‘Epithets of the Mantra’ in the Heart Sutra

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Abstract

In this article, I continue a detailed critical re-assessment of the text of the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya or Heart Sutra begun by Jan Nattier (1992, see also Huifeng 2014, Attwood 2015). Nattier and Yamabe pointed out that where the Sanskrit Heart Sutra has the word mantra, some parallel passages in the Sanskrit 8,000 and 25,000 line Prajñāpāramitā sutras have the word vidyā (Nattier 1992: 211, n.54a). I show that in every other occurrence of this passage in Sanskrit and Chinese versions of these texts, Prajñāpāramitā is referred to as a superlative kind of practical knowledge or incantation (vidyā) and there is no mention of a mantra. Nor would we expect one, since these texts predate the assimilation of mantra into Buddhism. This suggests that mantra in the Sanskrit Heart Sutra is a mistranslation of a Chinese rendering of vidyā. I explain why this might have happened in semantic and historical terms. Given that the so-called mantra itself is better described as a dhāraṇī, it is hard to escape the conclusion that there is no mantra in the Heart Sutra and no mention of a mantra. This raises some interesting questions.
Introduction

In Jan Nattier’s watershed article on the Heart Sutra, an extra note was included as the article was going to press (1992: 211-213, n.54a). The subject of note 54a is the section of the Heart Sutra often referred to as the “epithets of the mantra,” i.e.

\( \text{tasmāj} \ jñātavyam \ prajñāpāramitā \ mahāmantrō \ mahāvidyāmantrō \ 'nuttaramantro \ 'samasama-mantraḥ} \) (Conze 1948, 1967)

In all English translations to date, mahā-, mahāvidyā, anuttara, and asamasama are epithets that describe a mantra. Since the Heart Sutra apparently contains a mantra, the natural conclusion seems to have been that the epithets are epithets of that mantra. The Heart Sutra also explicitly says, “The mantra spoken in the perfection of wisdom is like this…” I will discuss this aspect of the passage below.

Nattier cites two letters sent to her by Nobuyoshi Yamabe who identified a number of passages in Chinese Perfection of Wisdom texts that closely parallel the epithets in the Heart Sutra. Nattier cites these with transliterations and translations and adds two extra passages to those identified by Yamabe. She notes that in Sanskrit counterparts of these occurrences, the word used is not mantra, but vidyā. Nattier concludes from the passages identified that “mantra” is an example of a back-translation from Chinese attributable to ambiguity in Chinese translations for the Sanskrit word vidyā. I will argue that it was more than a simple ambiguity. The context had to have changed significantly for vidyā to become mantra. In particular, mantra is a word that came into use in Buddhist texts only in association with Tantra.

To pursue this issue I identified all the occurrences of the epithets passages by searching the CBETA electronic version of the Chinese Tripiṭaka across the

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1 My thanks to Maitiu O’Ceileachair for his helpful comments on my Chinese translations; to Richard Gombrich for his willingness to support independent scholarship; and to the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge for access to their library and providing a convivial place to work.

2 Nattier herself uses this phrase (1992: 177); it is also used by Lopez (1988: 110, 1990: 353, 1996: 166). The translation of T250 by Rulu (2011) goes further by specifically relating the epithets to “the Prajñā-Pāramitā [mantra]”.

3 \( \text{Prajñāpāramitāḥ uktō mantrāḥ tadyathā...} \) Throughout the text, there is some ambiguity in the word prajñāpāramitāḥ: it is the name of the literary genre, a religious practice, the attainment of a religious ideal, and the name of a goddess.

4 The Chinese characters had to be left out, and one of my aims is to present the cited passages in Chinese to aid any future attempts to locate them.
texts that might predate the Heart Sutra and cross checked these with the printed Taishō Edition. This produced many more passages (more than doubling the number previously identified). I also used electronic versions of the parallel texts in Sanskrit, held in the Göttin gen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages or GRE Til, to identify any Sanskrit counterparts. The full list of occurrences is given in Appendix 1, while in Appendix 2 the epithets are extracted for direct comparison. The passages of most interest are in the Chinese translations of Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra (Pañcaviṃśati) and Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra (Aṣṭa) attributed to Kumārajīva (T223, T227) and Xuánzàng (T220-ii, T220-iv), and the Sanskrit counterparts of these, though other texts and versions will help to shed light our problem.

Conze and the Epithets

In Conze’s translation of his own Sanskrit edition of the Heart Sutra (cited above) the “epithets of the mantra” passage reads:

Therefore, it should be known that the perfection of wisdom is a great mantra, a mantra of great insight, an unexcelled mantra, an unequalled mantra. (1948, 1967, 1973, and 1975)

There is little disagreement amongst Conze’s Sanskrit witnesses to complicate his edition at this point. He suggests that these are epithets of the Buddha applied to a mantra as a way of conveying the magical power of the mantra: “The prajñāpāramitā... is here envisaged as a spell” (1973: 101-104). The epithets in question are, according to Conze (1975: 102, 104), those from the familiar Ityapi Gāthā:

Such is the blessed Buddha: “in that state, worthy, perfectly enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practices, in a good state, a world-knower, unexcelled, a guide for guidable men, a teacher of gods and men, awakened and blessed.  

\[\text{http://www.dsbcproject.org/āryatriratnānusmṛtisūtram/āryatriratnānusmṛtisūtram}\]

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Of the terms in *Heart Sutra*, only *anuttara* “unexcelled” has an actual parallel and it is a rather common superlative applied to any and all Buddhist ideals. So Conze’s assertion about the epithets seems implausible. Conze has followed previous translators as translating all of the epithets as *karmadhāraya* compounds: i.e. “a [superlative] mantra”. Richard Gombrich has suggested that the two compounds *anuttaramantra* and *asamasamamantra* might be more naturally read as *tatpurusa* compounds, i.e. “the mantra of the [one who is] unexcelled”; and “the mantra of the [one who is] unequalled.” If this were the case, the epithets would be epithets of the Buddha or of *Prajñāpāramitā*, rather than the *mantra*. However, the other two epithets—*mahāmantra* and *mahāvidyāmantra*—are clearly *karmadhāraya* compounds and provide a context for reading the others similarly. In the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśati*, the compound is replaced by a phrase, e.g. “this unexcelled knowledge” (*anuttaraiṣā vidyā*), which also argues for reading the later compounds as *karmadhāraya*. In the 40 or so published English translations that I have access to, all concur with Conze’s translation, except for Beal (1865) who also reads the compounds as *karmadhāraya*, but has *dhāraṇī* for *mantra*.

From the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* we now move to the Chinese versions.

**The Chinese Heart Sutra Texts**

There are three versions of the short text *Heart Sutra* in the Chinese *Tripitaka*, of which we will focus on two:

T2509 摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經 = *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*-mahāvidyā-sūtra.

T251 般若波羅蜜多心經 = *Prajñāpāramitā*-hṛdaya-sūtra.

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[8] A survey of English language translations is beyond the scope of this article.

