

国際仏教学大学院大学研究紀要

第 11 号 (平成 19 年)

Journal of the International College
for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies
Vol. XI, 2007

The Meeting of the Buddha with Māyā in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven

Examination of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* and its quotations in the *Shijiapu*—Part I

Hubert Durt

The Meeting of the Buddha with Māyā in the Trāyastrimśa Heaven

Examination of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* and its quotations in the *Shijiapu*—Part I

Hubert Durt

To Antonino Forte (1940–2006)

In Memoriam

INTRODUCTION

An anthology may be considered as a repository of ancient texts which in this way become more available to readers. It may also be considered as a publicity tool for new or unknown texts. This was the case, it seems, for a few anthologies of the Liang era, in the first half of the sixth century. One can thus entertain the possibility that Sengyou 僧祐, in the *Shijiapu* 釋迦譜 (T. 2040), which will be largely discussed here, or Baochang 寶唱, in the *Jinglüyixiang* 經律異相 (T. 2121), wished to reflect the success of a few sūtras which had been recently translated, or if they wished to assure at least some diffusion to texts which were passible of falling into oblivion. What is certain is that the only two known translations of an obscure translator named Danjing 曇景 obtained, through their inclusion in anthologies, an audience larger than expected.

These two translations are namely the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* (T. 383) and the *Sūtra of the Extraordinary Conditionment* (*Wei ceng you yin yuan jing* 未曾有因緣經, T. 754). In the case of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, one of the reasons of its notoriety was the narrative of a miraculous apparition of the Buddha standing up from his coffin in order to greet his mother, Mahāmāyā or Māyā. By introducing in their two abovementioned anthologies this miracle, which

occured after the Buddha's entry into nirvāṇa and was never told in other traditions, the compilers may have wished to magnify the echo of an event helping to promote the reputation of Buddhism in China as "pro-familia" and of the Buddha as an example of filial piety.

Moreover, we have to keep in mind that the *Shijiapu* is altogether both an anthology and an encyclopedia (these two genres of work were considered almost equivalent, as related by Paul Demiéville¹). The *Shijiapu* is an attempt to give parallel accounts, from different sources, of events from the Buddha's life. Thus it derives, as I wrote elsewhere,² from a comparative, selective and, via Sengyou's short comment, a more or less critical approach to the legend of the Buddha.

As indicated by its title "Genealogy of the Śākyas (釋迦譜)," the *Shijiapu* is obviously concerned with the family relations of the Buddha: that is to say, his lineage and his relatives. Among the thirty-four chapters, fourteen chapters may be considered, already from their titles, as mainly family related: three chapters (I, II, III) deal with the ascendants of the Buddha; three chapters (VI, VII, XVIII) deal with his relatives in a broad sense; five chapters are named after his immediate relatives: father (XV), mother (XVI), aunt and stepmother (XIV and XVII) and son (XIII); three chapters are labeled after his cousins, followers such as Anuruddha and Bhadrīka (XI) and Saundarananda (XII), or dissidents, like Devadatta (X).

Several of the remaining chapters are also filled with family stories. This is especially the case in chapter IV, pertaining to the youth of the Bodhisattva, known in two versions, very different in length.³ It is also the case in chapter

¹ "Les Chinois ont toujours conçu leurs encyclopédies comme des recueils de matériaux" in Louis Renou, Jean Filliozat, et al. *L'Inde Classique*, vol. II, Hanoi: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1953, p. 457.

² "The *Shijiapu* of Sengyou: The first Chinese attempt to produce a critical biography of the Buddha," *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies (JICPBS)* No 10 (2006), pp. 51–86.

XXVII, which deals with the parinirvāṇa, and will be the focus of special attention will be devoted in the second part of this article, to be published in the next issue of this *Journal*.

The topic here will concern events anterior to the parinirvāṇa and especially the visit of the Buddha to his mother in the heaven of the Trāyastriṃśa. This visit is the object of chapter XVI of the *Shijiapu*. However, the first (brief) mention of Māyā takes place in the account of the Bodhisattva's birth (Chapter IV of the *Shijiapu*). These references are based on the account of the *Puyaojing* 普曜經 (T. 186), an archaic (dated 308) version of the *Lalitavistara*, extant only in Chinese. Sengyou's only source for chapters XVI (meeting with Māyā in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven) and XXVII (section on the meeting with Māyā after the parinirvāṇa) is the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*. For these two chapters of the *Shijiapu* exceptionally, Sengyou could not resort to other sources as the events told in the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* are not known in any other text.

I. *The Shijiapu version on the role of Māyā in the conception and the birth of the Bodhisattva*

We are blessed with an abundant artistic illustration for both the scene of the conception of the Bodhisattva (the “Dream of a sleeping Māyā”) and for the scene of his birth from a standing Māyā grasping the branch of a tree in the garden of Lumbinī. By contrast, the literary tradition on these two events is rather limited. In a few previous articles, I have dealt with the pregnancy of Māyā and with a number of later episodes from her legend. In those articles, I did not include the visit of her son in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, which will be considered here, nor the episode of the last farewell to his mother, already announced as the subject of a forthcoming article.

