The Adoption of the Buddha’s Life Pattern in the Ten-Bhūmi Systems

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Buddhism in the earliest period had no doctrinal systems or biographies of the Buddha. It was some time after the Buddha’s decease that the teachings came to be systematized and biographical narratives were compiled. Difference in systematization and interpretation of the doctrine gave rise to the emergence of different schools; and several schools, it is assumed, had also their own tradition of the Buddha’s life. Those biographies which we now have in Sanskrit, Pāli, Tibetan, and Chinese bear traces of gradual amplification and ideological development. Simple and plain descriptions of the Buddha’s life were replaced by decorative glorifications in literal expression and ideology. Development of the Ābhidharmika concepts of Buddha and Dharma surely exerted no small influence on the Buddha’s biographies, and the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism gave impetus to the compilation of Mahāyānistic biographies, such as the Lalitavistara.

Influence of the biographical literature upon Mahāyāna ideologies is no less significant. When the idea of Ten-Bhūmi arose, the Buddha’s life was adapted into its scheme. Out of a number of Ten-Bhūmi systems, the following three, in particular, show clear indications of the attempt to incorporate the Buddha’s life into their systems: Mahāvastu, Prajñāparamita, and Avatāmsaka. A comparative study of these systems will reveal the process by which the Buddha’s life pattern was formulated to fit the Ten-Bhūmi concepts, and it will, I hope, throw a light on the relation between different Ten-Bhūmi systems.

(1) The colophon to the Fu pên hang chi ching 佛本行集經 testifies to this fact stating that the Mahāsāṃghikas, Sarvāstivādins, Kāśyapiyas, Dharma-guptas, and Mahīśāsakas had their own biographies. (Taishō. III, 932 a)
I. MAHAVASTU

The Mahāvastu is a collection of almost all the historical records and legendary stories of the Buddha that had been passed down to the period of its compilation. We find in it a large section on the Ten Bhūmis which, no doubt, is an elaboration by later Lokottaravādins. Quasi-Mahāyānic as it may well be called, the idea of the Mahāvastu affords ample material for the developed Mahāyānic Ten-Bhūmi concepts. According to the Mahāvastu, a Bodhisattva in the Tenth Bhūmi, Abhiṣekatā (Consecrational), is to be born in the Tuṣita Heaven, is to descend to earth, become recluse, and finally attain Buddhahood. The description of his final existence is the same as that of Śākyamuni Buddha, or, it might be better to say that Śākyamuni’s life is reproduced here in a generalized form. It is asserted that all Bodhisattvas go through the same stages to become a Buddha. The life pattern in the Tenth Bhūmi is presented as the seven perfections: 1 garbhavakrānti, 2 garbha-sthiti, 3 jāti, 4 janetī, 5 abhinī-śkramaṇa, 6 virya, and 7 jñānādhiṣṭigamaṇa.

In explaining the details of this form, the compiler(s) of the Mahāvastu simply follows the biographical stories of Śākyamuni Buddha. Even the proper names are reserved. Near the end of the whole account of the Ten Bhūmis, Mahākātyāyana, in answering Mahākāśyapa’s question, says that all Buddhas expounded the Ten Bhūmis and that the foregoing Ten Bhūmis have been explained by taking the Buddha Śākyamuni as a type. The compiler(s) certainly had in mind a system which would embrace both the traditional biography of the Buddha and the newly risen Ten-Bhūmi formula. The attempt to bring out a well-formulated system appears to have failed to reach its goal, but it paved a way for a better system as we shall see

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(2) “garbhavakrānti-saṃpannaḥ ca sāmyaksaṃbuddhā bhavanti, etc.” Mahāvastu, ed. by Senart, I, 142. Note that the later biographies of the Buddha made a Mahāyānic turn. The Lalitavistara, for example, gives the following nine features of the life of a Bodhisattva in the Abhiṣeka Bhūmi: avakramaṇa, janma, abhinīśkramaṇa, duṣkara-caryā, bodhimaṇḍopasaṃkramaṇa, māra-dhvaṃsana, bodhi-vibodhana, dharma-cakrapravartana, and maḥāparinirvāṇa. (Lalitavistara, ed. by Lefmann, p. 36)

(3) Mahāvastu, I, 161.
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in Mahāyāna literature.

II. PRAJÑĀ SŪTRAS

The Prajñā literature belongs to the base stratum of Mahāyāna Buddhism. We find in it various basic ideologies of Mahāyāna. The idea of Ten Bhūmis is presented in it more systematically than in the Mahāvastu. It is easily observed that the Ten-Bhūmi of the Prajñā literature has grown out of a mere systematization of Śākyamuni’s Bodhisattva career. The life and career of Śākyamuni is generalized to such a degree now that it is adaptable universally to all Bodhisattvas. A Bodhisattva of the highest stage, according to the Prajñā literature, is endowed with twelve perfections, of which the last seven or nine are very much the same as the main events in Śākyamuni’s life. The following are several varieties of the twelve-aspect pattern in different Prajñā sūtras.

