of sūtra-discourse in the canon are: MN I, 108 (T 26: vol. 1, 603 b), MN III, 192 (T 26: vol. 1, 696 b), AN IV, 120, AN V 46 (T 99: vol. 2, 143 a), AN V, 225 (T 26: vol. 1, 734 a), SN II, 47 (T 99: vol. 2, 95 b), SN III, 1 (T 99: vol. 2, 33 a; T 125: vol. 2, 573 a), SN IV, 93 (T 99: vol. 2, 56 c).

Throughout the following section on the early canon I have based my research primarily on the Pali Canon but have in each case sought in addition for the corresponding passage in the āgamas preserved in Chinese. We can be thus assured that we are not dealing with matters peculiar to the Theravādin tradition. Where such corresponding passages have been found—with the help of Akanuma Chizen’s The Comparative Catalogue of Chinese Āgamas and Pāli Nikāyas, Tokyo, Hajinkaku-Shobo 1958—they are indicated in brackets after the Pali reference. In each case the Chinese passage agrees with its Pali equivalent on the point in question unless there is indication to the contrary. Reference is generally to the first page (or, in the case of the Chinese, section) of the sūtra.

20 ‘Sāriputta, I may teach Dhamma in brief [sankhittena], and again I may teach it in detail [vitthārena], and I may teach it both in brief and in detail. It is those who understand that are hard to find.’ AN I, 133 (T 99: vol. 2, 255 b). The translation is by F. L. Woodward, The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya), London, Luzac 1932, I, 116.
21 Examples of Sāriputra expanding utterances are: SN II, 47 (T 99: vol. 2, 95 b); SN III, 1 (T 99: vol. 2, 33 a; T 125: vol. 2, 573 a).
22 Some examples are: DN II, 316 (T 1: vol. 1, 42 b); MN I, 212 (T 26: vol. 1, 726 c); MN I, 299 (T 26: vol. 1, 788 a); MN III, 7 (T 26: vol. 1, 653 c); MN III, 124 (T 26: vol. 1, 475 a); AN III, 186 (T 26: vol. 1, 454 a); SN I, 71 (T 99: vol. 2, 335 c); SN II, 112 (T 99: vol. 2, 81 a); SN II, 205 (T 99: vol. 2, 300 c).
23 The Pali phrases quoted here are from an old and very important passage describing the rise of a Buddha in the world. The passage is common; see DN I, 100 (T 1: vol. 1, 83 c) for a typical occurrence.
24 MN III, 29.
26 E.g.: MN I, 108 (T 26: vol. 1, 603 b; T 125: vol. 2, 743 a); MN I, 212 (T 26: vol. 1, 726 c; T 125: vol. 2, 710 c); MN I, 192 (T 26: vol. 1, 696 b); AN IV, 27; AN IV, 162; AN V, 225 (T 26: vol. 1, 734 a); SN I, 71 (T 99: vol. 2, 335 c; T 100: vol. 2, 392 c); SN II, 47 (T 99: vol. 2, 95 b); SN II, 205 (T 99: vol. 2, 300 c; T 100: vol. 2, 415 b).
27 This is commonly used in connection with prati-bhā constructions, discussed in the next section of the paper.
28 E.g.: MN II, 157; AN III, 186 (T 26: vol. 1, 454 a); AN III, 292; AN III, 314 (T 99: vol. 2, 143 b); AN III, 340 (T 99: vol. 2, 128 c); AN III, 355; AN V, 41 (T 26: vol.
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1. 572 c; AN V, 46 (T 99: vol. 2, 143 a); AN V, 121; SN II, 112 (T 99: vol. 2, 81 a); SN IV, 103; SN V, 293 (T 99: vol. 2, 139 a).


31 See J. Gonda’s excellent treatment of this in his The Vision of the Vedic Poets. The Hague, Mouton 1963, pp. 14 ff. and throughout.

32 Ibid., p. 318.

33 The cases are: DN III, 209 (T 1: vol. 1, 49, c 3–4); MN I, 46; MN I, 354 (T 99: vol. 2, 316, b 6–7—not certain that the construction is present); MN II, 31 (T 26: vol. 1, 783 c–784 a—not certain that the construction is present); AN V, 122–123; AN V, 125; SN I, 155; SN II, 36–37; SN II, 198 (T 99: Vol. 2, 299 c 16; T 100: vol. 2, 414, b 1)—this passage also occurs elsewhere; SN IV, 184 (T 99: vol. 2, 316, b 6–7).


35 Ibid., 124.


40 Ibid.

41 See the Vaṅgisa Suttas, SN I, 185 ff. (T 99: vol. 2, 329, 9 ff.).

42 My translation. See SN I, 196 (cf. T 99: vol. 2, 331, c 24; T 100: vol. 2, 462, b 5) and Theragāthā, verse 1262. See also SN I, 110 (T 99: vol. 2, 285, c 16–18; T 100: vol. 2, 382, b 22–25) and the translator’s comments, Kindred Sayings, I, 138, n. 6 regarding this term.

