

Introduction

Thinking about the Mahāyāna

The study of the collection of Buddhist movements known as the Great Vehicle is in need of some methodological direction. It seems to me there have been enough general theories of its origins. Some, particularly Japanese, scholars have seen a lay-centered development in the texts, a pseudo-Reformation against monastic elitism. Others see it as riding the wave of bhakti devotionalism sweeping across India at the turn of the Common Era—as if Hindus and Buddhists alike suddenly discovered that the gods were open for business. Still others have emphasized the philosophical innovations of the Mahāyāna and its seeming tendency to carry certain early doctrines to their logical conclusion. These theories—and many more—have been spun now by multiple generations of scholars.

When we begin to catalogue the things we don't know concerning the origins of the Mahāyāna, the list quickly becomes daunting. Unlike scholars of, say, early Christianity, we have little idea as to which social classes were drawn to this movement. We don't know, for example, what really to make of the prominent presence of the figure of the *grhapati*—usually translated as householder, but almost certainly a man of considerable means, perhaps a guild master—in early Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as the *Ugrapariprcchā*. Does the presence of such an interlocutor indicate that the Mahāyāna had a strong initial appeal to wealthy members of Indian society, or was their narrative role more a form of advertising, an attempt to draw such individuals toward a movement desperately in want of patronage?

We do, however, have some sense that a number of individuals who aligned themselves with the various Mahāyānas throughout much of its early and middle history perceived themselves as reviled by their Mainstream monastic brethren.¹ But we often have little sense of how Mainstream monks themselves regarded their co-religionists on the bodhisattva path or if they regarded them at all. Moreover, did non-Buddhists take note of such divisions, or were these multiple spiritual orientations invisible to outsiders, in much the same way ancient Romans regarded first-century Christianity as a “Jewish disturbance”? Indeed, when we come to grips with the range of questions our classicist colleagues can ask and often answer with regard to the birth of Christianity and its domestication within the Roman empire, it is easy to become mildly demoralized at our situation as historians of the Mahāyāna. Only recently have we

begun to catch glimpses of hope that a way out of this morass may be at hand. This project is an attempt to pick up some of the current momentum in early Mahāyāna studies and to identify a set of threads that manifest themselves as an interdependent skein of influences upon a single text within this literature.

Much of the recent scholarship on the early Mahāyāna points to a tradition that arose not as a single, well-defined, unitary movement, but from multiple trajectories emanating from and alongside Mainstream Buddhism.² Whether we focus upon developments of ascetic rigor, the apotheosis of the Buddha or buddhas, or the virtues of *dāna* (gifting, generosity), in almost every instance we see continuity from early Buddhism to multiple Mahāyāna developments.

In fact, there is good reason to believe that the spiritual orientation of monastics was in some sense independent of their institutional affiliations. So, for example, membership in a Dharmaguptaka monastery may in itself say nothing about any given individual's beliefs or practices apart from conforming to certain disciplinary regulations. It may have been relatively easy in some cases for a small group of monks to congregate around a common text or ritual agenda apart from their co-religionists. Mainstream monks in some monasteries may well have reacted with indifference to the bodhisattva aspirations of some of their brethren, whereas others—as evidenced by the scathing critiques recorded by some Mahāyāna authors (including those of the *Rāṣtrapāla*)—would have been far less sympathetic. Different communities responded to different concerns, not the least of which may have included their own sense of the perceptions and expectations of their most loyal donors.³ Texts and inscriptions both make clear that patronage was never far from the minds of monks of all periods.

Perhaps our most pressing desideratum, therefore, is to conceive an appropriate model with which to think about the complex of traditions we have come to lump under the label “Mahāyāna.” Here a comparison with other new religious movements may be helpful, especially in fields more thoroughly worked or in possession of richer sources. I think in this regard particularly of Mormonism, an analogy I owe to my colleague Jan Nattier. Here we have a tradition whose formation is relatively recent and therefore well documented. It presented itself as a new revelation that did not replace but completed the existing scriptures. Like the bodhisattva career, the spiritual path of the Latter-day Saints is conceived of as a multilife process aimed at the eventual apotheosis of all male members. And, as with the Mahāyāna, the Latter-day Saints have had a complicated relationship with the mainstream.

