



"A Development in the Notion of Irreversibility
(avaivartika) on the Bodhisattva Path"

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I will show how exegesis on irreversible bodhisattvas gradually became more and more complicated and of less and less practical significance because of a major development in Mahāyāna soteriological theory.

I will argue that prior to Dharmakīrti, Buddhist soteriology was strongly shaped by the belief that an effect could be inferred on the basis of a cause. Thus, if it could be established that a bodhisattva had gained a certain realisation (e.g. anupattidharmakakṣānti) then his progress toward enlightenment was guaranteed since such a realisation was a key cause for the attainment of Buddhahood. It was not something that could lead to the nirvāṇa of a śrāvaka or pratyekabuddha.

However, once Dharmakīrti had established that only causes could be inferred from effects, and not vice-versa, the whole treatment of irreversibility changed. Later commentators such as Haribhadra and Ratnākaraśānti concerned themselves not so much with exoteric meaning of the Buddha's teaching on irreversible bodhisattvas, but instead used their commentaries on it as an opportunity to assert the views of their own particular philosophical systems.

In short, I aim to show that although an early Buddhist truth claim concerning the path was negated by a development in epistemology, later commentators were nevertheless able to use the earlier material as a basis that supported and validated a more developed and systematised soteriological theory..