Since it is not considered a primary source, the *Shijiapu* anthology is

³ See “The Crucial Chapter IV of the *Shijiapu*” in *ibid.*, pp. 68–71.

generally not included in the examination of scriptural and iconographical data about Māyā's pregnancy,⁴ although Sengyou deserves to be read with attention. He reproduces extracts of primary sources (in the present case, as mentioned above, the early Chinese translation of the *Lalitavistara* was his main source) but the extracts he selects are representative of his vision of the life of the Buddha. It is noteworthy that he did not neglect the tradition of Māyā's healing power during her pregnancy, and the Buddha's preaching inside his mother's womb.⁵

Before considering the three episodes where Māyā plays a more conspicuous role, a remark has to be made concerning the Chinese way to refer to her name in the *Shijiapu*. She is described as *miao* 妙 sublime when first encountered,⁶ then she is subsequently called chaste and sublime queen 王后潔妙,⁷ and thereafter 妙后 or 王后, or also "Mother of the Bodhisattva." Further study should be undertaken on the character *miao* 妙 "sublime" in this *Puyaojing*-inspired context. *Miao* could be considered as either an archaic transcription, or as a translation of the Sanskrit term *māyā*. *Māyā*, one of the richest terms of the Sanskrit vocabulary, could be understood here merely as "wonder," although the meaning of "illusion" was not unknown in the Buddhist tradition. The classical transcription *Mo-ye* 摩耶 appears only in a quotation by Sengyou⁸ of the [*Upāyakaṣāya*]*Jñānottarabodhisattvapariṣcchā* (*Hui shang pu sa wen da shan quan jing* 慧上菩薩問大善權經, T. 345).

The three episodes related to Māyā are: 1. the tale of an elephant descent from the Tuṣita heaven to the maternal womb (the elephant is often replaced

⁴ "The Pregnancy of Māyā: I. The five uncontrollable longings (*dohada*)," *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies (JICABS)* No 5 (2002), pp. 165-188; "The Pregnancy of Māyā: II. Māyā as healer," *JICABS* No 6 (2003), pp. 171-190. III "Late Episodes...", *JICABS* No 7 (2004), pp. 55-72.

⁵ T. 2040, j. 1, p.5a.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4c18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5a4.

⁸ T. 2040, j. 1, p. 5c13.

by Bodhisattva riding an elephant⁹); 2. the tale of the Bodhisattva's birth from the right side of his mother;¹⁰ and 3. the tale of Māyā's death seven days after the birth of her child and the subsequent announcement of her divinisation. Beside his customary sources, Sengyou refers to the *Dirghāgama*¹¹ and to a Mahayanic¹² interpretation of the event.

One may conclude that the chapter IV of the *Shijiapu* is very succinct about the prematurely dead mother of the Buddha, since it is a reflection of the scarcity of details existing about Māyā's human life in the early Chinese sources. Her life in the world had often been defined as "ten months of pregnancy, seven days of life (as mother)." This brevity will be compensated by the miraculous post mortem meetings she had with her son, as recounted in chapters XVI and XXVII of the anthology, based in both chapters on the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*.

⁹ *Acts of the Conference on the Birth of the Buddha*, Lumbini, October 2004 (under print). According to T. 186 which is the main source of the *Shijiapu* in the first version of Chapter IV (p. 4c-5a), the Bodhisattva took the form of a white elephant. However Sengyou quotes other sources (T. 185 and T. 184) where it is expressed that the Bodhisattva rode an elephant. It is again a reference to an elephant being ridden which figures in Chapter XXVII (p. 70c) in a passage based on the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*.

¹⁰ On this episode, the quoted supplementary sources here are 1) two archaic biographies (*Benqi* 本起) already mentioned in note 9, 2) an exceptional quotation from the Chinese version (T. 192) of the *Buddhacarita*, and 3) the Mahayanic (and very influent) *Upāyakaṣālya-sūtra* (T. 345).

¹¹ The *Dirgha āgama* (T. 1, p. 4a) passage which mentions the Buddha Vipāśyin refers to the rule for every mother of a Buddha to be reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven.

¹² The *Upāyakaṣālya-sūtra* (T. 345, p.161a) presents all these miraculous transformations (神變) as salvific artifices (善權方便). In this quotation, Queen Māyā appears for the first time in the *Shijiapu* under her name: 摩耶后.