For example, much of the early appeal of converts to Joseph Smith's new movement was “to its allure as a form of primitive Christianity.”⁴ Early Mahāyāna texts too often implicitly characterized themselves as a restoration of the Buddha's original message, which a corrupt *saṅgha* had long since lost. One of the

problems, however, with the scholarship on the early Mahāyāna is that it typically treats this movement as an established fact. But if the authors of the *Rāṣtrapāla* are to be believed, it would appear that their Mainstream contemporaries did not.⁵ That is to say, much ink was spilled in defending the status of early Mahāyāna *sūtras* as *buddhavacana* (the word of the Buddha). Some accepted them, some did not. The interesting question for us then is this: why would someone accept an (obviously?) new *sūtra* as the word of the Buddha? Just as the early Mormons preached largely from the King James Bible in winning new converts,⁶ the authors of the *Rāṣtrapāla* strategically borrowed from the idiom of pre-Mahāyāna sources, including some of the earliest texts in the Buddhist canon.⁷ It is not unlikely that this was intended to impart an archaic aura to the text that would have disguised their role in its production.⁸

Joseph Smith and his first disciples are known to have been desperately impoverished. Those drawn to him and his new revelation often shared a deep resentment against the well-to-do and, particularly, against the unresponsiveness of the religious establishment. Smith's message explicitly addressed these dissatisfactions.⁹ Consider the following passage from the *Book of Mormon*:

Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrines, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up.

They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up.¹⁰

These verses would fit squarely in the *Rāṣtrapāla* with only cosmetic adjustments. We might wonder then if the authors of the *Rāṣtrapāla* also suffered from economic impoverishment. We know that they assumed that some of their fellow monks left the household merely to escape poverty: "They will receive rebirth in poor families on account of their undisciplined practice. Becoming renunciants from these poor families, they will take satisfaction in the teaching at this time only for the sake of profit."¹¹ Were their complaints about their brethren's preoccupation with profit and honor a barely masked envy? Were those drawn to this bodhisattva network likewise disenfranchised? If so, we would expect that the leaders of this group would have to have offered an alternative commodity to attract those deprived of the rewards enjoyed by their more affluent co-religionists. I will attempt to show that the *Rāṣtrapāla* provides evidence of just such a promise.

To make one final comparison: the capacity for individual revelation, encouraged in the early days following Joseph Smith's divinely appointed mission,

proved to be divisive. If every male member of the church can and should receive his orders directly from God, why would such an individual submit to commands mediated by church officials? Despite his later attempts to rein in his flock and restrict prophecy, Joseph Smith had let the genie out of the bottle.¹² In so doing, he precipitated the eventual emergence of over two hundred Mormon splinter groups, many of which acted with an authority that in every way paralleled the one claimed by Smith himself.¹³ Might not the proliferation of *Mahāyāna sūtras* be a similar phenomenon? Individual monks came to see themselves as empowered to speak for or, more literally, to speak *as* the Buddha. Whether they did so on the authority of an ecstatic experience that brought them into direct association with a living buddha or by means of other secret transmissions, each new *Mahāyāna sūtra* embodied in some sense a new vision and a new movement.¹⁴ Once the floodgate was opened, the production of a massive literature containing new “revelations” was sure to follow.

These are the kinds of questions that inform this study. Accordingly, I am first and foremost interested in the *Mahāyāna* as a social phenomenon rather than as a philosophical school. To this end, we need to think like scholars of the Latter-day Saints, not scholars of the *Yogācāra*—of Hare Krishnas, not *Nāgārjuna*. Thus my analysis will attempt to address what Weber has called the “economic ethic” of religion. Rather than being interested primarily in the “ethical theories of theological compendia,” I will focus on “the practical impulses for action which are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religions.”¹⁵ I will want to know, for example, about the processes of group formation and self identity: what accounts for the predisposition of some monks to accept the bodhisattva path—along with its doctrinal innovations, cosmology, and cults—as opposed to other forms of protest? How did members congregate and maintain relationships with both insiders and outsiders? Could a monk participate in a bodhisattva network in plain view of his monastery’s elders? And when the monastery’s elders did not approve, what was the source of their opposition? Our texts seldom speak directly to these questions. But as in all academic enterprises, the hard part is getting the questions right in the first place.