[9] When citing texts from the Chinese *Tripitaka* I have adopted the following conventions: when citing a text generally, I refer to it by the running number in the *Taishō* Edition; when citing a passage from a text I refer to the volume, page, section, and column in the *Taishō* Ed. When referring to Xuánzàng’s massive *Prajñāpāramitā* compilation I also cite the fascicle number to aid in locating it.
The other text, T256, once connected with Xuánzàng, is now generally considered to be a later version attributed to Amoghavajra (705–774). Another variation can be found in the commentary by Woncheuk (T1711), but it merely adds the character 等 “and so on” twice (Lusthaus 2003:81 ff.), so I won’t consider it here. T250 is attributed to Kumārajīva and T251 is attributed to Xuánzàng, though Nattier has plausibly cast doubt on these attributions because both texts seem to post-date their putative translators (1992: 184ff). The epithets passage is one in which the two texts differ slightly:

T250: “Hence, we know that the Prajñā-Pāramitā [Mantra] is the great illumination [大明呪] mantra, the unsurpassed illumination mantra [無上明呪], the unequalled illumination mantra [無等等明呪]” (Rulu 2011) 11

T251: “Therefore know that the Prajna Paramita is the great transcendent mantra [大神咒], it is the great bright mantra [大明咒], utmost mantra [無上咒], is the supreme mantra [無等等咒].” (Mu 2010) 12

These two recent translations give a flavour of how the Chinese texts are typically translated. In the Chinese epithets there is often a one-to-one correspondence with Sanskrit, e.g. 大 = mahā (great), 無 = a- (un-, not), 上 = uttara (higher, superior), and 等 = sama (equal).

The two characters 咒 and 呪 are simple graphical variants and both pronounced /*tjus/ in the Zhengzhang reconstruction of Old Chinese (2000), though some texts show a preference for one or the other. 13 Where they occur in

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10. The preface of T256 in the Taishō edition says that the text was transcribed by Amoghavajra, referring to him by his “imperially conferred posthumous name… (He whose) great deeds are right and broad (大辦正廣),” dating the text to before his death 774 (Hurvitz 1977: 110), even if the preface post-dates him. A Chinese ms. of T256 was found at Dunhuang (British Library Manuscript Or.8210/S.5648), which says that the text was “edited” by Amoghavajra (Tanahashi 2014: 68).

11. 故知般若波羅蜜 是大明呪，無上明呪，無等等明呪， (8.847c24-25)

12. 故知般若波羅蜜多，是大神咒，是大明咒，是無上咒，是無等等咒， (8.848c18-19)

13. Where the printed Taishō edition has 咒, the online CEBTA Tripitaka tends inconsistently to favour 呪.
the *Heart Sutra* it is usual to assume that 咒/呪 should be read as a standalone word meaning *mantra*, leading to combinations such as 明呪 or 神呪 being treated as two words (as above). T250 consistently uses 明呪 instead of 呪 for *mantra*, suggesting that we read it as one word. As will become clear, this word ought to be *vidyā*. This is reflected in the title of T250 as well, viz. …大明呪經, which I translate as *Mahāvidyā Sūtra* (as does Huifeng 2009). In the first published English translation of the *Heart Sutra* in English, completed before the Sanskrit text or its translations were published, Beal translates 咒 as dhāraṇī (1865: 28), a point to which I will return.

T250 omits the epithet “great transcendent mantra” (大神咒), leaving only three epithets. We will see below that the number of epithets varies throughout the parallel passages. T250 only uses the verb 是 “is” in the first instance and leaves it tacit subsequently, whereas T251 repeats it each time.

In T251 only, we find Prajñāpāramitā described as 大神咒 “a great transcendent mantra”. 神 is a term from Daoism that generally means “spirit” or “soul” (sometimes translated as “divinity”). It is also used to translate Sanskrit ṛddhi “supernatural power”, anubhava “power, majesty”, or deva “god”. As we will see, the use of 神 in this context is mainly associated with the *Prajñāpāramitā* translations of Xuánzàng, the single exception being T225 《大明度經》 by Zhī Qiān (225 CE). On 神, Nattier says, “My assumption is that the person who translated the text into Sanskrit simply chose not to include an equivalent of this character.” (1992: 213, n.55). The other possibility is that the text used by that translator lacked this term, i.e. that the Chinese source text was more like T250 than like T251. The Digital Dictionary of Buddhism lists 神咒 as one of many variant “spellings” of *mantra* used in Chinese texts, so it’s also possible that 大神咒 is a translation of mahāmantra and is thus a synonym for 大明呪, though if this is true it is unclear why Xuánzàng might have used both.

**Sources of the Epithets**

As is now widely known, the core of the Chinese text of the *Heart Sutra* (not including the epithets) is almost identical to Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Pañcavimśati*) (T223 8.223a13-20). The *Heart Sutra* is not so much a “condensation” as suggested by Conze, but a framed extract. There is a certain amount of continuity amongst the various *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. Longer versions of the text are literally expansions of shorter versions, though the manuscripts of the longer versions are not necessarily
later, since each text appears to have continued to evolve independently. Of these texts, the versions in 8,000 and 25,000 lines\textsuperscript{14} were by far the most important in China, as indicated by the multiple translations of each in the Tripitaka (seven and four respectively), though an 18,000 line version may have been popular in central Asia (Conze 1978: 10).

Three Chinese translations of Pañcaviṃśati are preserved in the Taishō Tripitaka:

- T221 《放光般若經》 by Mokṣala (291 CE)
- T223 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》 by Kumārajīva (404 CE)
- T220-ii 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 401-478), by Xuánzàng. (659-663 CE)\textsuperscript{15}

There is also T222 《光讚經》 (8.147-218) a partial translation by Dharmarakṣa (286 CE), which omits our passages. There are two published editions of the Sanskrit Pañcaviṃśati: Dutt (1934), which finishes at Chapter 21 (thus does not contain the epithets passage), and Kimura (2010) a new critical edition of the whole text, based on four manuscripts from Nepal. A recent facsimile edition of one of the Gilgit Pañcaviṃśati manuscripts by Karashima et al. (2016) makes this text more accessible, but no transcription or edition has been published.\textsuperscript{16}

Conze’s translation, The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom (1975a), is based on a patchwork of various Sanskrit manuscripts from the extended Prajñāpāramitā tradition. At best, it can only indicate the general outline of the text, which seems to have been Conze’s intention.

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\textsuperscript{14} Apart from the Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā, none of the early Prajñāpāramitā texts is written in verse, though Vajracchedikā does paradoxically refer to itself as consisting of catuspadikāṃ gātham (Vaj 8) “verses consisting of four quarters”. The number of lines a text occupied was dependent on the size of the leaves it was written on and the scribe’s handwriting. This may be may be why it was common to use the śloka—a meter of 4 x 8 = 32 syllables—as a measure of length. In this measure, sāhasrikā works out at 32,000 syllables (Gombrich, personal communication 22 Feb 2017). However, it has become customary in English to treat sāhasrikā as referring to “lines”.

\textsuperscript{15} Xuánzàng’s translations occur within his 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 Dābōrēbōluōmìduō-jīng, Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra (T220), a compendium of 16 Prajñāpāramitā texts in 600 fascicles, covering three volumes in the Taishō Tripitaka. Vols. 5-6 are taken up with a version of the 100,000 line text. Vol. 7 contains the remaining texts. The fact that the Heart Sutra is not included in T220 is evidence that undermines attribution of T251 to Xuánzàng.

\textsuperscript{16} For more information about the state of scholarship on this text and its manuscripts, see Karashima et al (2016).
Nattier (1992: 186ff) conjectures that T250 is extracted from or influenced by T1509 《大智度論》 Dàzhìdùlùn = Sanskrit *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa, a commentary, attributed to Nāgārjuna, on Pañcaviṃśati incorporating the text and also translated by Kumārajīva (and thus employing similar or identical terminology). In the case of the epithets passage, T1509 and T223 are identical, so I will not comment on this issue here.