1. Śatasahasrika Prajñāpāramitā: A Bodhisattva in the Ninth Bhūmi fulfils the twelve dharmas, which are: 1 ananta-pranidhāna-parigraha, 2 deva-nāga-yakṣa-gandharvāsura-garudi-kinnara-mahoraga-ruta-jñāna, 3 paripūrṇa-pratibhā-nirdeśa-jñāna, 4 garbhāvakraṇti-sampat, 5 kula-sampat, 6 jāti-sampat, 7 gotra-sampat, 8 paricāra-sampat (or parivāra-s.), 9 jana-sampat, 10 abhikramaṇa-sampat, 11 bodhivriksa-vyūha-sampat, and 12 sarvaguna-paripūri-sampat. The detailed explanation of each item, however, includes much that is peculiar to Buddha’s biographies.

2. Kuang tsan pan jo po lo mi ching: The twelve dharmas are to be perfected in the Tenth Bhūmi. They are: 1 वैन्युक्तिक प्रतिभासन्नीत, 2 देवसंस्त, 3 गृहोदय, 4 गयार्ध, 5 गौतम, 6 विद्यासे, 7 वैद्यासे, 8 वैद्यासे, 9 वैद्यासे, 10 वैद्यासे, 11 वैद्यासे, 12 वैद्यासे. The detailed explanation of each item, however, includes much that is peculiar to Buddha’s biographies.


(5) Taishō. VIII, 197 a.
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3. Fang kuang pan jo po lo mi ching 放光般若波羅蜜經: A Bodhisattva perfects the twelve dharmas in the Ninth Bhūmi: 1 持無限處廣大之願隨所應各授其證, 2 天龍夜叉捷陀羅悉皆具足, 3 知其音聲以弁才教授所因, 4 胎胎成就, 5 居家成就, 6 父母成就, 7 種姓成就, 8 宗親成就, 9 得生成就, 10 出家成就, 11 莊嚴佛樹成就, 12 諸善功德成就.

4. Mo ho pan jo po lo mi ching 摩诃般若波羅蜜經: There are the twelve dharmas to be perfected in the Ninth Bhūmi: 1 受無邊世界所度之分, 2 菩薩得如所願, 3 知諸天龍夜叉捷陀羅悉皆具足, 4 處胎成就, 5 家成就, 6 所生成就, 7 姓成就, 8 賢屬成就, 9 出生成就, 10 出家成就, 11 莊嚴佛樹成就, 12 一切諸善功德成滿具足.

5. Ta pan jo po lo mi ching 大般若波羅蜜經: The twelve dharmas are to be perfected in the Tenth Bhūmi: 1 攫受無邊處所大願隨所願皆令證得, 2 隨諸天龍及藥叉等異類音, 3 無碍所說, 4 入胎具足, 5 出生具足, 6 家族具足, 7 種姓具足, 8 賢屬具足, 9 生身具足, 10 出家具足, 11 莊嚴菩提樹具足, 12 一切功德成辨具足.

III. AVATĀMSAKA-SŪTRA We find the idea of Ten Bhūmis fully developed in the Daśabhūmika-sūtra, in which a Bodhisattva of the Tenth Bhūmi, Dharmamegha, manifests himself in ten states: 1 tuṣita-vara-bhavana-vāsa, 2 cyavana, 3 avakramaṇa, 4 garbha-sthiti, 5 janma, 6 abhinīkramana, 7 abhisaṃbodhi, 8 adhyeyeṣaṇa, 9 mahādharmacakra-pravartana, 10 mahāparinirvāṇa.

Here ten outstanding events in the Buddha’s life are taken up to formulate the life of a Bodhisattva of the highest rank. The number of aspects, however, varies in the same sūtra. In the exposition of the First Bhūmi, Pramudita, the Buddha’s life pattern is shown in the following fifteen states: 1 tuṣita-bhavana-vāsa, 2 cyavana, 3 ācaṅkramaṇa, 4 garbha-sthiti, 5 janma, 6 kumāra-krīḍa, 7 antaḥpura-vāsa, 8 abhiniṣkramaṇa, 9 duṣkara-caryā, 10 bodhimaṇḍa-upasaṃkramaṇa, 11 māradharṣaṇa, 12 abhisaṃbodhi, 13 adhye-

(6) Taishō. VIII, 27 c.
(7) Ibid., 257 b-c.
(8) Taishō. VII, 83 c.
(9) Daśabhūmika, Rahder’s text, p. 90; Kondo’s text, p. 191.

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śaṇa, 14 mahācakrapravartana, and 15 mahāparinirvāṇa. In different Chinese translations of the Daśabhūmika, we have similar presentations of the formula of Buddha's life.