The *Rāṣtrapāla*, however, will not be reduced to a mere expression of its social situation. Functional approaches have been rightly criticized for their tendency toward chronological compartmentalization and circular reasoning and for their inattentiveness to the content of religious discourse. Certainly Buddhist studies has historically concerned itself—almost exclusively in many cases—with doctrine and polemics. Scholars of Buddhism have until quite recently been less sensitive to the social dynamics that precede ideology. This study seeks to address this imbalance, to show that the rhetoric of the *Rāṣtrapāla* itself calls for an analysis that lays bare its disguised forms of exchange.

Situating the “Early” Mahāyāna

I am not, for the sake of this study, going to preoccupy myself with what we might—or should—mean by “early” with regard to the Mahāyāna. Scholars have long talked about the early Mahāyāna as if we all knew what we meant. Clearly, we don’t. As historians, we naturally want to know where the witnesses to this movement can be placed on a timeline. We understand that this cannot be done in absolute terms. The Indian materials are almost universally silent on such matters—in part by the necessity of legitimating such texts as the word of the Buddha—and the Chinese translations can usually only provide a *terminus ante quem*. The best we can hope for, it seems, is a relative chronology of texts.

But there are more than a few problems with even a relative chronology. First of all, there are a bewildering array of criteria for dating texts in relation to one another. Traits one scholar takes as a marker of antiquity are to another signs of advanced development. This problem may not be intractable. But it is certainly indicative of the current state of Mahāyāna textual studies, despite some general agreement about the probable earliness or lateness of particular candidates.¹⁶

Our preoccupation with dating, however, masks a number of features about these texts that constitute much more interesting, and therefore fruitful, avenues of investigation. We might want, for instance, to discern the social milieu of any given text as intimated by its rhetorical strategy. To whom is the author speaking? Whom is he ignoring? Under what conditions might this text have appealed to the target audience? These questions require a greater sensitivity to matters of tone and voice than we have generally paid, and they are not necessarily restricted to any one time period. In fact, evidence from the *Rāṣtrapāla* will point to the likelihood that it was made to respond over time to multiple milieux.

Second, and this may be the more important point, this concern with dating may very well place the proverbial cart before the proverbial horse. Given the paucity of well-studied *sūtras* at our disposal, it might seem presumptuous to classify that which we do not yet well understand. Thus my use of the term “early” will mean little more here than pre-Gupta, texts that we have good reason to believe were composed (at least in part) before the fourth century and therefore prior to the beginnings of the institutional presence of the Mahāyāna within the Indian religious landscape. This is profoundly inadequate, but given the current state of the field, it will have to do.

Perhaps the most insightful observations on this problem have been proffered recently by Paul Harrison, who has reminded us that all of the earliest developments of this movement must have taken place before our earliest extant sources.¹⁷ That is to say, our earliest documents of this movement, consisting of at least the Mahāyāna *sūtras* translated into Chinese during the second and

third centuries, reflect an already fully elaborated set of traditions that must have undergone a long period of development. Thus, in the study of the early Mahāyāna, we are in the awkward position of never knowing with any certainty how long it would have taken any particular idea, doctrine, literary motif, or practice to find textual expression in India and, subsequently, translation in China.¹⁸ Given the complexity with which the Mahāyāna does finally appear within the textual record in second-century Chinese translations, we can only assume that these texts must have been preceded by long, involved debates within this fledgling movement and that these debates would have varied according to the different responses of their co-religionists.

Why the *Rāṣtrapāla*?

Relatively little early Mahāyāna literature is preserved in Indian languages, and much of what is extant is in late (sixteenth to twentieth century) Nepalese manuscripts. Thus any adequate attempt to appreciate the breadth of this movement will have to work to a large degree with translations, particularly the large corpora preserved in Chinese and Tibetan.

Among the advantages of the Chinese translations is the fact that the earliest among them date from a period centuries—in some cases, many centuries—before our Indic source materials. Already in the late second century we see the translation of a small but significant body of Mahāyāna literature, particularly by the Yuezhi missionary Lokakṣema and his team at the Eastern Han capital of Luoyang. By the end of the third century, the translations number in the hundreds.

At the heart of my initial entrée into this literature during my graduate student days was a seemingly simple query: how reliable are these early Chinese translations for the study of Indian Buddhism? I say “seemingly simple” because as I dove headfirst into this translation literature, I discovered that questions of fidelity merely scratched the surface of the problem. Years later I now find myself traveling, figuratively, back and forth over the Himalayas to reconsider this question anew.

