THE PHRASE ‘sa ārthiv-pradeśaḥ caityabhūto bhavet’
IN THE Vajracchedikā:
NOTES ON THE CULT OF THE BOOK IN MAHĀYĀNA*

The phrase sa ārthiv-pradeśaḥ caityabhūto bhavet at Vajracchedikā (= Vaj) 12 & 15c represents neither the sole, nor even, perhaps, the most important occurrence of this curious formula. The Vaj occurrences are taken as the point of departure for the present paper because they represent the least fully articulated form of the phrase and its supportive context, and, as a consequence, are most open to misunderstanding if confronted in isolation. Further, by beginning from this point, we are able to illustrate in a more general way the danger of approaching any one piece of Buddhist Sūtra Literature — be it a phrase, a figure of speech, or a whole text — in isolation from its fellows, which generally — as in this case — exhibit an unexpected interlocking of seemingly disparate wholes. The approach followed here is to give the two occurrences of the phrase in the Vaj; to look at them and note the difficulties; then to read both behind them and around them in the hope of understanding the intention of the phrase and — if any — its concrete referent. This method requires that we rely heavily on textual citations, and they will usually be given in full in the hope that, since the language of the various passages is similar but not identical, the manner of expression in one passage will illuminate a somewhat different expression in another passage, and vice versa. Our basic source materials are the Sanskrit texts; within the Sanskrit texts, in turn, our basic problem is one of how to understand the compound ‘caityabhūta’. As an ancillary aid to this understanding we have consulted throughout the Tibetan translations of our basic documents. In the process it became apparent that the Tibetan translators had had the same difficulty in rendering the term into Tibetan that modern translators had had in rendering it into modern European languages, proving, I suppose, that if our understanding of these passages is not altogether satisfactory, we can at least be consoled with the idea that we are in good company. Finally, in investigating the occurrence and the context of parallel or partially parallel versions of the phrase in works other than the Vaj, we stumbled upon some significant data which made possible a set of generalizations as to the evolution of basic cult-types in early Mahāyāna.

The first of the two occurrences which constitute our point of departure is Vaj 12 (Müller, 28.10–17); Pargiter 181.13–182.3; Chakravarti, deest;

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Conze, 37.10–19; Dutt, 150.8–14; Vaidya 79.10–15; Pek. Vol. 21, no. 739, 252–5–5 to 7; Hashimoto and Shimizu, 49.8–9):

\textit{api tu (khalu punah) Subhūte yasmin prthivipraveṣa ito dharmaparyāyāḥ (antaśāḥ) cātuspadāṅkām api gāthām (udghyā bhāgyeta vā samprakāṣyeta vā SA PRTHIVI-PRADEŚAS CATYAYAHU BHAVENT) SĀDEVA-MĀNUSĀSURA-SAYASAYASAYA LOKASYA | sa phyaogs de lah mi dah mi dah ma yin du bcas pa'i 'jig rten gyi mchod rten du gyur pa yin na, kah punar vādo ya imaśa dharmaparyāyam (sakalasamāptam) dhārayisyanti (vācāvyasyanti paryavāpsyanti parebhyaśa ca vistāreṣa samprakāṣayasyanti) paramaṇa te Subhūte aścaryena samanvāyātā bhavisyanti. Tasmāṇ ē ca Subhūte prthivipraveṣe sāśāt viharaty anyataṁ yātataratvato vā vijñāguru-sthāṇīyāḥ.}^{2}


\textsuperscript{2} The manuscript tradition produces the following variants (enclosed in the text above by parentheses; the underlining marks the Skt which corresponds to the Tibetan which is placed in brackets immediately following it), almost all of which represent Pargiter’s ed. of the ‘Eastern Turkestan’ text: \textit{Khalu punah} is omitted by Pargiter [the omission of these connective particles is characteristic of his ms.; see Conze’s ed. (paragraph numbers) 4, 12, 14e, 14f, 14g, 14h, 15b (twice), 16b, etc., where variants are marked with a superscribed “P.”]; the phrase \textit{antaśāḥ cātuspadāṅkām api gāthām udghyā bhāgyeta vā samprakāṣyeta vā sa prthivipraveṣaḥ catyabhūto bhavet in Pargiter is represented by \textit{cātuspadā(m a)pi gāthāh bhāgyate: tena saḥ prthivipraveṣaḥ catyabhūto bhavīṣyaḥ} this is potentially the most significant variant and will be referred to again below; the phrase \textit{vācāvyasyanti paryavāpsyanti parebhyaśa ca vistāreṇa samprakāṣayasyanti is omitted in Pargiter [this is again characteristic of his ms. (cf. Conze, para, num. 14h, 15b, 16a, 16b, etc.)]; finally, \textit{sakalasamāptam} is omitted in Pargiter. The Skt. version tentatively reconstructed from the Khotanese by S. Konow ("The Vajracchedikā in the Old Khotanese Version of Eastern Turkestan" in Hoernle, \textit{Manuscript Remains}, 255–56) has: yasya prthivyāḥ pradeṣasya upari sah dharmaḥ syat pujānyāḥ sa diśā bhavet saha devasya tathā māṇuyasya prthivyālokaṇa; yasyām diśāyām dharmaḥ syāt catyaśya upamā na diśā prāśādikā bhavet evam a māṇuyānaḥ nāmam sāśāt taṭatā iva tathā suśattvam paramah guruh.

For the Tibetan we may cite a slightly different version of the phrase found in a fragment of one of the Tibetan translations found at Tun-Huang and reproduced in Poussin’s catalogue (L. de La Vallée Poussin, \textit{Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Tun-Huang in the India Office Library} (London: 1962) no. 172, p. 62); Poussin refers to it as ‘an older translation’: \textit{sa de’i phyaogs de lha dan dan lha ma yin dan ‘jig rten du bcas pa’i mchod rten du gyur na, Hashimoto and Shimizu has bcas pa’i ‘jig rten tu gyur pa yin na instead of bcas pa’i ‘jig rten kyi mchod rten du gyur pa yin na. The omission is obviously a scribal error.}