II. *The Buddha's Preaching in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven as told in the Mahāmāyā Sūtra*

A. *Presentation of the Moho Moye jing* (T. 383)

The *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* 摩訶摩耶經 is a middle length text (two *juans*) included among the *mahāyānasūtras* in the category of “single translation sūtras” (單 訳 經). It is not included in the five major classes, namely *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Ratnakūṭa*, *Mahāsaṃnipāta*, *Avataṃsaka*, and *Nirvāṇa*. At a rather recent date however, it has been included in one of these five classes, the *Nirvāṇa* class (涅槃部) of the Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. Its translation is attributed to an almost unknown translator of the Qi 齊 dynasty (479–502) called Danjing 曇景¹³ active in the city of Yangtu 楊都. The text has two titles, the first being *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* 摩訶摩耶經, abbreviated to 摩耶經 in the quotation of chapter XXVII of the *Shijiapu*. Its second title, *Sūtra of the Ascension of the Buddha to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven in order to Preach the Dharma to his Mother* 佛昇刀利天爲母說法經, is used in chapter XVI of the *Shijiapu*. This title had already been assigned to an earlier *mahāyānasūtra* whose translation (T. 815) is attributed to Dharmarakṣa 竺法護, active during the Xi Jin 西晉 dynasty (265–316). In its formulation, this second title refers only to the first part of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*.

The *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* consists in two parts. The first coincides with the first scroll (*juan*) of the present edition of the text. It tells the story of the Buddha's visit to his natural mother. We know the context from many sources. The premature death of Māyā has deprived her of her son's salvific message. By comparison, her sister Mahāprajāpati, who became the future Buddha's foster mother, had a long life suffused with the Buddha's teaching. As Māyā had been reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the Buddha had to ascend to that

¹³ His other known translation is T. 754: *Sūtra of the Extraordinary Conditionment* (Wei ceng you yin yuan jing 未曾有因緣經).

heaven in order to teach his mother. In one of the last years of his active life as preacher, the Buddha was thus compelled to spend the three months of the summer retreat during the rainy season (*varṣā*) outside of our world. This sermon on and the subsequent theophanic return to Jambudvīpa surrounded by gods, and using a celestial ladder, is known in several biographies or hagiographies of the Buddha.¹⁴

A peculiarity of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* is that there is no orderly account of Māyā's life as a human being. We face only a nebulous collection of remembrances. The reader is made to jump from one allusion to another, expressed by either the Buddha or Māyā, before reaching a more or less panoramic view of the legend of Māyā as natural mother of the Buddha. Such a composition, often graced by a feminine narrative touch, is a rather uncommon feature in Buddhist literature. Some precise biographical facts about the Buddha and Māyā were visibly needed at the outset of the sūtra. They are less numerous in the second part.¹⁵

B. Abstract of the first part of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*

More than a sermon to the gods in the Trāyastrimśa Heaven, the first part of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* is centered on the meeting of the Buddha with his mother, which ends with the gift of a *dhāraṇī*. Although there is an introductory theophany of the Buddha, his role seems at first limited. He tells that he wishes to invite his mother to venerate the Triple Treasure. He then sends to her a messenger, identified as Mañjuśrī. When, at last, the Buddha meets her mother personally, he tells her about the separation which will result from his nirvāṇa. As of that moment, it is mostly Māyā herself who

¹⁴ Okamoto Kensuke 岡本健資, "The *Buddhacarita* and the story of Aśoka's pilgrimage in the *Divyāvadāna*, Chapter 27—*Divyāvadāna* 第二十七章に見られる佛跡巡礼と *Buddhacarita*, *Tōhōgaku* 東方学 110 (2005), p. 148-136.

¹⁵ One example in the second part is the remembrance of Māyā's dreams at the time of the Bodhisattva's conception (T. 383, j. 2, p. 1012b1-6).

preaches in prose and in stanzas.

The *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* has been rejected rather pedantically by a modern Japanese censor as being philosophically valueless.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the first part of this sūtra at least, has the interest of being a teaching whose longest part (more than two thirds of the first scroll: pp. 1005b11–1008a26) is spoken in the voice of a woman, Māyā. Although Māyā's words are mainly devoted to standard tenets (almost devoid of mahayanic influence) such as the sorrow of impermanence and bliss of deliverance, they bring us a sample of familiar Indian (or pseudo-Indian) discourse. Its abundance in Indian or pseudo-Indian transcriptions may also attract attention from a linguistical standpoint.

The end of the first part of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* is devoted to the departure of the Buddha. The celebrity of his visit to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is partly a consequence of the diffusion, especially through Buddhist art, of the scene of the “Descent of the gods.” In this scene, the Buddha, accompanied by the gods Brahmā and Śakra, uses god-made stairs for his return to Jambudvīpa. After the discourses of Māyā, the conclusive words of the Buddha and the celestial audience's approbation, the Buddha is reminded that he is needed in Jambudvīpa and that his nirvāṇa is approaching. The messenger of the Buddha here is Kumāra, son of a Minister of Rājagṛha (p. 1008b5).

In this final section, figures the Buddha's proclamation of a *dhāraṇī* to his mother (pp. 1008c26–1009a17). This *dhāraṇī* is offered to Māyā as a token of gratitude (報恩),¹⁷ an obligation which had been put into evidence in the first paragraphs of the sūtra.¹⁸ This *dhāraṇī* is commented on by the Buddha who points out the divine protectors (鬼神) of China and Jambudvīpa. After a few words on the Buddha's separation from his mother (p. 1009b26), he is

¹⁶ Minō Kōjun 美濃見順 in the Buddhist Bibliographical Dictionary 佛書解説大辞典, Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1935, vol. 10, p.276d, s.v. Makamayakyō: 思想的には何等特にいうべきほどのものはないが...