It was clear from the outset that, in order to do justice to a study of early Chinese translation literature, I would have to acquire a level of comfort in its archaic, often obscure idiom. To do so would require that I isolate a particular translator so as to understand his habits, his syntax, his lexicon, and, where possible, something of his overall strategy. Paul Harrison blazed a trail in this regard with his work on the corpus of Lokakṣema. If I was to answer some of the questions I wanted to pose, I would need a corpus of translations for which at least a fair number had extant Sanskrit “originals.” This led me to the Yuezhi translator Dharmarakṣa, whose corpus included over 150 texts, roughly half of which are extant, with Sanskrit

witnesses for several. Deciphering his idiom and the problems he confronted in translation became the focus of my dissertation research.

Having settled upon a translator, I next wanted to choose a text with an extant Sanskrit version for comparison. I wanted to know how Dharmarakṣa's translation differed from the Indic text and whether his rendition would expose some of the early textual history of the Sanskrit *sūtra* that has come down to us only in late manuscripts. I also wanted a text with multiple Chinese translations so that I could chart these changes, if any, over time. Finally, I thought it prudent to choose a translation within Dharmarakṣa's corpus of modest size, a project that would allow me time not only to read and translate the *sūtra*, but to unpack the significance of the findings from both the Indian and the Chinese sources. With these criteria in mind, I chose the *Rāṣtrapāla* as my first integral textual study from Dharmarakṣa's works. Besides Dharmarakṣa's translation of 270 C.E., we have Jñānagupta's translation of the late sixth century and Dānapāla's of the late tenth. We also have a Tibetan translation from the early ninth century. Our earliest Sanskrit manuscript for the text dates to the late seventeenth century.

But apart from my interests in the early Chinese Buddhist translations, it turns out the timing of this study of the *Rāṣtrapāla* could hardly have been better. Over the last two decades, a number of scholars have opened new avenues for our understanding of the manifold voices represented in the early Mahāyāna. One of the loudest among this chorus—and in the case of the *Rāṣtrapāla*, certainly the most shrill—is the wilderness-dwelling faction. Thanks to Reginald Ray's recent study on the subterranean forest traditions that percolated up from the recesses of the mainstream from time to time, we are better able to see what was almost certainly a formative strand of the early Mahāyāna. These bodhisattva critics were not always well received by their monastic brethren, since their charges constituted a potential threat to their status in the eyes of lay donors. And we have the recent work of Gregory Schopen to thank for making this socioeconomic context of the classical Indian monastery so vividly real for us.

Source Materials for the Study of the *Rāṣtrapāla*

The extant materials for research on the *Rāṣtrapāla* are manifold. A Nepalese Sanskrit manuscript, dated to 1661 and held at Cambridge University, was edited by Louis Finot over a century ago.¹⁹ Another manuscript held in Paris was known to Finot but not used, since he understood it to be a copy of the Cambridge manuscript. A manuscript preserved in Tokyo was studied by Itō and partially examined by de Jong, who found nothing in the way of textual variation vis-à-vis the Cambridge manuscript.²⁰ More recently, at least four copies of the Sanskrit text have come to light from the German-Nepali Preservation Proj-

ect, but they are all very late (eighteenth to twentieth century) and derivative. In addition, we have five citations of the *Rāṣtrapāla* in Śāntideva's eighth-century anthology, the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, some of which are quite sizable.

The early-ninth-century Tibetan translation by Jinamitra, Dānaśīla, Munivarman, and Ye śes sde was edited over fifty years ago by Jacob Ensink as an appendix to his English translation of the Sanskrit: 'phags pa yul 'khor skyon gis žus pa žes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo.²¹ Unfortunately, his edition could hardly be called critical by the standards of today's Kanjur studies.²² All four of his textual representatives derive from the *Tshal pa* or Eastern recension branch, and one of his witnesses, the Lhasa Kanjur, is widely recognized now to be a mere copy of another *Tshal pa* text and thus has no independent text critical value. In addition, the readings of the Derge (*sde dge*) version are known to have been contaminated by the *Them spaṇs ma*, or Western line, thus reducing its text critical value (though not the quality of its readings). For this reason I have felt it necessary to augment Ensink's edition of the Narthang and Peking recensions by consulting at least two of the *Them spaṇs ma* representatives: the Stog Palace manuscript and the London (*Sel dkar*) manuscript *bka' 'gyur*.²³