Nattier and Yamabe identified some epithet passages in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (Aṣṭa) translations by Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng. There are seven Chinese translations related to the Aṣṭa:

- T224 《道行般若經》by Lokakṣema (179 CE).
- T225 《大明度經》by Zhī Qiān (225 CE);
- T226 《摩訶般若鈔經》by Zhú Fóniàn (382 CE).
- T227 《小品般若經》by Kumārajīva (408 CE)
- T220-iv 《大般若波羅蜜多經》(Vol. 7, Fasc. 538-555), by Xuánzàng (660 CE)
- T220-v 《大般若波羅蜜多經》(Vol. 7, Fasc. 556-565), by Xuánzàng (660 CE)\(^{17}\)
- T228 《佛母出生三法藏般若波羅蜜多經》by Dānapāla (985 CE).

Further comparative information on the various Chinese Aṣṭa translations can be found in Karashima (2011). In Sanskrit, there are two editions, Mitra (1888) and Vaidya (1960). Conze’s translation (1973a) is from the former. I have used Vaidya’s edition, simply because it was available both in print and electronically.

The epithets passage can also be found in the Chinese translation of the Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra or 18000 line text (Aṣṭadaśa), by Xuánzàng (T220-iii; Vol. 7, Fasc. 479-537). Since these are identical to the passages found in T220-ii, I’ve merely noted the bibliographic details alongside references to the Pañcaviṃśati passages. Again, the identical passage

\(^{17}\) A translation of a long fragment of text that closely resembles Aṣṭa.
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is found in Xuánzàng’s translation of the Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra or 100,000 line text (Śata) (T200-i; Vol. 5-6, fasc. 1-400) and I only note bibliographic details. Conze (1962) has published a partial Sanskrit text of Aṣṭadaśa, but no Sanskrit text of Śata has yet been published. A 10,000 line version is preserved in Tibetan only (Conze 1978: 45ff). I have not consulted this version.

A translation of Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā (Rgs) was made by Fǎxián 法賢 in 991CE, 《佛母寶德藏般若波羅蜜經》 Collection of Precious Virtues of the Mother of the Buddhas Perfection of Wisdom Text (T229). I consulted the Sanskrit edition by Yuyama (1976). Conze places this text alongside Aṣṭa or perhaps a little earlier in the timeline of Prajñāpāramitā text production, though the text that survives was reorganised by Haribhadra in the 8th century to fit the chapter structure of Aṣṭa (1978: 9-10). A fragment of the epithets passage can be identified in both the Sanskrit and the Chinese versions of Rgs.

As well as these primary sources, there are a number of ancient commentaries (see Lopez 1988, 1996; Hyun Choo 2006; Shih & Lusthaus 2006). Most of these are from a few centuries after the probable date of composition of the Heart Sutra and all are manifestly sectarian. The commentaries by Xuánzàng’s students—Kuíjì 窺基 (T1710) and Woncheuk 測撰 (T1711)—are much closer to the time of composition and both presumably influenced by Xuánzàng. Both treat the Heart Sutra as epitomising Yogācāra doctrines. Kuíjì is considered, along with Xuánzàng, to be the co-founder of the Chinese Fǎxiàng Yogācāra School. Lusthaus places Woncheuk’s commentary, T1711, shortly after the death of Xuánzàng in 664 (2003: 66).

Despite the proliferating occurrences noted by Yamabe and Nattier and added to in this study, by comparing the context of all of the occurrences we can see that there are in fact just two passages, with minor variations, that are potential sources for the Heart Sutra epithets passage, each followed by a distinct identifying passage. To make the subject manageable, all of the parallels will be noted in appendixes, and in the body of the article I will focus on the two passages as they occur in Kimura’s Sanskrit edition of Pañcavimśati and in Kumārajīva’s (Kj) translation (T223), and make comparisons with other texts where relevant.
Passage One

What distinguishes Passage One is that good-sons (善男子 = kulaputra) or good daughters (善女人 = kuladuhitr), train (學) in the Prajñāpāramitā vidyā (明呪) and it enables them to be peaceful, or to not cause harm (惱) to themselves or others. In Kumārajīva’s translation of the Pañcaviṃśati (T223) Passage One reads

“The Perfection of Wisdom is a great vidyā (大明呪), an unexcelled vidyā (無上明呪). If a kulaputra or kuladuhitr trains in this vidyā, then they do not intend harm to themselves, or others, or both.

This passage with minor variations is found in Xuánzàng’s translations at T220-i, 5.568.b19-23 (fasc. 102) = T220-ii, 7.151.a29-b3 (fasc. 428, Chp. 30) = T220-iii, 7.551.b10-14 (fasc. 501). Xuánzàng routinely adds two epithets that don’t have parallels in other Chinese translations or in the extant Sanskrit texts, i.e. “great vidyā” or “great supernatural vidyā” (大神呪) and “Queen of all vidyās” (一切呪王 = sarvavidyārājñī?). Here 王 means, “king, monarch” and I am reading “queen” because in Sanskrit vidyā is a feminine noun. The Sanskrit counterpart to this is:

Kauśika, this perfection of wisdom is a great vidyā (mahāvidyā); this perfection of wisdom is an unexcelled vidyā (anuttarasā)

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18 Both Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng use the same character善 to translate Skt. kuśala, i.e. ‘good, virtuous, kind, friendly’. So in Chinese 善男子/善女人 takes on the connotation of virtuous son or daughter, which in China may have had connotations of filial piety (孝 xiào).

19 “Although the basic meaning of惱 is vexation, anxiety or worry, perhaps a better translation here is ‘to harm’, or ‘the intent to cause harm.” (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)

20 Compare Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta (Mn 13) describing someone in the jhānas. “At that time he does not intend harm for himself, or harm for another, or harm for both; at that time he experiences only the experience of being free of the desire to harm. I say that the supreme happiness is the experience of [having no desire to] harm.” (neva tasmiṃ samaye attabyābādhāyapi ceteti, na parabyābābdhāyapi ceteti; ahyābajjhāmyeva tasmiṃ samaye vedanaṃ vedeti. Ahyābajjhāparamāham, bhikkhave, vedanaṃm asaddaṃ vadāmi. i.89). Compare MĀ 99: 彼於爾時不念自害, 亦不念害他, 若不念害者, (T 1.586a19-20). Also MN iii.21f., SN iv.339, AN i.157-9, 216 (attabyābābdhāyapi ceteti…); and cf. MN i.414 (attabyābābdhāyapi samvattatteyya…), MN ii.115, AN i.114 (attabyābābdhāyapi samvattati…).

21 是般若波羅蜜是大明呪, 是無上明呪。若善男子善女人, 於是明咒中學, 自不惱身, 亦不惱他, 亦不兩惱。 (8.283b9-11 = T1509 25.463.e07-8)

22 See the discussion of 神呪 above.
vidyā). For here, Kauśika, a good son or daughter training in this [vidyā] does not intend harm for themselves, for another, or for both. 23

Here the Gilgit manuscript describes Prajñāpāramitā as, mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā, and niruttarā vidyā.24 This passage can be traced back to the Aṣṭa in both Chinese and Sanskrit. In Kumārajiva’s translation of Aṣṭa T227, we find:

“The prajñāpāramitā is a great incantation (大呪術), a supreme incantation (無上呪術). Sons and daughters of good family should learn this incantation.”25

Here vidyā is translated by Kumārajiva as 呪術 “incantation”, possibly influenced by Mokṣala (T221, see Passage Two below); whereas a few pages later in Passage Two he uses the more familiar 明呪. This is further evidence that 明呪 was intended as one word elsewhere.