¹⁷ p. 1009a18.

¹⁸ p. 1005a29, b24.

described as going down the famous stairs bringing him to the Jetavana of Śrāvastī. Without anecdotal details, the first scroll of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* ends with the account of a welcoming party led by King Prasenajit. The King asks for some teachings and receives a standard lecture by the Buddha on the twelve co-dependent elements of the *Pratītya-samutpāda* (p. 1010a7-15).

C. Remembrances and gratitude

We may now go back to the recollection of sweet memories which characterizes the beginning of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*. I will point out them in the order of appearance in the text. The climax is reached with Māyā's accession to the first grade of "Entered in the Stream" in the way to *arhatva*.

After a lofty description, in rather Mahayanic style, of the Buddha seated in meditation under a pārichattaka tree in the Nandavana garden of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the Buddha expresses to his messenger Mañjuśrī Kumārabhūta his wish that his mother pay homage to the Triratna (p. 1005a20-21). This wish is accompanied by *gāthās* or stanzas, where the Buddha concedes that although living in Jambudvīpa, he desired from long ago to have the chance, much like the god with a thousand eyes (i.e. Śakra),¹⁹ to contemplate the benevolent face of the mother who brought him to life in a king's palace, and ascended miraculously to heaven to receive a divine award seven days after his birth. He was left to the care of his mother's young sister who educated and fed him with her milk in the process toward *bodhi*-attainment. Preaching the dharma to his natural mother in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is thus an act of gratitude (報恩). The Buddha wishes therefore that his mother and her retinue pay homage to him (the Buddha), the Dharma and the crowd (saṃgha) and receive the true and pure Dharma (p. 1005a23-b2).

These stanzas are immediately followed by the narrative of Mañjuśrī's visit to Mahāmāyā who figures here under her name. While listening to the

¹⁹ Śakra/Indra is the supreme god of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven.

messenger's recounting of the Tathāgata's stanzas, milk gushes from Māyā's breast. She says that if he is definitely her son Siddhārtha, then her milk has to reach his mouth directly. Pouring milk like white lotus flowers, she succeeds in making it enter the mouth of the Tathāgata who is far away (p. 1005b3-8). Among several wondrous events caused by this miracle, rather familiar²⁰ in Indian tales, Māyā declares to Mañjuśrī that she never had such a joy and happiness since the time when she became the mother of her son. Her joy is like the pleasure of a delicious meal for somebody hungry. She is getting rid of her previous distressing thoughts (p. 1005b8-15).

Accompanied by Mañjuśrī, Māyā reaches the Buddha who, from afar, is himself subject to intense emotions, and who expresses to her with a brahmic sound that he is close to enter *nirvāṇa*, the cessation of pains and pleasures (p. 1005b15-19). Māyā ceremoniously greets the Buddha and expresses by stanzas her taking refuge into him, the teacher of humans and gods. Her stanzas start with an evocation of his gratitude toward her. Cutting for her the roots of the triple poison results of her having fed him with her milk during innumerable kalpas. The five-hundred previous existences of Māyā as mother of the Bodhisattva is another familiar theme of the stories (*Jātaka*) about the former existences of the Buddha.²¹ The stanzas end with an evocation of her long aspiration to realize the fruit (of *arhatva*), aspiration which had been the motive for giving birth to him in the king's palace (p.1005b19-c5).

Then comes the account of Māyā's accession to the "entrance in the stream" (*śrota-āpanna*), which is the end of the first collection of reminiscences about the Māyā's motherhood.

The next commemoration will appear in a long suit of stanzas pronounced by Māyā. They include an enumeration and description of famous

²⁰ According to an Indian cliché, the test for a mother recovering a departed child consists of having her breast throwing milk in his mouth from a long distance.

²¹ See "Kajaṅgalā, who could have been the last mother of the Buddha," *JICPBS* No 9 (2005), p. 66.

beneficiaries of the Buddha's compassion. The first group are disciples: Kaundinya, one of the Buddha's five first followers, and the four Mahāśrāvakas (Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, Kāśyapa and Kātyāyana). Then follow famous converts or sinners: Aṅgulimāla, Devadatta (who after his attempt to murder the Buddha is looked upon with equanimity as the Buddha looks upon on his own son, Rāhula) (p. 1006b28-c17). The object of the longest description is the Mother of the demons (鬼子母), known also as Hārītī. About this other type of mother, converted through energetic means by the Buddha, Māyā concludes (pp. 1006c18-1007a3):

“Because she loved her own child
Such a Mother of demons
Extended this love to others
Totally and for ever refrained from killing.
如彼鬼子母
自愛其子故
廣及於他人
究竟永斷殺

The last stanza is an appeal to the Buddha for the diffusion of his Dharma by affection for his “birth mother” (以愍所生母)²² (p. 1007a4-6).