We also have at our disposal three Chinese translations. The earliest translation by the third-century Yuezhi monk Dharmarakṣa, the *Deguang taizi jing* 德光太子經 (T 170, 4: 412a–418c), has not been recognized as a translation of the *Rāṣtrapāla* by Western scholars, including Ensink. In Japan, the *Deguang taizi jing* was acknowledged as a translation of the *Rāṣtrapāla* at least since Itō's early studies.²⁴ De Jong also drew our attention to the importance of this early translation in his 1953 review of Ensink independently of Itō, whose work he had not seen.²⁵ The date for the completion of the translation is recorded as the sixth year of the Taishi reign period, on the thirtieth day of the ninth month (= October 31, 270).²⁶ Chapters 5 and 6 will be largely focused on the problems presented to us by Dharmarakṣa's translation.²⁷

The *sūtra* was retranslated in the late sixth century by Jñānagupta, a monk from Gandhāra, and Dharmagupta, who appears to have served as scribal assistant, at the Da Xingshan monastery.²⁸ Their translation occurs within the *Mahāratnakūṭa* anthology in the *Taishō* canon: *Huguo pusa hui* 護國菩薩會 (T 310.18, 11: 457b–472b).²⁹ This translation is of great importance. With Jñānagupta's rendering we see what is essentially the final form of the text. That is to say, Jñānagupta's text largely coincides in structure and content with the later Chinese translation by Dānapāla, the Tibetan translation of the ninth century, and the Sanskrit manuscript tradition as it has come down to us from Nepal. There are small differences among these various witnesses to be sure. But it is clear that the full fleshing out of the Indic text as we have it occurred between the composition of the source texts for Dharmarakṣa's translation of 270 and

Jñānagupta's of the late sixth century. I will discuss the implications of this dating in Chapter 6.

The *Rāṣtrapāla* was translated again in 994 by Dānapāla (Shihu 施護): *Huguo zunzhe suowen dasheng jing* 護國尊者所問大乘經 (T 321, 12: 1a-14c).³⁰ Dānapāla arrived at the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng in 980 and proved to be among the most productive of the Song translators, working up to his death in 1018.³¹ This translation is of considerably less value than the preceding two. It offers little in the way of important textual variants, and where it does differ, it is usually in the form of translation mistakes and interpolations. Often Dānapāla's rendering bears little relationship to any of our other versions. This is what we have come to expect from Song period translations.³² Accordingly, I have paid less attention to this text in my annotation to the translation. We have, in sum, a rather rich variety of witnesses to the shape of the *Rāṣtrapāla* over some fourteen centuries.³³

Dating and Locating the Indic Text

Ignorance of the existence of Dharmarakṣa's translation has dramatically affected attempts to date the Indic text. Winternitz, commenting on the Sanskrit edition in the early years of the twentieth century, had this to say: "The Chinese translation of the *Rāṣtrapāla-Paripṛcchā* made between 585 and 592 A.D., proves that the conditions here described, already existed in the 6th century. The Sūtra is probably not much earlier than the Chinese translation as is shown by the barbaric language, which particularly in the Gāthās is a mixture of Prākrit and bad Sanskrit, and by the elaborate metres and the careless style."³⁴ As a result of Edgerton's magisterial work, we now know that Winternitz drew entirely unwarranted conclusions concerning the nature of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. The very criterion by which he determined the language of the *Rāṣtrapāla* to be late, namely, the "barbaric" mixture of Prakrit and Sanskrit, is now widely thought to be an indicator of an earlier, pre-Sanskritized phase of Mahāyāna literature.³⁵

However, other scholars, also oblivious to the existence of an early Chinese translation, drew very different conclusions concerning its date on the basis of internal evidence. Consider, for example, the remarks of A. K. Warder:

One of the other *sūtras* of the *Ratnakūṭa* collection available in Sanskrit, the *Rāṣtrapālaparipṛcchā*, deals somewhat more elaborately (though still unsystematically) with the way of the *bodhisattva*, referring for illustration to fifty *jātaka* stories. There is no external evidence for its great antiquity, but its content would harmonise with its being even earlier than the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*, before the open breach with the 'pupils' (who are not

here denounced), in fact a *sūtra* of the Pūrva Śaila school not remodelled after the breach. The ethical principles do not differ from those of the more original *Tripiṭaka* except for the commendation of the way of the *bodhisattva* and, in connection with this way, the additional stress on self-sacrifice (in fulfilling the perfections).³⁶