Xuánzàng’s translations are: T220-iv, 7.774.b07-11 (fasc. 540) = T220-v, 7.873.a28-b1 (fasc. 557). Lokakṣema’s 179 CE translation (T224, 8.431.c12-21), the first in Chinese, describes Prajñāpāramitā as 極大祝 “an extremely great incantation” and 猛祝 “an outstanding incantation”.26 Zhī Qiān, 46 years later, also has a slightly different terminology (T225, 8.484.a1-4): in his text, the Prajñāpāramitā is the vidyā (神呪) of all Buddhas (諸佛) and Queen of vidyās (呪中之王矣). The phrase “Queen of vidyās” is used by Xuánzàng in some of his translations, but not by other translators. This raises the possibility that a particular branch of the Sanskrit manuscript tradition had mahāvidyārājñī at


25 般若波羅蜜是大呪術、無上呪術。善男子、善女人，學此呪術. (8.542.b5-6)

26 Chinese text revised per Karashima (2011: 64). In ancient China 祝 was the title of the person who oversaw ritual offerings or who was in charge of fires and incense in temples. It also meant, “to pray”. (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)
this point and others did not. That said, *mahāvidyārājñī* is not found in any of the extant Sanskrit mss. Finally Zhú Fóniàn (T226, 8.514.a28-03) has just two epithets: “extremely great vidyā” (極大呪) and “preserves the excellence of the vidyā” (持尊之呪).

The Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* has the same passage but with six epithets.

Kauśika, the perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvidyā*); the perfection of wisdom is an immeasurable (*apramāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a measureless (*aparimāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed (*anuttara*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unequalled (*asama*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a peerless (*asamasameyaṃ*) *vidyā*. What is the reason? For here, Kauśika, a kulaputra or kuladuhitṛ, training in this *vidyā* would not intend harm for themselves, for another or for both.\(^{27}\)

Note that *apramāṇa* and *aparimāṇa* are close synonyms, as are *asama* and *asamasama*. As far as extant manuscripts go, *Aṣṭa* is more elaborate than *Pañcaviṃśati* at this point, despite the latter being notionally a development from the former. The texts seem to have continued to evolve independently of the process of expansion, i.e. after Buddhists expanded *Aṣṭa* to produce *Pañcaviṃśati*, they continued to tinker with *Aṣṭa*. The Gilgit *Pañcaviṃśati* has three epithets in Passage One, while the later Nepalese mss. have only two. That the extra terms are not found in any Chinese translation suggests that this feature may be a late addition to the manuscripts from India.

**Passage Two**

The second passage is very similar in its phrasing, but the epithets are followed by a reference to the Buddhas of the three times and ten directions (*atītānāgata-pratyutpannā daśadiśi*) attaining unexcelled perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*) as a result of knowledge (*vidyā*) of the perfection of wisdom.

In all the texts, Passage Two comes a few pages after Passage One in the same chapter.

Kumārajīva’s translation of Pañcavimśati, T223, reads:

[Śakra said] “Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great vidyā (大明呪), an unexcelled vidyā (無上明呪), an unequalled vidyā (無等等明呪). Why is that? Bhagavan, because the Perfection of Wisdom can remove all evil dharmas (不善法 = akuśaladharmāḥ) and enable all good dharmas (善法 = kuśaladharmāḥ.).”

Then the Buddha said to Śakra, Lord of the Devas, “Yes! Yes! Kauśika, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great vidyā, an unexcelled vidyā, an unequalled vidyā. Why is that? Kauśika, because all the Buddhas of the past have used this vidyā to attain supreme perfect awakening and all the Buddhas of the future and the Buddhas of the ten directions, because of this vidyā, have attained to supreme, perfect awakening.”

We find this passage in Xuánzàng’s translations at T220-ii 7.156.a17-22; (fasc. 429) = T220-i 5.580.b27-c13 (Fasc. 105) = T220-iii 7.556.a24-26; (fasc. 502). Here Xuánzàng refers to the Prajñāpāramitā as 大神明呪王, which is probably another rendering of Sanskrit mahāvidyārājñī (compare Zhī Qiān’s, “Queen of vidyās” 呪中之王矣 and Xuánzàng’s “Queen of all vidyās”一切呪王 in T225 above). This raises the possibility that Xuánzàng intended 神明 to be read as vidyā. Though not found in the Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitā texts, the term mahāvidyārājñī is found in Buddhist literature especially in relation to dhāraṇī and other apotropaic texts. Xuánzàng doesn’t use the phrase 大神明呪王 in Passage One of T220-iv or in either passage in T220-v. The only other translator who uses the phrase is Zhī Qiān (225 CE) whose 明呪中之王矣 in Passage One also represents mahāvidyārājñī.

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28 世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？世尊！是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。」 佛語釋提桓因言：「如是，如是！憍尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？憍尸迦！過去諸佛因是明呪故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來世諸佛、今現在十方諸佛，亦因是明呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。 (8.286b28-c7 = T1509, 25.468.b21-25).

29 Here T220-i is elaborated with filler material, mainly extra repetitions, but is essentially the same text. Taishō has a note here to say that Tempyō ms (739 CE) and the Chinese ms of the Sui (531-617) have 祝 for 呪.
Mokșala, in T221, has a quite different translation:

Bhagavan: this perfection of wisdom is a very great art (極大術), this perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed art (無上之術), this perfection of wisdom is an art without equal (無等之術).\(^{31}\)

Here \textit{vidyā} is translated as 術 meaning “technique, art, or skill”, cf. Kumārajīva’s “incantation” 召術 (literally dhāraṇī-technique?) above. This conveys the more practical meanings of \textit{vidyā} quite well, but lacks the soteriological connotations that are part of the definition of \textit{vidyā}.

The first part of this passage, Śakra’s declaration to the Buddha, is missing from Kimura’s Sanskrit edition\(^{32}\), but we pick up from the Bhagavan’s reply, which in any case repeats Śakra’s words.\(^{33}\)

This being said, the Bhagavan said this to Śakra, Lord of the Devas, “This is so Kauśika, this is so. Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is a great \textit{vidyā} (mahāvidyā); Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is an unexcelled \textit{vidyā} (anuttarā vidyā); Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is an unequalled \textit{vidyā}. What is the reason? Because, Kauśika, all those perfect Buddhas, who are worthy and fully awakened Tathāgatavas in the three times and the ten directions, awaken and will awaken in the future to the unexcelled, perfect awakening having arrived at just this perfection of wisdom.”\(^{34}\)

\(^{31}\) 世尊！是般若波羅蜜為極大術,般若波羅蜜無上之術,般若波羅蜜者無等之術。 (8.48.b14-22; fs. 7, chp.25). “In Mokșala’s very early translation 是 is an anaphoric pronoun, 'this', not a verb. Here 為 is the verb 'to be'. This is characteristic of an early period of Chinese language.” (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)

\(^{32}\) In the Gilgit ms. the missing passage reads: “Śakra said: ‘Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great \textit{vidyā}; Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is an unexcelled \textit{vidyā}; Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is an unequalled \textit{vidyā}. Why is that? Bhagavan, because the Perfection of Wisdom dries up all unskilful dharmas and upholds all skilful dharmas.’” śakra ahā | mahāvidyāyam bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā | anuttarāyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā [13] asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | tat kasya hetoh | tathā hi bhagavan prajñāpāramitā sarvākuśalānām dharmā[ṇām] ucchoṇa[ṣa] yatīrī sarvākuśalānām dharmā[ṇām] dātrī | (Karashima et. al. 2016, folio 146v. lines 12-13; my transcription).