43 AN IV, 163. My translation.

44 Ibid., 164, translated by E. M. Hare, Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya), London, Luzac 1935, IV, 112.

45 DN II, 123 (T 1: vol. 1, 17b–18a); AN II, 167.

46 AN IV, 143, translated by Hare, Gradual Sayings, IV, 96–97.

47 This we determine from a comparison of the surviving sūtra-piṭakas of the different sects. The changes are certainly greater than that which the Christian canon underwent after being fixed (in part because the sūtra-piṭaka was preserved orally for centuries in most sects) but there is, on the whole, considerable resistance to change observable, the major exception being the Ekottara Āgama preserved in Chinese. The creativity of the latter is almost certainly due to its connection with Mahāyāna. References and further remarks can be found in my unpublished doctoral dissertation, A Study of the Śrāmānayaphala Sūtra, Harvard University 1978.

48 See Conze’s essays ‘The development of Prajñāpāramitā thought’ and ‘The Composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā in his Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies.
Columbia, South Carolina, The University of South Carolina Press 1968, as well as his *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, The Hague, Mouton 1960. See also, e.g. Hajime Nakamura, ‘Historical studies of the coming into existence of Mahāyāna Sūtras’, *Proceedings of the Okurayama Oriental Research Institute*, II (1956), 2. Note that in the present paper the Mahāyāna sūtras are treated as wholes, no attempt being made to establish different historical levels. Our arguments will, of course, need eventually to be tested through such detailed historical analysis.


50 I believe this to be indicated by the passage under consideration despite the fact that the Buddha himself is, if the text is considered as a whole, the sūtra’s chief speaker.


53 Such proclamations are being made all the time. The announcement of the second turning of the wheel of the dharma is a good example (below, p. 52).

54 See especially the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, chapters 10, 15.

55 *Sad.*, 69–70 (Lotus, 70); *AP*, 203.

56 *AP*, 226–228.

57 *AP*, 228–229.


60 E.g., *AP*, 224–225, 251–252.

61 This is said less explicitly in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* than in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, but that dreams were considered important is clear (e.g. *AP*, 380–382), and that visions of various sorts were common is likewise clear (see especially the story of Sadāpārūḍita, chapters 30–31), though they are looked upon with some misgivings in most parts of the text (e.g. *AP*, 337–338, 393–394).

62 *AP*, chapter 4, especially p. 100.

63 *AP*, 92, 253–255.

64 There are a number of well known canonical passages that make this point, e.g. DN II, 154; MN III, 7ff.; SN III, 120. In the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* one sees an awareness of this tradition and an attempt to build upon it (see, e.g. *AP*, 460–464).

65 *AP*, 460–464.

66 *AP*, 61. Conze’s translation with some changes.

67 I suggest this parallel hesitantly, having not yet worked out its implication and its worth.


69 *AP*, 171, 462, 528.

70 *AP*, 529. My translation.

71 Ibid. My translation.

72 This is the most common term for the preacher, though we also see the term dharma-kathika used (*AP*, 30).

73 An interpretive rather than a literal translation of bodhicittotpāda.

74 The identification of saving or liberating with bringing to Buddhahood appears not to be aboriginal in Mahāyāna, but it was a fairly early development, at least in some groups (as seen in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*).

75 *Sad.*, 268–269 (Lotus, 257).

76 See especially *AP*, chapter 17.

77 In the *AP*, for example much effort is spent in trying to explain why some bodhisattvas (Mahāyānists) oppose the perfection of wisdom. See especially pp. 176–184.

78 E.g., *AP*, 420; *Sad.*, 285 (Lotus, 271).
79 In the *Aṣṭasāhasrika* the problem of pride arises chiefly in connection with the ‘saved’ rather than the mere converted. The saved are those who are ‘irreversible’ (*avinivartaniya*), meaning fully assured of attaining Buddhahood. In this connection see especially pp. 385ff.

80 *AP*, 329.

81 The term ‘bodhisattva-cult’ refers here to the worship of specific *bodhisattvas* (such as Avalokiteśvara) as divine persons.


83 More accurately, in the early stages of the movement the Mahāyāna *sūtras* were regarded by their proponents as superseding the traditional *sūtras* as scripture for Mahāyānists (the *Aṣṭasāhasrika* shows evidence, for example, of the existence of Mahāyānists who continued to use the traditional *sūtras* as scripture, and considerable energy is spent arguing against this position—see chapter 11 in particular, and p. 460); later, or perhaps simply in other groups, when the *bodhisattva* path was seen as that to which everyone was called, the traditional *sūtras* were often regarded as entirely otiose.