Warder raises a number of points here that deserve further comment. First and most obvious, the supposed lack of “external evidence for its great antiquity” we now know—and have known for some time—cannot be substantiated in recognition of Dharmarakṣa’s third-century translation. The mere existence of Dharmarakṣa’s rendering does not guarantee that the *Rāṣtrapāla* is necessarily one of the earliest Mahāyāna *sūtras* now extant. Warder’s claim that it may be older than the *Ratnakūṭa-sūtra* (= *Kāśyapa-parivarta*) is striking, since we can date that text to at least the late second century on the basis of its translation by Lokakṣema. But we must be suspicious of this claim as well, as it is founded on the belief that the *Rāṣtrapāla* represents a voice from before “the breach with the pupils.” The implicit assumption here is that hostility between adherents of the Mahāyāna and the Mainstream must reflect a later development of the former, a time after a presumed idyllic cohabitation among monks of different orientations and a time before Mahāyānists thought to contrast themselves sharply with their Mainstream co-religionists.³⁷ As I have suggested above and will demonstrate at some length, the reality was far less tidy than this. Developments, hostile or otherwise, did not necessarily proceed apace in all regions or even in all monasteries with monks of multiple spiritual aspirations. Warder is right to point out, however, that the so-called ethical principles of the *Rāṣtrapāla* do not deviate appreciably from the Mainstream. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Warder’s association of the *Rāṣtrapāla* with the Pūrva-śaila school of Andhra Pradesh is based on a reference to a text titled *Ratṭhapāla-gajjita* in the fourteenth-century Sinhalese compendium the *Nikāya-saṃgraha*.³⁸ This reference does not inspire confidence. It is, first of all, very late and after a time when orthodox impositions had largely eliminated the Mahāyāna from Sri Lanka. Second, we cannot know with certainty that the text here alluded to is in fact our *Rāṣtrapāla*. Andhra Pradesh in south central India has long been one of the sites associated by modern scholars with the rise of the Mahāyāna—the other being Gandhāra in the northwest.³⁹ These attempts to locate the rise of the movement geographically have taken their cues from vague references in a very few texts. It is, in my opinion, much more likely that the Mahāyāna quickly became a pan-Indian phenomenon and that any attempt to isolate its location is doomed in advance.

Why a New Translation?

Readers familiar with the scope of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature may be puzzled by the retranslation of a text that has been available in English for over fifty years.⁴⁰ Indeed, with many hundreds of Mahāyāna *sūtras* still untouched, it may appear imprudent to revisit seemingly known territory. There are several reasons, however, why a new translation of this text is appropriate. First, the published reviews of Ensink's translation have pointed out numerous problems with his understanding of the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the text.⁴¹ To be fair, the language of the text is difficult in many places, and the Nepalese manuscript is rife with corruptions. Finot's Sanskrit edition, the basis for Ensink's and my translation, is itself fraught with numerous problems. Ensink was able to improve on it in a number of ways. Moreover, Ensink had the misfortune to publish his translation, which was his Ph.D. thesis, just one year before the appearance of Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. Many of his lexical uncertainties would have been solved by access to this work. We are thus far better placed today to understand the language of this text than in 1952.

Second, Ensink was not able to take advantage of the Chinese translations of the *Rāṣtrapāla*, which, as I will demonstrate below, contain invaluable data on its textual history. In particular, Dharmarakṣa's translation allows us to track the development of an early version of the text from the mid-third century to the late sixth century, the time of Jñānagupta's translation and the time when the text essentially assumed its final form. These two translations are the only evidence we have about one of the crucial phases of the text's formation, a phase that largely coincides with the Indian Gupta period. This evidence will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Moreover, interest in and research on these early Chinese Buddhist translations have been steadily increasing during the last two decades. One thinks especially of Erik Zürcher's work on the vernacularisms sprinkled throughout the Han and Three Kingdoms translations, Florin Deleanu's and Stefano Zucchetti's recent studies on An Shigao, Paul Harrison's work on the corpus of Lokakṣema, and Seishi Karashima's impressive studies of Dharmarakṣa, particularly the latter's translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Jan Nattier has recently begun to compile a very promising lexicon on the translation idiom of the early-third-century lay translator Zhi Qian. All of this makes the task of confronting these recondite works slightly less daunting.