\(^{33}\) This passage is omitted from Dutt. Nattier (1992: 213) was writing before the publication of Kimura’s edition of the \textit{Pañcavimśati} so was not able to provide a Sanskrit counterpart. Compare Conze (1975a: 237).

\(^{34}\) evam ukte bhagavān śakrāṃ devānām indram etad avocat: evam etat kauṣikaivaṃ etat, mahāvidyāyaṃ kauṣika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttarayam kauṣika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā, asamasameyam kauṣika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā. tat kasya hetoh? tathā hi kauṣika ye 'tītānāgatapratyutpānā dāsadiśī loke tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyakṣambuddhāḥ
As with Passage One, we can trace Passage Two in the various versions of Aṣṭa. In Kumārajīva’s translation T227 the most pertinent part is:

_Prajñāpāramitā_ is a great _vidyā_ (大明呪); _Prajñāpāramitā_ is an unsurpassed _vidyā_ (無上呪); _Prajñāpāramitā_ is an unequalled _vidyā_ (無等等呪).\(^{35}\)

Again, Xuánzàng’s translation, T220-iv, is more elaborate with five epithets to Kumārajīva’s three:

_Prajñāpāramitā_ is a great _vidyā_ (大神呪); _Prajñāpāramitā_ is a great _vidyā_ (大明呪); _Prajñāpāramitā_ is an unsurpassed _vidyā_ (無上呪); _Prajñāpāramitā_ is an unequalled _vidyā_ (無等等呪); _Prajñāpāramitā_ is the queen of all _vidyās_ (一切呪王).\(^{36}\)

Lokakṣema’s translation, T224 (8.433.b22-3), has three epithets compared to the two in Passage One, i.e. “an extremely great incantation” (極大祝), “a supremely venerable incantation” (極尊祝), and “an unequalled incantation” (無有輩祝). Zhī Qiān’s translation, T225, provides only one epithet here, i.e. “greatly honoured _vidyā_” (大尊呪) (8.484.b13-15). Zhú Fóniàn, T226 (8.515.c12-20) has three epithets which, apparently following Lokakṣema, he translates, “an extremely great _vidyā_” (極大呪), “a supremely venerable _vidyā_” (極尊呪), and “an unequalled _vidyā_” (無有輩呪). The counterpart Sanskrit text of the Aṣṭa reads:

When this was said Śakra, Lord of the Devas, said this to the Bhagavan: “Bhagavan, the perfection of wisdom is a great _vidyā_ (mahāvidyā); the perfection of wisdom is an immeasurable (apramāṇa) _vidyā_; the perfection of wisdom is a measureless (aparimāṇa) _vidyā_; the perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed (niruttarā) _vidyā_; the perfection of wisdom is an unequalled

\[\text{sarve te imām eva prajñāpāramitām āgamyānuttarāṁ samyaksambodhīm abhisambuddhā abhisambudhyante abhisambhoisyante ca. (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)}\] The Gilgit ms. has the same epithets here.

\(^{35}\) 般若波羅蜜是大明呪, 般若波羅蜜是無上呪, 般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。 (8.543b25-29) In the Taishō Ed. this occurs under a subheading: 摩訶般若波羅蜜明咒品第四 “Mahāprajñāpāramitā-vidyā, Section Four.”

\(^{36}\) 甚深般若波羅蜜多是大神呪, 是大明呪, 是無上呪, 是無等等呪, 是一切呪王, (7.777.c05-6). Compare T220-v, fasc. 557 (7.875.a2-7).
(asama)  vidyā; the perfection of wisdom is a peerless (asamasama)  vidyā.”

This is followed, as above, by the Buddha’s reply. Here again,  Aṣṭa  doubles up some of the epithets:  apramāṇa  =  aparimāṇa; and  niruttara  =  anuttara; and  asama  =  asamasama. We saw the use of  niruttara  in the Gilgit ms. parallel of Passage One.

We conclude this survey of the  Prajñāpāramitā  literature by noting that we can even get a glimpse of the  Heart Sutra  passage in  Rgs, T229:

This great  vidyā (大明) of perfect wisdom is the mother of all Buddhas,

Able to remove distress in all world spheres,

All the Buddhas of the three times and the ten directions,

Schooled in this knowledge are the supreme masters.

This corresponds to the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text:

This perfection of wisdom of the Jinas is a great  vidyā,

In the realm abounding in beings, whose nature is suffering, grief, and darkness.

The world protectors of past and future, in the ten directions, who,

Trained in this  vidyā, are the unexcelled kings of the knowledgeable.

Here,  大明 corresponds to  mahāvidyā in the Sanskrit text. Fāxián was constrained to translate each line of verse as seven Chinese characters, so

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37 evam ukte śakro devānām indro bhagavantam etad avocat - mahāvidyeyaṃ bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā / apramāṇeyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / aparimāṇeyaṃ bhagavan [37] vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / niruttareyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamasameyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / (Vaidya 1960: 36-7).

38 大明般若諸佛母，能除苦惱徧世界，所有三世十方佛，學此明得無上師。(8.678.a4-5)

even though 明 literally means “bright” we have to read it here as a poetic abbreviation of 明呪 i.e. as vidyā. If Conze is correct in his assumption that Rgs is the earliest of all the Prajñāpāramitā texts, then here we see the epithets passage in its earliest form, though we now have reason to believe that Aṣṭa was composed in Gāndhārī (Falk & Karashima 2012).

Comparing the two passages in Pañcaviṃśati, Passage Two seems more likely to be the source of the epithets passage in the Heart Sutra than Passage One. In fact, the wording of Kumārajīva’s Pañcaviṃśati (T223) is identical to the Heart Sutra text attributed to him (T250). Also the association with the idea of all the Buddhas of the three times awakening through Prajñāpāramitā is similar to the immediately preceding part of the Heart Sutra.

**Vidyā vs. Mantra**

Yamabe observed that in Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitā is a vidyā and not a mantra or a dhāraṇī (Nattier 1992, n. 54a). The present survey confirms this and across a wider range of texts. The Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitā literature always refers to Prajñāpāramitā as a vidyā rather than as a mantra. So how did the Sanskrit Heart Sutra, which is after all a quote from the Large Prajñāpāramitā text, come to have the word mantra? I will look at the problem from two angles: semantics and chronology.

**Semantics**

Conze asserts that vidyā is “untranslatable” (1975b: 122) and renders it both as “science” (122) and “lore” (237). Vidyā derives from the verbal root √vid “to know, to discover” (cognate with “wise, wisdom” etc). Sometimes vidyā is translated as “science”, but the whole context is pre-scientific so this is anachronistic. Vidyā refers to knowledge in a particular field: knowledge of the Vedas, knowledge of political governance, etc. Knowledge cultivated through learning and experience, rather than divinely inspired knowledge or insight. It also has a magical connotation. Knowledge in the sense of vidyā bestows control over the subject studied; when one thoroughly knows a subject one is said to have “mastered” it. In the context of Prajñāpāramitā, vidyā seems to mean knowledge in verbal form that has specific apotropaic and/or soteriological value in a Buddhist context.