In other chapters of the Avatamsaka we find sporadic references to the formula of Buddha's life. A striking example of the resemblance to Śākyamuni's biography is found in the Chapter "Renunciation of the World", in which, according to the Tu shih p' in ching and others, Samantabhadra answer questions regarding, among others, nineteen features of Buddha's life, including dwelling in the Tuśita Heaven, birth, walking seven steps after birth, overpowering of māras, Enlightenment, and Parinirvāṇa. In the Gaṇḍavyūha, too, we often run into cases in which a Bodhisattva's specific teachings are expounded based on or in connection with main events in Śākyamuni's life.

The above inquiry leads us to the following conclusions. First, the seven dharmas to be perfected (sampanna) in the Tenth Bhūmi in the Mahāvastu are similar to the last seven or nine of the twelve dharmas in the Prajñā sūtras. Three of them are even identical, only difference being that 'sampanna' in the former is changed to its noun form 'sampat' in the latter. This fact suggests a close relationship between the two systems. We can not yet decide whether the Prajñā sūtras borrowed the Buddha's life pattern from the Mahāvastu or vice versa, or whether there existed an archetypal pattern from which the two systems derived their materials.

Secondly, the life patterns of a highest Bodhisattva in the Mahāvastu and the Prajñā sūtras end in Enlightenment, whereas in the Avatamsaka a complete picture of the Buddha's life, i.e. from the life in the Tuṣita

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(10) Daśabhūmika, Rahder's text, p. 14; Kondo's text, p. 19. In the latter the tenth item is lacking.

(11) Cf. 漢佛一切智德經, Taishō. X, 462 b-c, 491 b, 492 a; 華嚴經 (60 chūan), Taishō. IX, 545 b, 573 c; 十住經, Taishō. X, 501 a, 528 a, 530 b-c; 華嚴經 (80 chūan), ibid., 181 c, 205 a, 207 b; 十地經, ibid., 538 c, 567 a, 570 a.

(12) 度世品經, Taishō. X, 644 a ff.; 華嚴經 (60 chūan), Taishō. IX, 632 c ff.; 華嚴經 (80 chūan), Taishō. X, 280 a-b ff.

(13) Gaṇḍavyūha, ed. Suzuki & Izumi, pp. 375, 441, 446, etc.
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Heaven to Parinirvāṇa, is given. In the former, the Bodhisattva career is supposed to end with the attainment of Buddhahood; thus, a line of demarcation is drawn between Bodhisattva-bhūmi and Buddha-bhūmi. In the *Avatāmsaka*, however, the realization of Buddhahood is not the end of the Bodhisattva career, but is simply an aspect of the eternal activity of an enlightened Bodhisattva; he is considered to carry on an endless altruism, in which he manifests himself even as a Buddha like Śākyamuni. In other words, the *Mahāvastu* and the Prajñā sūtras emphasize a Buddha with all the characteristics and attributes of Nirmāṇakāya, even though the latter speaks of Dharmakāya in the Seventh Bhūmi; but the *Avatāmsaka* places a greater emphasis on Dharmakāya, so that a human Buddha is considered to be a mere manifestation of the original Dharmakāya.

Lastly, the process of generalizing the Buddha’s life pattern can be presented in the following way. First stage: a pattern of Śākyamuni’s life up to Enlightenment was formulated to describe His last birth in the Bodhisattva career. The second: the life pattern thus established was generalized in order to be adaptable to the Bodhisattvas, first, to the seven former Buddhas, while in their Bodhisattva stages, and then to all other Buddhas. The third: the life pattern of the highest Bodhisattva so set was extended to include the whole life of the Buddhas.

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Note: It is unlikely that the set patterns such as those in the *Mahāvastu* and the Prajñā sūtras were created directly from Śākyamuni’s biographical stories. They presuppose several foregoing patterns, one of which we find in the *Mahāpadana-suttanta* of the Dīgha-Nikāya (DN. ii, 12-15). This suttanta, in presenting the story of Vipassi Buddha (the oldest of the six past Buddhas), shows that it is the “rule” or the course of nature (dhammatā) for a Bodhisattva to manifest the 16 characteristic features: that is, his descent from the Tuṣita Heaven up to taking 7 steps on his birth.

The popular life pattern of a Buddha in China and Japan consists of eight aspects; hence, ‘八相成道’, or ‘eight-aspect of attaining Bodhi’. The 大乘起信論 enumerates the following eight (Taishō. XXXII, 581 a): 1. 徒率天退 2. 入胎 3. 住胎 4. 出胎 5. 出家 6. 成道 7. 轉法輪 8. 入於涅槃. However, T’ien-t’ai in his 天台四教儀 omits ‘住胎’ and supplies ‘降魔’ before ‘成道’ (Taishō. LX, 745 c).