But perhaps the most important reason for revisiting the *Rāṣtrapāla* at this time is its relevance to current discussions concerning the formation of the Mahāyāna. As I will argue at length below, the *Rāṣtrapāla* is representative of a clear but as yet still underappreciated strand of the early bodhisattva orientation, namely, a reactionary critique of sedentary monasticism in favor of a re-

turn to wilderness dwelling. An adequate reappraisal of this critique requires that we make full use of the source materials at our disposal so as to best place this discourse in its historical context.

The Plan for This Study

This study has two fundamental aims: an analysis of the major themes of the Indian text and an examination of the value of Dharmarakṣa’s translation. My goal in the first four chapters is to reflect on the relationship between the bodily glorification of the Buddha and the ascetic career—spanning thousands of lifetimes—that produced it within the socioreligious world of early medieval Buddhist monasticism. The context for the glorification of the Buddha’s body within the *Rāṣtrapāla* is essentially threefold: the placement of the Buddha’s career within the genre of *jātaka* (former birth story) narratives from the Mainstream canonical and art historical traditions; the centrality of wilderness dwelling and the ascetic rigors of those who embraced it; and a criticism of sedentary monasticism, of monks fully entrenched in the socioeconomic affairs of the secular world and thereby perceived to be lax and corrupt. These three themes are interrelated. The authors of the *Rāṣtrapāla* criticize their monastic contemporaries as no longer following the ascetic ideal of the first Buddhist communities, an ideal that, for some in the Mahāyāna, self-consciously imitates the disciplines and sacrifices of the Buddha’s own bodhisattva career, the very career that led to his acquisition of bodily perfection. I will begin then by revealing the ways in which the authors of the *Rāṣtrapāla* co-opted this *topos* concerning the bodily perfection of the Buddha from the Mainstream tradition to subvert their contemporaries who represented that tradition.

Part 2 will focus on Dharmarakṣa’s third-century Chinese translation of the text. Part of my argument above depends on placing the textual development of the *Rāṣtrapāla* in a more nuanced historical framework. Our only means of doing this is to chart the changes in the Chinese translations from the late third century to the late tenth century. In this regard Dharmarakṣa’s translation has special significance since it differs considerably from all other witnesses.

However, the early Chinese translations are as invaluable as they are problematic. I will demonstrate that a critical use of these translations requires that we understand not only their abstruse idiom—no small matter in itself—but also the process by which these texts were rendered from an undetermined Indian language into a Chinese cultural product. This process left many traces, and these traces will reveal clues about the nature of the source text as well as the world of the principal recipients.

A Note on the Translation

It is now customary in scholarly translations to defuse a reader's anxiety in confronting a text in translation by assuring him or her that the translator has every intention of adhering closely to the original. The author does this by promising what is often called a literal translation, as if every word or phrase in the source text had a single, clear equivalent in the target language.

The reader will get no such crutch here. Not only am I convinced that another equally or better qualified reader of the Sanskrit *Rāṣtrapāla* could produce a different, yet equally valid, translation of the text, I am also certain that if I were to translate the *Rāṣtrapāla* ten more times, I would end up with ten different translations. A translation is first and foremost a reading of a text, and as a reading, it is influenced by what I've read before and during the translation process. I have no doubt that in the years to come I will see some things in the *Rāṣtrapāla* differently.

So while this cannot be the final word on the *Rāṣtrapāla*, the purpose of the textual analysis and annotation to the translation is to convince my readers that they have a reliable guide through the text. I won't hold your hand, but I will alert you to places that may be worth a second look. I expect that in the near future some of my readers will alert me to places where I could have lingered a little longer. In other words, I offer this contribution as part of an ongoing and much larger dialogue among students of Buddhism. It is nothing more than that—and, I hope, nothing less.

A final note: since part of the purpose of this study is to make a case for the value of the early Chinese translations for the study of Indian Buddhist textual history, it seemed to me appropriate to make the idiom and structure of Dharmarakṣa's rendition as transparent as possible. The notes to the translation are designed to illuminate variant and sometimes bizarre readings from the manifold versions at our disposal. For the reader less interested in such technicalities, I have marked in boldface those portions of my translation from the Sanskrit that are also represented in Dharmarakṣa's third-century translation. Thus readers can see immediately the basic shape of the earliest version available to us. Beyond the *Rāṣtrapāla*, all other translations from Buddhist sources are my own unless otherwise stated.