Knowing, as we now do, that the surviving Sanskrit texts all have vidyā, we can confidently read the many Chinese variants—祝, 咒, 呪, 明, 明呪, 術, 呪...
術, 神呪, and 神明呪—in this context as translations of *vidyā*. The common element, with a few exceptions already discussed, is a character pronounced /tjus/ in Old Chinese (Mandarin *zhòu*). Lokākṣema’s translations have the synonym 祝 “incantation” pronounced / tjugs/ (Mandarin *zhù*).

The Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has four epithets. Although numbers vary, only Xuánzàng’s translations have more than three, and specifically the version of the *Heart Sutra* attributed to him (T251) has four. Where most Chinese texts have something resembling the core epithets of “great”, “unsurpassed” and “unequalled” (大明, 無上, and 無等等), the translation of *Aṣṭa* by Zhī Qiān (T225) only has two, i.e. “*vidyā* of all the Buddhas” (諸佛神呪) and “Queen of *vidyās*” (呪中之王矣) corresponding to Xuánzàng’s “great *vidyā*” (大神呪) and “Queen of all *vidyās*” (一切呪王). There is no extant Sanskrit manuscript with these two extra epithets.

Against this reading, we have the commentaries produced by Xuánzàng’s two main students, Kuījī and Woncheuk, both of which understand 明呪 as two words. As noted above, Beal, relying on a Tang Dynasty commentary, renders 呪 as *dhāraṇī* (1865: 28). In Kuījī’s commentary, T1710, he prefaces his gloss on this section of the text with a well known fourfold classification of types of *dhāraṇī* that occurs in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (translated by Xuánzàng). This suggests that Kuījī is also reading 呪/呪 as *dhāraṇī*, even though both Hyun Choo (2006) and Shih & Lusthaus (2006) render the character as *mantra* in their translations of these early commentaries.

Woncheuk (T1711) glosses 大明呪 as: “[Because] it dispels darkness (暗) and removes ignorance (除癡), it is called the great-bright-*dhāraṇī* (大明呪).” Woncheuk uses the character 暗 “dark” as a contrast to 明 “bright”, which suggests he understood 明呪 as two words, in this case “bright *dhāraṇī*” rather than *vidyā*. But he also describes it as “removing ignorance” 除癡 so perhaps he was aware of the ambiguity, since *avidyā* is a common word for ignorance. Kuījī glosses 明 as a standalone character: “it breaks through where there is no light.”

Woncheuk seemingly had a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Heart Sutra* to consult. Lusthaus refers to it as a Sanskrit “original” (2003:83), though this assertion appears to go beyond the evidence available. That a Sanskrit text was available

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40 遣暗除癡稱大明呪。 (33.551.c03)
41 無幽不燭曰明. (33.0542a17) An alternative reading is: “shining through all darkness” (Shih 2001: 122)
in China after Xuánzàng’s death is not evidence that it preceded any Chinese version. On the contrary, we fully expect a Sanskrit version to be available in China before Xuánzàng’s death, especially if Nattier’s conjecture is right and Xuánzàng himself translated the Heart Sutra from Chinese into Sanskrit.

To sum up, we have considered all of the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the Aṣṭa and Pañcaviṃśati, plus a few related texts. All the Sanskrit texts have vidyā where the Sanskrit Heart Sutra has mantra. I have shown that all of the Chinese Prajñāparamitā texts have read vidyā as well, although Tang Dynasty commentators seem to have understood咒/呪 to mean dhāraṇī. I believe we can explain these discrepancies with reference to Jan Nattier’s hypothesis that the Heart Sutra was composed in China, combined with some observations about how the Buddhist lexicon changed over time.

**Context and Chronology**

The different parts of The Heart Sutra tell us that it was composed in an environment of devotion to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, of meditative practices involving examination of the skandhas, and of dhāraṇī chanting. These are all mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhist practices in China in the early Medieval Period (cf. Copp 2014).

The presence of a mantra, if it is a mantra, tempts many commentators to think of this text as tantric (see for example Kūkai’s commentary in Hakeda 1972: 262). Ryūichi Abe (1999) distinguishes Tantra proper from the disparate elements associated with Tantra (specifically a mantra) present in Japan before Tantric Buddhism was introduced when Saichō and Kūkai returned from China in the early 9th Century. Similarly, I would argue that the presence of a mantra alone, if it is a mantra, is not evidence for Tantric Buddhism. Tantra is a context within which elements such as mantras are combined with other essential elements (mudrā, maṇḍala, abhiṣeka, etc), which make a particular kind of sense. Without this context, an isolated element such as a mantra cannot be considered Tantric. **Mantra** is a term appropriate to the context of Buddhists involved in bestowing abhiṣeka and practising sādhana, and arguably not applicable to the environment of the Heart Sutra.

More recently, Paul Copp has argued that teleological arguments along the lines that a dhāraṇī represents a “proto-Tantric” element have blinded scholars to the significance of dhāraṇī in medieval China (2014: 198). Like Abé, Copp’s argument points away from treating the dhāraṇī as a “proto-Tantric” feature and opens up the possibility of understanding dhāraṇī in its own right. Copp’s
comments apply to Prajñāpāramita qua vidyā as much as dhāraṇī. Although both dhāraṇī and mantra might involve spoken (or, especially in China, written) phrases or sounds, they are understood as having different functions. Broadly speaking, the former is protective, while the latter is transformative.

Were it not for the recurring word mantra in the text, I suggest that we would conclude that the string “gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā” is a dhāraṇī. For example, unlike almost all mantras, it does not start with oṃ⁴²; it does not contain a bīja or seed-syllable; and does not relate to a deity or ritual function. On the other hand, it does use a sequence of variants on a word that is characteristic of dhāraṇī. Nattier notes (1992: 211, n.52, 53) the similar “spells” contained in the Chinese texts identified by McRae and Fukui, e.g. in T901 Dhāraṇī Collection Sūtra, are referred to as dhāraṇī. The character 心 “heart” (in the title of T251) often corresponds to Sanskrit citta and is usually translated literally as “heart”; however, Fukui has argued that 心 can also be read as dhāraṇī (cited in Nattier 1992: 175-6; 210, n.47). To this, we can add the observation that some of the Nepalese manuscripts of the Heart Sutra explicitly refer to the text as a dhāraṇī.⁴³

Although vidyā later becomes, at times, almost synonymous with mantra, at the time the Aṣṭa and the Paṅcaviṃśati were composed, Indian Buddhists still saw mantra as non-Buddhist. The Pāli Nikāyas contain a few passages making it clear that the chanting of mantras is, at the very least, wrong-livelihood and forbidden for bhikkhus (DN i.9; SN i.167, Sn 480). In early Mahāyāna texts (i.e. Aṣṭa or Paṅcaviṃśati), mantra was viewed quite negatively (see for example, Conze 1973: 160, 205, and 206). By contrast, the chanting of parittā, or protective texts, was already established as a popular Buddhist practice by the time of the Milindapañha (150-4). The Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra repeatedly refers to oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ, the “mantra” of Avalokiteśvara, as ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvidyā or “six-syllabled great incantation” (2002: 61; cf. Roberts 2012: 230-231). Studholme dates the Kāraṇḍavyūha to the fourth century CE. Peter Roberts, also commenting on the Kāraṇḍavyūha, remarks that, in this context, vidyā means “spell” or “incantation” and mahāvidyā means “great incantation” (2012: 230). He marks the sūtra as having many features in common with the Prajñāpāramitā

⁴² The only exceptions I am aware of occur in the Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi-tantra, where mantras may begin with namaḥ samantabuddhānām... or namaḥ samantavajrānām... (see Hodge 2003)

⁴³ For example, (using notation from Conze 1948) Ne: Ārya-paṅcaviṃśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya nāma dhāraṇī; Nh: Ārya-śrī-paṅcavinsatikā-prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya nāma dhāraṇī.
literature, except that the ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvidyā replaces prajñāpāramitā as the “supreme principle of Mahāyāna” (2002: 87). Although there is no evidence that the composer of the Heart Sutra was aware of the Kāraṇḍavyūha, the inclusion of Avalokiteśvara suggests devotion to the cult of the bodhisattva and probably some sympathy with the ideas in the Kāraṇḍavyūha that feature Avalokiteśvara in a soteriological role.