The personal link between the Buddha and his mother will appear only once more, before the end of the first part of the sūtra. It is at the time of the Buddha's departure, when Māyā, crying in despair, records that the vocation of a Bhagavat was always conditioned by previous self-sacrifices of his head, eyes, marrow, and brain (p. 1008c15-18). The answer of the Buddha is to deliver, particularly by gratitude (報恩) for his mother, the long *dhāraṇī* (pp. 1008c26-1009a17) which is an important element of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*. In the last sentence before going down the renowned stairs which made famous

²² The expression 所生母 may be compared with the expression “original mother” 本母 found in the *Shijiapu*, in a quotation from T. 185.

the episode of the predication in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the Buddha adds a few stanzas where he quotes almost literally his mother's line about his self-sacrifice. After Māyā employed the term *bhagavat*, we find here, from the mouth of the Buddha, the use of the terms *bodhisattva* and *pāramitā*, which are one of the few apparitions of Mahayanic vocabulary in the context of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* (p. 1009b20-22).

D. Is the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* a *mahāyānasūtra* ?

Is it because the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* is assorted with a *dhāraṇī* that it has been classified as *mahāyānasūtra* ? While acknowledging that it is a text of popular character, it is probably more appropriate to consider it as a hybrid text, or better, as a work of transition between Mainstream Buddhism and Mahāyana.

Its transitional and popular character is confirmed by quite a few unusual features.

1. The Mahābhikṣu in the introductory assembly.

We must first consider that the localisation of the aforementioned summer-retreat is exceptional as it takes place in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Such an exceptional location may explain that the text is introduced with a fantasmagorical radiance and a multiplication of Buddhas which are prodigies typical of a *mahāyānasūtra*. At any rate, a difference consists in the fact that the seated Buddha is surrounded neither by Bodhisattvas nor, as we could expect, by the resident gods of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, but by one thousand five hundred *mahābhikṣus*. One should immediately ask how they could be there as we know that this heaven is not accessible to human beings. It seems that this question did not embarrass the author of the *sūtra* as his description of the assembly continues with the customary list of living beings: *deva*, *nāga*, *yakṣa*, etc. until man and non-human. The description ends with the four classes of the Community: *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*, *upāsaka* and *upāsikā*. It is only much later, when the Buddha expresses his readiness to return to Jambudvīpa

that there is reference to the existence, in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, of the eight groups of living beings and of the four classes of the Community (p. 1008b4).

2. *The role of the assemblies.*

This assembly of spectators/listeners of the Buddha manifests itself on three occasions: first, in applauding Māyā who, reaching the grade of “Entered in the Stream,” claims her attestation of deliverance (*vimokṣa* 解脫). They express their wish to reach deliverance like Mahāmāyā (p. 1005c8-13). Second, after having heard the long doctrinal exchanges between Māyā and the Buddha, they express their rejection of the impermanent world and confirm their devotion to the the Buddha called the guide, the god among the gods, the incomparable and supreme lord (導師天中天無比最上士) according to the well-known list of elogious qualifications (p. 1008a26-b3).²³ Their last manifestation takes place when they escort the Buddha returning on earth through the divine stairs. Concurrently, during the last part of the narrative, another crowd is also revealed. As he is getting closer to his entry into nirvāṇa, people in Jambudvīpa are demanding the Buddha’s return to earth. They complain about their deficient bodies, the difference between gods and men, and their incapacity to climb to the heavens (p. 1008b16-27). Finally when the Buddha enters the Jetavana, the human crowd, led by King Prasenajit, welcomes him. The crowd is now composed of king, dignitaries, and the four classes of the earth-bound Community (p. 1009c12).

3. *The theme of self-sacrifice.*

A leitmotif of the Mainstream Buddhist sūtras and of the *mahāyānasūtras* is the insistence on the point that a Buddha needs to have practiced, in his past

²³ See Etienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse*, I, Louvain 1944, pp. 115-146; Jan Nattier, “The Ten Epithets of the Buddha in the Translations of Zhi Qian,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, No 6 (2003), pp. 207-250. This list is also partly reproduced in the first stanzas of Māyā (T. 383, p. 1005b25-27).

existences during numerous kalpas, every kind of self-sacrifice. We know how this teaching was controversial in China.²⁴ but regardless, Māyā praises the compassionate renunciation (*tyāga* 捨) of his head, eyes, marrow and brain (p. 1008c16–17). Moreover, the Buddha himself is proud, as a Bodhisattva practicing the *pāramitās*, of the past renunciation to the body parts already mentioned, in addition to his bones, flesh, hands, feet, and to his land, castle, wife and child (p. 1009b20–21).

