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Instances of the Middle Way in Early Mahāyāna Sūtras

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The Buddha famously taught the Middle Way (Skt. *madhyamā pratipat*) between the extremes of existence and non-existence in the discourse to *Kaccāyanagotta*. In this early teaching the Buddha indicated the Middle Way between upholding a permanent and substantial “Self” (*ātman*), or denying the principles of causality (*karma*) and rebirth altogether. Did the Buddha teach the Middle Way in early Mahāyāna *sūtras*? If so, what kind of Middle Way did early Mahāyāna *sūtras* advocate? This paper examines the Middle Way as defined in two early Mahāyāna *sūtras*, the *Kāśyapaparivarta* and *Ratnacūḍaparipṛcchā*. The paper demonstrates that these two discourses present an alternative understanding of the Middle Way that, on the one hand, upholds the mainstream Buddhist understanding of causation and its surface reality (*samvṛtisatya*) and yet, on the other, posits a deeper purport of causation which is linked with the nature of reality being unarisen (*anutpanna*) and unextinguished (*aniruddha*).