All this suggests that mantra is not only a back-translation but a mistranslation of vidyā. Though the words in the epithets passage were originally composed in one milieu—where protective incantations were relevant, but mantras were alien and forbidden—by the time the Chinese Heart Sutra came to be translated into Sanskrit the religious and linguistic landscape in India and China had changed. In the interim mantra had been assimilated into Buddhist practice. In other words, the Sanskrit translation of the Heart Sutra must have been produced in a milieu where the two characters 明呪 were naturally taken to be two words, and mantra seemed the natural translation of 明 rather than vidyā or dhāraṇī. This suggests a context where Tantric Buddhism was prominent, dhāraṇī had been assimilated to mantra, and the non-Tantric nature of the Heart Sutra was easily overlooked. This supports Nattier’s conjecture that the translation into Sanskrit occurred relatively late, probably in the 7th century.

The conclusion seems to be that there is no mantra in the Heart Sutra. Instead, it contains a dhāraṇī and refers to Prajñāpāramitā as a superlative kind of practical knowledge or incantation (vidyā). This leaves the modern commentator with a problem. If mantra is a mistranslation based on a misreading of the Chinese text due to historical shifts in Buddhist terminology, should we “correct” the text? Every Sanskrit witness of the Heart Sutra understands the mistaken translation as the correct one. Does any modern scholar have the kind of authority that would legitimise overriding traditional witnesses, stretching back over 1000 years?

The Problem of the Heart Sutra Ur-text

As this study shows, we have a particular problem with the Heart Sutra. Conze and other editors have treated the Heart Sutra as an Indian, Sanskrit, Buddhist sūtra. In creating his critical edition, Conze sought to recreate a putative ur-text in Sanskrit, seeing in it the source of the extant texts in many languages. Now, however, we can say beyond any reasonable doubt that this “ur-text” was a translation from a Chinese text that is similar to, but not exactly like T250
or T251. It was probably created some time in the 7th century, much later than Conze thought. Important as it is to establish the earliest Sanskrit text of the Heart Sutra, the ur-text itself was almost certainly Chinese. I would argue that the Chinese ur-text is no longer extant, since none of the surviving versions is sufficiently similar to the Sanskrit Heart Sutra, or to each other, to have been the source of the others.

A further complication is that our text is a composite made up largely of quotations from other texts. Even if we establish a Chinese ur-text of the Heart Sutra, we can still peel away further layers and seek its origins in other texts, mainly of the Prajñāpāramitā genre. But the Prajñāpāramitā literature is itself far from being fixed. A core text has evolved into a number of species of different sizes, each of which has continued to evolve at different rates so that surviving manuscripts of a supposedly “early” text, Aṣṭa, may show features that apparently post-date the “later” text Pañcaviṃśati. We have reason to believe that the core Prajñāpāramitā text was composed in Gāndhārī and only later translated into Sanskrit (Falk & Karashima 2012). Beyond this, the origins of Prajñāpāramitā texts are obscure, though there are some affinities with Pāli texts (e.g. MN 121, 122, SN 12.15 etc.).

Each time we approach the horizon we see a new mountain range far off in the distance. Unfortunately, as we go back in time our sources become fewer and less complete. It may be that the very idea of an ur-text is meaningless under these circumstances. All we can really do is establish the text at certain points in space and time and relate it to the appropriate historical circumstances.

Appendix 1: Parallel Passages

Passage One

Pañcaviṃśati

T220-ii, 5.151.a29-b3:44
如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪, 如是般若波羅蜜多是大明呪, 如是般若波羅蜜多是無上呪, 如是般若波羅蜜多是一切呪王

T221, 8.46a.03-05:
拘翼！是般若波羅蜜者，無上之術。善男子、善女人學是術者，亦不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，亦不念兩惡。

44 (fasc. 428, Chp. 30) = T220-i 568.b19-23 (fasc. 102) = T220-iii 551.b10-14 (fasc. 501,)
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T223, 8.283b9-11: 是般若波羅蜜是大明呪，是無上明呪。若善男子善女人，於是明呪中學，自不惱身，亦不惱他，亦不兩惱。

T1509, 25.463.e07-8: 是般若波羅蜜，是大明呪、是無上呪。


Gilgit 141v line 8-10: mahāvideyaṃ kauśika yaduta praśnāpāramitā | [9] anuttareyaṃ kauśika yaduta praśnāpāramitā | niruttareyaṃ kauśika yaduta praśnāpāramitā

Aṣṭa

T220-iv, 7.774.b07-11: 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等呪；如是般若波羅蜜多是諸呪王，最上、最妙、無能及者，具大威力，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。

T220-v, 7.873.a28-b1: 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是無上呪，若能於此精勤修學，不為自害、不為他害、不為俱害，疾證無上正等菩提

T224, 8.431.c12-21: 何以故？是般若波羅蜜者極大祝，人中之猛祝。學是祝者，是善男子、善女人不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，都無所念惡，善為人中之雄，自致作佛，為護人民蜎飛蠕動，學是祝者疾成佛道也。

T225, 8.484.a1-4: 所以然者，斯定，諸佛神呪，呪中之王矣。學是呪者，不自念惡、不念人惡，都無惡念，是為人中之雄，自致作佛，為護眾生。

T226, 8.514.a28-03: 是般若波羅蜜者，極大呪，持尊之呪。學是呪者，善男子、善女人不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，都不念惡，為人中之雄，自致作佛，當護一切人

T227, 8.542.b5-6 般若波羅蜜是大呪術、無上呪術。善男子、善女人，學此呪術，不自念惡，不念他惡，不兩念惡；學是呪術，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，得薩婆若智，能觀一切眾生心。

45 Revised per Karashima (2011: 64).
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(Vaidya 27-28):

mahāvidyeyāṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
apramāneyāṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
aparimāneyāṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
anuttareyāṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
asameveyāṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
asamasameyāṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /

Passage Two

Pañcaviṃśati

T220-ii, 7.156.a17-22: 46

「世尊！如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，最尊最勝、最上最妙，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。何以故？世尊！如是般若波羅蜜多能除一切惡不善法，能攝一切殊勝善法。」爾時，佛告天帝釋言：「如是！如是！如汝所說。何以故？憍尸迦！過去未來現在諸佛，皆因如是甚深般若波羅蜜多大神呪王，證得無上正等菩提，轉妙法輪度無量眾。

T221, 8.48.b14-22: 世尊！是般若波羅蜜為極大術，般若波羅蜜無上之術，般若波羅蜜者無等之術。

T223, 8.286b28-c7: 世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？世尊！般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。」佛語釋提桓因言：「如是，如是！憍尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？憍尸迦！過去諸佛因是明呪故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來世諸佛、今現在十方諸佛，亦因是明呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提

T1509, 25.468.b21-25: as for T223.