4. *Parallelism in the names of the messengers of the Buddha.*

We know how Ānanda assumed the role of auxiliary (*upasthāyaka*) of the Buddha on earth. In the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, it is first Mañjuśrī who receives from the Buddha the order to contact Māyā. For Mañjuśrī, the text never employs his familiar title of Bodhisattva (a term which is used here only for the Buddha in his previous existences) but rather makes use of the Chinese translation “young man” 童子 which derives from a well-known epithet of Mañjuśrī: *kumāra* or *kumārabhūta*.²⁵ At the end of the narrative, when the Buddha requires a messenger in order to reestablish contact with Jambudvīpa, he calls on a certain Kumāra 鳩摩羅, son of a Minister of Rājagṛha (p. 1008b6). The double appearance of the same term, young man, once in Chinese translation, the second time in a Chinese transcription from Sanskrit, leaves the impression that there could have originally been only one messenger, perhaps simply qualified as “young man.” This may also result from an effort to give some congruency in a textual tradition that had several sources. The intrusion of Mañjuśrī, one of the most eminent figures of the Mahāyāna, as a messenger denounces perhaps a Mahayanic adaptation of a text which was originally a transitional bridge between Mainstream Buddhism and Mahāyāna.

²⁴ See H. Durt, “Two Interpretations of Human-flesh Offering: Misdeed or Supreme Sacrifice,” *JICABS* No 1 (1998), pp. 236–210.

²⁵ Etienne Lamotte, “Mañjuśrī,” *T’oung Pao* 48,1–3 (1960), p.25.

5. *Parallelism between the account of the life of the Buddha as told by Māyā in the Mahāmāyā Sūtra and the Lotus Face Sūtra.*

My conviction that the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, perhaps erroneously classified as a *mahāyānasūtra*, is still close to the Mainstream Buddhist sūtra tradition is intensified when I compare it to the *Lotus Face Sūtra*, *Lianhuamian jing* 蓮華面經 (T. 386). The translation of this prophetic and apocalyptic sūtra by Narendrayaśas (517-589) was completed one hundred years later than the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* and is the work of a famous Indian translator who translated several *mahāyānasūtras*. Like the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, the *Lotus Face Sūtra* is included among the *mahāyānasūtras* in the category of “single translation sūtras” (單訳經), and was later included in the *Nirvāṇa* class (涅槃部) of the Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. The leitmotif of the first part of this sūtra is that the Buddha is said to be close to his nirvāṇa²⁶ and that his relics will pose problems. He thus makes several last visits to the external worlds and, first among them, to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven and to his sovereign, Śakra.²⁷ No reference is made here to Māyā. Later, the Buddha remembers his past, his birthplace, Lumbinī, eulogizing his mother Māyā and his father Śuddhodana in the process.²⁸ In the second part, after the demise of the Buddha, the Buddha’s bowl, a particularly meaningful relic, will circulate in the universes and reach the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. It is then that Māyā appears. The vision of this relic which implies that the nirvāṇa of the Buddha took place, is unbearable like an arrow piercing her heart (如箭入心難可堪忍).²⁹ She then makes a eulogy for the bowl, which amounts to a summary of eight events from the Buddha’s life. She particularly insists on the story of Hārītī’s conversion.³⁰

²⁶ T. 386, p. 1070b26 and *passim*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1071b20-29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1073b24-29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1076b11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1976b15-c5.

The reader will immediately understand that between the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* and the *Lotus Face Sūtra* although there is no question of influence, there are convergences of spirit. Proximity of Nirvāṇa, prophecies of apocalyptic character, references to Māyā, epitomes in both texts about the legend of the Buddha told by Māyā (with the Hārītī reference as the only common point), are rather uncommon features which, in the immense world of Buddhist literature, do not necessarily preclude influences. Except for one classification grouping Śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas together,³¹ there is no trace of Mahāyāna in the *Lotus Face Sūtra*. We may thus suppose that for both the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* and the *Lotus Face Sūtra*, the qualification of *mahāyānasūtra* seems inappropriate. Rather, they represent a relatively late age in a popular current close to Mainstream Buddhism.

III. *The quotation from the First Part of the Mahāmāyā Sūtra in the Shijiapu*

In chapter XVI of the *Shijiapu*, whose title is “Record of Lady (夫人) Mahāmāyā, mother of Śākya,” Sengyou relies on one source only, the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, mentioned here under the title referred to supra as “Sūtra of the Buddha’s ascension to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven in order to preach to his mother.” From this sūtra, Sengyou quotes three extracts which are drastically resumed despite using the original vocabulary of the sūtra as much as possible. As usual, anthologies, which were not conceived for recitation, exclude from quotation the stanzas as well as the *dhāraṇī* (which is not mentioned at all).

1. *Meeting of the Buddha with Māyā*

In the first extract, mother and son play a central role. The text begins with the description of the Buddha staying for *varṣā* at the Trāyastriṃśa

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1071a29.

Heaven in the presence of a quadruple community, and producing various miracles: emanation of powerful light from the pores of his skin and multiplication of metamorphosis buddhas (化仏). The gods do not understand the meaning of these feats. The Buddha, wishing that his mother pay homage to the Triratna, sends Mañjuśrī (not qualified here as “young man”) to her.