84 It is evident at *Sad.*, 261 (*Lotus*, 249–250) that this text was supposed to have a role in bringing about *bodhicicittotpāda*. See also *Sad.*, 328 (*Lotus*, 312) and *Sad.*, 330 (*Lotus*, 315), where this is given as one among several spiritual gifts associated with the text. The *Aṣṭasāhasrika*, on the other hand, makes comparatively little mention of *bodhicicittotpāda* (although see p. 209), seeming to presuppose this elementary attainment and presents itself as an advanced training manual (e.g. p. 139).


86 See ibid., throughout.

87 *Sad.*, 227 (*Lotus*, 216).

88 One has the option of bearing the perfection of wisdom in a book or in one’s memory. See, e.g. *AP*, 284.

89 We hear of the dharma-preacher’s teaching of dharma (dharmabhānakasya dharmadeśanā—*AP*, 98) and learn that he may privately teach a willing dharma-hearer (dharmasyravani—*AP*, 243–245). In addition we learn that he is anxious to understand and interpret his text correctly. See e.g. *Sad.*, 372–374 (*Lotus*, 351–352).

90 *AP*, 482–483. My translation. The options are that the perfection of wisdom be found *pustakagata* (in a book) or *dharmabhānakasya bhiksōh kāyagata* (in the person or body of a renunciant dharma-preacher). The latter expression seems to refer sometimes to memorization of the text—as at *AP*, 284—but here it appears to have a wider signification. Note also that the *dharmabhānakya* can be either a monk or a layman. See, e.g. *Sad.*, 227 (*Lotus*, 216).

91 For a description of the range of the literature in question see Conze’s *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature*.


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100 Sad., 226–227 (Lotus, 216).
101 Sad., 226 (Lotus, 215); Sad., 343 (Lotus, 326–327).
102 E.g., Sad., 343 (Lotus, 326–327) as well as chapter 10 of the text.
103 E.g., Sad., 227 (Lotus, 216); Sad., 482–483 (Lotus, 439); AP, chapter 7.
104 Certification after the event is seen typically at AP, 321, 401, 446. Certification before the event is seen in the invitation to speak that opens the sūtra discussed above, pp. 25ff. Certification of Subhūti as a person can be seen at AP, 154 and through the words of others but with the Buddha’s obvious approval, at AP, 6, 30, 306.
105 AP, 30.
106 AP, 7 (Conze’s rather free translation).
107 AP, 39–41.
108 AP, 31. The brackets are Conze’s.
109 AP, 454.
111 Ibid. Conze’s characterization of Subhūti on p. xii of The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines is well worth noting:

Where Subhūti talks it is the Buddha himself who speaks through him... He is the principal channel through whom the Buddha’s inspiration travels downwards. The theory is stated quite clearly at Rgs I 2–4 (= A I 4), and also at A I 25, II 44. It is the Buddha’s might (antabhāva), his ‘sustaining power’ (adhiśṭhāna), or as we might say, his ‘grace’ which leads to his revelation of the true doctrine, either through his own words or through inspired men as his mouthpiece. These men in their turn gain access to the revelation by their holy lives and their spiritual and meditational practices.

The characterization is not inaccurate, but it describes Subhūti, and the dharma-preacher in general, strictly within the theistic framework.

112 ‘Emptiness-perception’ does not refer to the perception of emptiness but to the perception of reality from the standpoint of emptiness.
113 AP, 83–84. My translation.
115 AP, 240. My translation.
116 See Gonda, The Vision of the Vedic Poets, pp. 17ff. and throughout. Possibly the legend of Brahma persuading the Buddha to preach after the latter’s enlightenment provides a precedent of sorts, but, although the Buddha is portrayed in the canon as communing with the gods and receiving information from them, I hardly think they induce inspired speech in him. Where he is described as having pratibhāna (see especially SN I, 136, which deals with the post-enlightenment events) it is not portrayed as dependent on the gods.
117 His translation of AP, 240.
118 Occasionally there is some divergence in form from the traditional pratibhā schemes, as at AP, 18–19. More frequently, the traditional structure is preserved, pratibhā forms being used with similes—as at Sad., 101 (Lotus, 99) and AP, 214ff. (cf. the canonical passages at MN I, 31–32; MN I, 230)—or verses of praise for the Buddha—as at P. L. Vaidya (ed) Samādhirājasūtra, Darbhanga, Mithila Institute, 1961, 83ff. The substantive pratibhāna is moderately common in the Mahāyāna sūtras and describes what becomes a standard attainment of the bodhisattva. Yet it should not be thought that pratibhā forms dominate the Mahāyāna sūtras; they are but one indicator of the religious transformation that Mahāyāna represents.