Kimura PSP 2-3:70: evam ukte bhagavān śakrāṃ devānām indram etad avocat: evam etat kauśikai evam, mahāvidyeyāṃ kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttareyāṃ kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā, asamasameyāṃ kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā.

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Gilgit 146v: 12-13
śakra ahā | mahāvidyeyam bhagavan yaduta prayñāpāramitā | anuttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā [13] asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā | tat kasya hetoh | tathā hi bhagavan prayñāpāramitā sarvakuśalānaṃ dharmāṇaṃ ucchoṣaṣayitrī sarvakuśalānaṃ dharmāṇaṃ dātrī |

Aṣṭa

T220-iv, 7.777.c05-6: 甚深 般若波羅蜜多是大神呪, 是大明呪, 是無上呪, 是無等等呪, 是一切呪王, 最尊最勝、最上最妙, 能伏一切, 不為一切之所降伏。

T220-v, 7.875.a2-7: 甚深般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是大明呪、是無上呪、是無等等呪。

T224, 8.433.b22-3: 極大祝般若波羅蜜, 極尊祝般若波羅蜜, 無有輩祝般若波羅蜜。

T225, 8.484.b13-15: 大尊呪

T226, 8.515.c12-20: 釋提桓因白佛: 「般若波羅蜜極大呪。天中天！般若波羅蜜極尊呪、無有輩呪。」佛言: 「如是, 如是! 拘翼! 般若波羅蜜為極大呪, 般若波羅蜜為極尊呪, 般若波羅蜜為極尊呪, 般若波羅蜜無有輩呪。

T227, 8.543.b28-c3: 「世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若波羅蜜是無上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。」 佛言: 「如是, 如是！憍尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若波羅蜜是無上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。何以故？憍尸迦！過去諸佛，因是呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來諸佛，亦因是呪，當得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。」

(Vaidya 36-7): mahāvidyeeyam bhagavan yaduta prayñāpāramitā / apramāṇeyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā / aparimāṇeyam bhagavan [37] vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā / niruttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā / anuttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā / asameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā / asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prayñāpāramitā /
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Ratnaguna
T229, 8.678.a4-5: 大明般若諸佛母，
Rgs 3.5 mahavidya prajña ayu pāramitā jinānām |

Appendix 2: Epithets Correspondence Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hṛd</th>
<th>T251 848c18-19</th>
<th>Xz</th>
<th>大神咒 大明咒 無上咒 無等等咒</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hṛd</td>
<td>T250 847c24-25</td>
<td>Kj</td>
<td>大明咒 無上明咒 無等等咒</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Passage One

Chinese Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>100</th>
<th>T220-i 568.b19-23 (fasc. 102)</th>
<th>Xz</th>
<th>大神咒 大明咒 無上咒 無等等咒 一切咒王</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>T220-ii 151.a29-b3 (fasc. 428)</td>
<td>Xz</td>
<td>大神咒 大明咒 無上咒 無等等咒 一切咒王</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>T220-iii 551.b10-14 (fasc. 501)</td>
<td>Xz</td>
<td>大神咒 大明咒 無上咒 無等等咒 一切咒王</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>T220-iv 774.b07-11 (fasc. 540)</td>
<td>Xz</td>
<td>大神咒 大明咒 無上咒 無等等咒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08a</td>
<td>T220-v 873.a28-b1 (fasc. 557)</td>
<td>Xz</td>
<td>大神咒 無上咒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>T1509 463.c07-8 (57)</td>
<td>Kj</td>
<td>大明咒 無上咒 無等等咒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>T223 283.b9-11</td>
<td>Kj</td>
<td>大呪術 無上咒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>T227 542.b5-6</td>
<td>Kj</td>
<td>大呪術 無上咒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>T221 46a.03-05 (fs. 7)</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>無上之術</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>T226 514.a29</td>
<td>ZF</td>
<td>極大呪 持尊之呪</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| 08 | T225 484.a1 | ZQ | 諸佛神呪 | 極大祝 | 猛祝 | 呪中之王矣 |
| 08 | T224 431.c12-21 | Lk | 極大祝 | 猛祝 |  |  |

**Sanskrit**

25: *mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā.* (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)

25: *mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā, niruttarā vidyā* (Gilgit 141v line 8-10)

08: *mahāvidyā, apramāṇa vidyā, aparimāṇa vidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā.* (Vaidya 27-8)

**Passage Two**

Pañcaviṃśati = Kimura (PSP 2-3:70) = Conze (1975a: 237, Chp 28)

Aṣṭa = Vaidya (36-7) = Conze (1973a: 108-9)

| Rgs | T229 678.a4-5 | Fx | 大明 |  |  |
| 25 | T1509 468.b21-25 (58) | Kj | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 |
| 100 | T220-i 580. b27-c13 (fasc. 105) | Xz | 大神呪 | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 | 一切呪王 |
| 25 | T220-ii 156.a17-22; (fasc. 429) | Xz | 大神呪 | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 | 一切呪王 |
| 18 | T220-iii 556.a24-26; (fasc. 502) | Xz | 大神呪 | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 | 一切呪王 |
| 08 | T220-iv 777.c05-6; (fasc. 540) | Xz | 大神呪 | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 | 一切呪王 |
| 08a | T220-v 875.a2-7 (fasc. 557) | Xz | 大神呪 | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 |  |
| 25 | T223 286.b28-c7 | Kj | 大明呪 | 無上明呪 | 無等等明呪 |  |
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| 08 | T227 543.b28-29 | Kj | 大明呪 | 無上呪 | 無等等呪 |
| 25 | T221 48.b14-22 (fs. 7) 25 | Mo | 極大術 | 無上之術 | 無等之術 |
| 08 | T226 515.c12-20 | ZF | 極大呪 | 極尊呪 | 無有輩呪 |
| 08 | T225 484.b13-15 | ZQ | 大尊呪 |  |  |
| 08 | T224 433.b22-3 | Lk | 極大祝 | 極尊祝 | 無有輩祝 |

25: mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)

25: mahavidya, anuttarā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Gilgit 146v: 12-13)

08: mahāvidyā, apramāṇā vidyā, aparimāṇā vidyā, niruttarā vidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Vaidya 36-7)


### Abbreviations

| Aṣṭa | Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra |
| Aṣṭadaśa | Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra |
| DN | Dīgha Nikāya |
| Fx | Faxian |
| Kj | Kumārajīva |
| Lk | Lokakṣema |
| Mo | Mokṣala |
| Pañcaviṃśatī | Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra |
| PSP | Kimura (2010) |
| Rgs | Ratnagunasaṃcayagāthā |
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| Šata   | Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra |
| Sn     | Suttanipatā                        |
| SN     | Saṃyutta Nikāya                    |
| T      | Taishō edition of Chinese Tripiṭaka. |
| Vaj    | Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā       |
| Xz     | Xuánzàng                           |
| ZF     | Zhú Fóniàn                          |
| ZQ     | Zhī Qiān                            |

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