When Mañjuśrī meets Māyā (not any longer “Mahāmāyā” as in the Sūtra) happens the test/miracle of the milk flowing from the Māyā’s two breasts into the far away mouth of the Tathāgata occurs. Mention is made of the consecutive earthquake of the megachiliocosm and of the sudden efflorescence of flowers and fruit. Māyā makes the declaration that she did not experience such a joy since the time she became the Buddha’s mother. The Buddha sees his mother from a distance, and to the palpitations of a frenetic drum similar to Mount Sumeru, he then addresses his mother with a brahmic sound announcing her that nirvāṇa is the definitive separation from joys and pains.

This first episode ends with Māyā paying homage to the Buddha and, after a sermon by the Buddha, as a result of the maturation of her karmic roots for good, and the breaking away of the knots of her eighty *koṭi* of *kleśa*, she obtains the fruit of *Srota-āpanna*. Her declaration of deliverance is followed by the wish, expressed by the assembly, that all living beings obtain deliverance.

2. Disarray of the Jambudvīpa and fabrication of triple-tiered precious stairs

The second segment comes from the last part of the chapter about the Buddha’s meeting with his mother at the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Thus, excluded from the Sengyou’s selection is the exchange of discourses between Māyā and her son.³² Māyā is now relegated to a secondary role.

We find reproduced in the *Shijiapu* the Buddha’s wish to go back down to earth after three months of lecturing the Trāyastriṃśa gods and bestowal of

³² From end of p.1005 until p. 1008 b4.

the resulting benefits. He then sends Kumāra with the mission to announce that his nirvāṇa is near. The people of earth who did not even know that the Buddha had gone to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven could not begin to express their sorrow enough. The Buddha appeases them with an emission of light and Śakra fabricates with the help of other divinities the famous triple-tiered precious stairs, which connects heaven and earth. Māyā weeps when the Buddha tells her that the law of saṃsāra is separation and that he must go back to Jambudvīpa where he will soon enter nirvāṇa.

3. *Return to Śrāvastī*

In the original *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, the text from which the third extract comes is similar to the origin of the second extract.³³ It is a short account of the glorious return of the Buddha, who is descending down the stairs with Brahmā handling the dais. The escort is described as consisting of the four Guardian Gods, the quadruple Community. The description strangely omits Śakra who followed Brahmā in the sūtra, and who is conspicuous in the triadic iconography, which traditionally represents the “Descent of the gods” with the Buddha going down the precious steps accompanied by Brahmā and Śakra.

Of all the kings of the welcoming party listed in the sūtra, Prasenajit, the king of Śrāvastī, seat of the Jetavana, alone is mentioned by his name; the others (等) left unnamed. This is probably because Prasenajit had the most important role in the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, where he pronounced a discourse in stanzas. The omission of King Udayana, who follows Prasenajit in the list of the sūtra, may be explained by the possibility that the compiler could not ignore the different accounts regarding the localisation of the return of the Buddha. Sāṃkāśya was one of the legendary terminal places of the precious stairs. Without dealing with the question of localisation, Sengyou devotes two short chapters of his anthology to the statues of the Buddha which were made

³³ From p. 1008c16 until p. 1009b25.

competitively during his absence. The first was made of sandalwood for King Udayana (chapter XXIII), while the second, in gold for king Prasenajit (chapter XXIV). Chapter XXIII starts with a reminder of the Buddha's sermon to his mother in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Both chapters are based on the *Ekottarāgama*.³⁴ In the chapter on the statue of king Udayana, a reference, in the original annotation of the *Shijiapu*, is made to the Mahayanic Contemplation Sūtra devoted to Śākyamuni *Guan fo san mei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經 (T. 643).³⁵

The third extract ends with a description of general happiness experienced when the Buddha recuperates his lion seat in the Jetavana.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION

The *Mahāmāyā Sūtra* may be considered as a religious text of Mainstream Buddhism, complemented by a powerful *dhāraṇī*.

The comparatively late date of its Chinese translation by an unknown translator along with the absence of any trace of this sūtra in the Sanskrit and Tibetan Scriptures makes it difficult to assign an Indian origin to this text. The luxury of Indian references in the text, some of them still unverifiable, may be an argument in favour of its pseudo-Indian Chinese apocryphon character. A thorough examination of its numerous transcriptions of Indic terms could perhaps betray Central Asian influence. We will see in the study of the second part of the sūtra that it probably had to suffer some editory transformations in order to be more closely integrated among the *Nirvāṇasūtras*.

Nevertheless, an immediate attraction to its content resulted from its grouping of scenes of dramatic interest: the meeting of the Buddha with his

³⁴ T. 125, j. 28, p. 706a.

³⁵ End of j. 6.

mother in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the triumphant return of the Buddha in our world through the stairs made by the gods in the first part, and, as we will see in the second part of the sūtra, the vivid depiction of the second meeting of the Buddha with Māyā (taking the form of a resurrection after Parinirvāṇa) along with the famous prediction about the vicissitudes of the Dharma.

It is not surprising that important fragments of such a text received the honour to be admitted in the *Shijiapu*, an anthological encyclopedia about the Buddha's life compiled by Sengyou. We may suppose that such an honour was bestowed, at least in part due to the exaltation of virtues such as gratitude (報恩), and of a Chinese Buddhist variety of filial piety (孝). Due to its intrinsic value, and vehiculated by the *Shijiapu*, the "Greetings of the Buddha from his coffin to his mother", the most impressive scene of the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, has been appreciated by devotees for centuries. In the seventh century, when making his pilgrimage to Kusinagara Xuanzang venerated the *caitya* devoted to this event. Later, in the twelfth century, the depiction of this scene "Śākya [muni] Rising from the Golden Coffin 釈迦金棺出現" gave birth to a masterwork of Heian period painting.

I. Primary Sources

- T. 2040 *Shi jia pu* (SHAKAFU) 釋迦譜 5 j. Sengyou 僧祐.
- T. 2121 *Jing lü yi xiang* (KYÖRITSUISŌ) 經律異相 50 j. Baochang 寶唱, etc.
- T. 383 *Mo he mo ye jing* (MAKAMAYAKYŌ) 摩訶摩耶經 2 j. *Mahāmāyāsūtra* ? Danjing 曇景.
- T. 754 *Wei ceng you yin yuan jing* (MIZOUINNENGYŌ) 未曾有因緣經 2 j. Danjing 曇景.
- T. 186 *Pu yao jing* (FUYŌKYŌ) 普曜經 8 j. **Lalitavistara*. Zhu Fahou 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa).
- T. 184 *Xiu xing ben qi jing* (SHUGYŌHONGIKYŌ) 修行本起經 2 j. Zhu Daili 竺大力 & Kang Mongxiang 康孟詳.

- T. 185 *Tai zi rui ying ben qi jing* (TAISHIZUIŌHONGIKYŌ) 太子瑞應本起經 2 j. Zhi Qian 支謙.
- T. 1 *Chang a han jing* (JŌAGONGYŌ) 長阿含經 22 j. *Dīrghāgama*. Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍 & Zhu Fonian 竺佛念.
- T. 345 *Hui shang pu sa wen da shan quan jing* (EJŌBOSATSUMONDAIZEN-GONGYŌ) 慧上菩薩問大善權經 2 j. [Upāyakaṣaḥ]jñānottarabodhisattvapariṣcchā. Zhu Fahou 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa).
- T. 815 *Fo sheng tao li tian wei mu shuo fa jing* (BUTSUSHŌTŌRITEUNIMOSEPPŌKYŌ) 佛昇刀利天爲母說法經 3 j. Zhu Fahou 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa).
- T. 186 *Lian hua mian jing* (RENGEMENGYŌ) 2 j. Narendrayaśas 那連耶舍.
- T. 125 *Zeng yi ahan jing* (ZŌICHIAGONGYŌ) 51 j. *Ekottarāgama*, *Ekottarika*. Gautama Saṃghadeva, mais plus probablement Zhu Fonian 竺佛念.
- T. 643 *Guan fo san mei hai jing* (KAMBUTSUSAMMAIKAIKYŌ) 觀佛三昧海經 10 j. Buddhābhadrā 仏陀跋陀羅.

II. Books and articles

Hubert Durt,

—“Two Interpretations of Human-flesh Offering: Misdeed or Supreme Sacrifice,” *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* (JICABS) No 1 (1998), pp. 236-210.

—I. “The Pregnancy of Māyā: The five uncontrollable longings (*dohada*),” *JICABS* No 5 (2002), pp. 165-188;

—II. “The Pregnancy of Māyā: Māyā as healer,” *JICABS* No 6 (2003), pp. 171-190.

—III. “Late Episodes...,” *JICABS* No 7 (2004), pp. 55-72.

—“Kajāṅgalā, who could have been the last mother of the Buddha,” *Journal of*

66 The Meeting of the Buddha with Māyā in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven (Durt)

the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies (JICPBS) No 9 (2005), p. 65-97.

—“The *Shijiapu* of Sengyou: The first Chinese attempt to produce a critical biography of the Buddha,” *JICPBS* No 10 (2006), pp. 51-86.

Etienne Lamotte,

—*Le Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse*, I, Louvain 1944, pp. 115-146.

—“Mañjuśrī,” *T'oung Pao* 48,1-3 (1960), pp. 1-96.

Jan Nattier,

—“The Ten Epithets of the Buddha in the Translations of Zhi Qian 支謙,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, No 6 (2003), pp. 207-250.

Okamoto Kensuke 岡本健資,

—“The *Buddhacarita* and the story of Aśoka’s pilgrimage in the *Divyāvadāna*, Chapter 27—*Divyāvadāna* 第二十七章に見られる佛跡巡礼と *Buddhacarita*, *Tōhōgaku* 東方学 110 (2005), p. 148-136.

I wish to thank Dominic Steavu for his revision of the English version of this article.

*Professor,
International College
for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies*