བཙུན་མོ་ས་ཞུས་པ།

The Questions of an Old Lady

Mahallikāparipṛcchā

འཕགས་པ་བགྲེས་མོས་ཞུས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

’phags pa bgres mos zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Questions of an Old Lady”

Āryamahallikāparipṛcchānāmamahāyānasūtra

· Toh 171 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 59 (mdo sde, ba), folios 310.b–314.a
For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

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Summary

s.1 This sūtra contains teachings given by the Buddha to a 120-year-old woman in the city of Vaiśalī. Upon meeting the Buddha, she asks him questions concerning the four stages of life, the aggregates, the elements, and the faculties. In response, the Buddha gives her a profound teaching on emptiness, using beautifully crafted examples to illustrate his point.

After hearing these teachings her doubts are dispelled and she is freed from clinging to the perception of a self. Ānanda asks the Buddha why he has given such profound teachings to this woman. The Buddha reveals that the woman has been his mother five hundred times in previous lifetimes and that he had generated the root of virtue for her to become enlightened. Because of her own strong aspirations, after dying, she would be born in the buddhafield of Sukhāvatī, and after sixty-eight thousand eons she would finally become the buddha Bodhyaṅgapuṣpakara.

Acknowledgments

ac.1 This sūtra was translated from Tibetan into English under the supervision of Khenpo Ngawang Jorden by Venerable Jampa Losal and the laywoman YangDol Tsatultsang, members of the Sakya Pandita Translation Group (International Buddhist Academy Division), Kathmandu.

This translation has been completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

Introduction

i.1 Considering the cultural norms of the time, the fact that the teaching contained in this sūtra was given entirely to a laywoman and, moreover, to a very old and impoverished laywoman, makes it stand apart.

The setting of this text is Vaiśalī, the ancient capital of the Licchavis and of the Vṛji confederacy of which the Licchavi republic was a member. The old lady, whose name we are never told, asks the Buddha such profound questions that Ānanda realizes this is no ordinary woman but one whose wisdom comes from merit collected in past lifetimes. As it turns out, the Buddha reveals that she has been his mother for five hundred lifetimes.

i.2 The main body of the text, which consists of the Buddha's teachings in answer to the old lady's questions, is an explanation of emptiness. To put it briefly, the Buddha says no phenomenon arises of its own accord. Neither does any phenomenon give rise to any other phenomenon. All phenomena arise owing to their dependence upon collections of causes and conditions. Hence, there is no independent phenomenon, though we may use terms to indicate various phenomena as if they were independent. After the Buddha's teaching the old lady realizes this profound truth. The Buddha prophesies that she herself will one day become a buddha. In earlier lifetimes he had planted roots of virtue and made strong aspirations for her to do so.

i.3 The following modern works should be mentioned. Frye (1979) provides us with an English translation from the Mongolian version of the sūtra. Research on the date and translator attributions of the Chinese versions is to be found in Nattier (2007). Durt (2005) discusses the theme of the *mahallikā* ("old lady") and the three Chinese versions (Taishō 559, 560, 561) of the *Mahallikā-paripṛcchā*. Most recently, Peter Skilling (2021) has included a translation of the sūtra and some helpful notes on it in his collection *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras*.

i.4 There is no Sanskrit version extant. The primary Tibetan text used for the present translation was the version in the Degé (*sde dge*) Kangyur, versions in the other Kangyurs being also compared. The colophon of the sūtra states that it was translated under the guidance of the abbots Jinamitra and Dānaśīla by the Tibetan translator Yeshé Dé (*ye shes sde*), from which we can conclude that this text must have been translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan in the early ninth century CE during the first major phase of the translation of Buddhist texts into Tibetan.

The Translation

1.

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Questions of an Old Lady

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. When the Bhagavān was traveling in the land of Vṛji, he went to the great city of Vaiśālī, together with a large saṅgha of 1,250 bhikṣus and a vast number of bodhisattva mahāsattvas. At that time, he came across an old woman from the city gathering grass in the countryside. She was decrepit and had reached the end of her lifespan, being 120 years old.

1.3 The woman saw the Bhagavān coming from afar—handsome, inspiring, with senses tamed, mind tamed, endowed with supreme discipline and serenity, guarded, faultless, senses controlled, pure and clear like the sea, unclouded, upright like a golden sacrificial post, radiant with splendor clear and distinct, wonderfully adorned with the thirty-two signs of a great being. When she saw him, faith grew in her mind. Then, full of devotion, she approached the Bhagavān, bowed her head at his feet, circumambulated the Bhagavān three times, and sat to one side.

1.4 Bowing with her palms together in the direction of the Bhagavān, the woman then asked him, “O Bhagavān, where does birth come from? Where does aging come from? Where do they go? O Bhagavān, where does sickness come from? Where does death come from? Where do they go? O Bhagavān, where does form come from? Where do sensation, notions, formative factors, and consciousness come from? Where do they go? O Bhagavān, where does the earth element come from? Where do the water element, the fire element, the wind element, the space element, and the element of consciousness come from? Where do they go? O Bhagavān, where does the eye come from? Where do the

ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind come from? Where do they go?”

1.5 The Bhagavān replied, “Sister, birth does not come from anywhere. Aging does not come from anywhere. They do not go anywhere. Sister, sickness does not come from anywhere. Death does not come from anywhere. They do not go anywhere. Sister, form does not come from anywhere. Sensation, notions, formative factors, and consciousness do not come from anywhere. They do not go anywhere. Sister, the earth element does not come from anywhere. The water element, the fire element, the wind element, the space element, and the element of consciousness do not come from anywhere. They do not go anywhere. Sister, the eye does not come from anywhere. The ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind do not come from anywhere. They do not go anywhere.

1.6 “Sister, it is as follows: As an analogy, a fire arises based on a stick to rub with, a stick to rub on, and also a person’s effort to generate it. That fire, moreover, once it has burnt the grass and wood, will have no more causes and will die. Sister, where do you think the fire comes from and where does it go?”

She answered, “O Bhagavān, that fire comes into being owing to the power of a collection of causes. It ceases and dies when it lacks the collection of causes.”

1.7 “Sister,” said the Bhagavān, “likewise, all phenomena come into being owing to the power of a collection. They cease and die when they lack the collection. Whatever the phenomena, they do not come from anywhere, nor do they go anywhere. Sister, it is as follows: although the eye consciousness arises based upon the eye and form, the eye consciousness does not have a producer, nor anything that makes it cease. Nowhere is it brought together at all. The aggregates do not come from anywhere, nor do they go anywhere. When one has accumulated karma through the conditions of the consciousnesses, the fruits manifest as the results of three types[1] in the three realms. That fruit is empty too. It has no coming. It has no going. No one makes it arise. It is not stopped by anybody. Sister, all phenomena have stopped due to their very natures.

1.8 “Likewise, although the mental consciousness arises based upon the ear and sound, the nose and smell, the tongue and taste, the body and touch, and the mind and phenomena, the mental consciousness[2] does not have a producer nor has it anything that makes it cease. Nowhere is it brought together at all.[3] The aggregates do not come from anywhere, nor do they go anywhere either. When one has accumulated karma through the condition of mental consciousness, the fruits manifest as the results of three types in the three realms. That fruit is empty too. It has no coming. It has no going. No one makes it arise. It is not stopped by anybody. Sister, all phenomena are inherently stopped.

1.9 “Sister, it is as follows: As an analogy, the sound of a drum arises based on wood, hide, and a stick, and also on a person’s effort to make it arise. The past sound of that drum was empty, the future sound will be empty, and the sound that arises at present is empty. The sound does not dwell in the wood, neither does it dwell in the hide, nor does it dwell in the stick, nor does it dwell in the person’s hand. However, because of these conditions, it is termed *sound*. That which is termed *sound* is also empty. It has no coming. It has no going. No one makes it arise. It is not stopped by anybody. Sister, all phenomena are inherently stopped.

1.10 “Sister, likewise, all phenomena depend solely on conditions, that is, ones such as ignorance, craving, karma, and consciousness. When these latter phenomena are present, the terms *death* and *birth* are designated. That which is designated *death* and *birth* is also empty. It has no coming. It has no going. No one makes it arise. It is not stopped by anybody. Sister, all phenomena are inherently stopped.

1.11 “Sister, in this way, whoever understands the nature of a drum’s sound well also understands emptiness well. Whoever understands emptiness well, understands nirvāṇa well. Whoever understands nirvāṇa well has no attachment to any entity, and despite designating conventional things with all sorts of terms—‘this is mine,’ or ‘that is me,’ or ‘sentient being,’ or ‘life force,’ or ‘living

being,' or 'man,' or 'person,' or 'born of Manu,' or 'son of Manu,' or 'agent,' or 'inciter of action,' or 'appropriator,' or 'discarder'—they teach Dharma without attachment to these. They teach Dharma well. They teach the final reality. They teach the final reality well.

1.12 "Sister, it is as follows: An artist or an artist's apprentice spreads various paints on a canvas that has been thoroughly cleaned, or on a flat piece of wood or on the surface of a wall that has been wiped clean. He paints with ease whatever bodily shape he might wish, such as the features of a man's physical form, the features of a woman's physical form, the features of an elephant's physical form, the features of a horse's physical form, or the features of a donkey's physical form, with complete limbs, parts of limbs, and all the sense faculties. Well executed though the painting may be, it does not involve any phenomenon at all being transferred from the artist's hand or mind to the physical form depicted; and yet we designate that *form* as a result of those conditions. That which is designated *form* is also empty. It has no coming. It has no going. No one makes it arise. It is not stopped by anybody. Sister, all phenomena are inherently stopped.

1.13 "Sister, it is likewise when there are meritorious formative factors. That is to say, although bodies conducive to merit might result among gods and humans, in that case not even an atom is transferred from this world to the world beyond. However, due to the formative factors, there are various kinds of rebirths. They are represented as physical bodies with their bases of cognition.

1.14 "It is likewise when there are demeritorious formative factors. That is to say, although bodies that are not meritorious result among hell beings, or in the animal state, or in the world of the Lord of Death, or among the demigods, not even an atom is transferred in such a case from this world to the world beyond. However, due to the formative factors there are various kinds of rebirths. They are understood to be physical forms with their bases of cognition.

1.15 “Sister, it is as follows: As an analogy, a vast gathering of clouds arises because of the nāga-power of the nāgas, and when those huge nets of clouds cover the earth they let fall a heavy deluge of rain. After the heavy deluge of rain has fallen, the hills and the valleys are quenched. When the hills and valleys are quenched, the rain later subsides. But these things do not originate from the nāgas’ bodies or minds. The nāgas produced the vast gathering of clouds by virtue of the nāga-power of nāgas alone.

1.16 “Sister, it is likewise when there are meritorious formative factors, that is to say, when meritorious bodies result among gods or humans. It is likewise, too, when there are demeritorious formative factors. That is to say, although bodies that are not meritorious result among hells beings or in the animal state or the world of the Lord of Death or among the demigods, in such cases the activity of the formative factor is empty, the agent of the formative factor is empty, and the fruits of the formative factor are also empty. Sister, when there are formative factors for remaining static, consciousness will reincarnate among the beings of the formless realms. That on account of which the consciousness reincarnates among beings of the formless realms is empty, and the consciousness that reincarnates among the beings of the formless realms is empty too. Why is this so? Sister, it is because all phenomena are empty of essence. Even so, phenomena are designated. The learned are not attached to them. As they have no attachment they do not dispute. Having no disputes is the supreme quality of the religious mendicant.”

1.17 The woman said, “Since the Bhagavān has taught the profound Dharma in this way, O Bhagavān, I, too, have penetrated these teachings with the eye of wisdom and will never be of two minds about them again. I have no doubts. O Bhagavān, earlier, as I hadn’t yet heard these teachings, I did have doubts. Now I am old, I am decrepit, I suffer, I am poor, I have no protector, I have no life, and yet I do not die. O Bhagavān, after hearing these teachings I realize that there is no aging, no poverty, no happiness, no sickness, nor is anyone ever ill, wealthy, or poor at all. I am freed from the notion of a self.”

1.18 Then the Venerable Ānanda inquired of the Bhagavān, “Bhagavān, why have you taught such a profound Dharma discourse as this? I wonder whether it is because this woman, who has investigated so well in this way, is meritorious, learned, and naturally wise.”

“Ānanda, so it is,” replied the Bhagavān. “Ānanda, it is indeed just as you say. This woman is meritorious, learned, and naturally wise. Ānanda, this woman was my mother for five hundred lifetimes. Ānanda, in each of those lifetimes I also generated the roots of virtue so she could attain unsurpassable and perfectly complete enlightenment. Ānanda, I cherished, revered, and respected this woman greatly. She, too, thought, ‘I will engage in whatever conduct my son engages in and attain the unsurpassable and perfectly complete enlightenment of the vehicle of happiness.’ ”

1.19 “Bhagavān, why is she so poor in this way?” inquired Ānanda.

The Bhagavān answered, “Ānanda, when I took up the conduct of a bodhisattva, I became a renunciant in the doctrine of the bhagavān, the tathāgata, arhat, perfectly complete Buddha Krakucchanda. At that time, Ānanda, this woman was my mother. Because of her attachment she did not want to let me go, so I stopped eating my one meal per day. Later, she agreed to let me go. Ānanda, it is because of the ripening of that karma that she is as poor as she is. Ānanda, this is the last time she will be poor. Ānanda, after death, this woman, who no longer craves a woman’s faculties, will obtain a man’s faculties in the Sukhāvatī buddhafield of the bhagavān, the perfectly complete Buddha Amitābha. Once born there, she will make offerings to an innumerable, immeasurable, inconceivable number of buddhas; guide an innumerable, immeasurable, inconceivable number of sentient beings to enlightenment; make an innumerable, immeasurable, inconceivable number of sentient beings ripe for enlightenment; bring an innumerable, immeasurable, inconceivable number of sentient beings to enlightenment; and, having brought an innumerable, immeasurable, inconceivable number of sentient beings to enlightenment, in six million eight hundred thousand kalpas she will become the tathāgata,

arhat, perfectly complete buddha named Bodhyaṅgapuṣpakara in this trichiliocosm. Ānanda, the wealth and enjoyments of sentient beings of this buddhafield will be like those of the gods of the Thirty-Three."

1.20 Thus did the Bhagavān announce, and having spoken these words, the Sugata, the Teacher, added the following verses:

"Ānanda, behold this old lady
Before me, with palms joined,
Who will become a buddha, excellent among humans,
Named Bodhyaṅgapuṣpakara.

1.21 "She, giving up a woman's form,
Will go to the realm of Sukhāvatī,
Venerate the victor Amitāyus,
And become a peerless buddha, conqueror of the three realms.

1.22 "Venerating, too, the many guides
Who dwell in other worlds,
The great sages who benefit those realms,
She will become a peerless buddha, excellent among humans.

1.23 "Having also heard the Dharma from them all,
With a purified mind, she will become accomplished in the same fashion.
Remaining in the immovable, supreme mind of enlightenment,
She will cause countless sentient beings to practice the Dharma.

1.24 "At that time there will be no inferior beings;
No beings with various bad bodies or bad color;
None dull, lame, and likewise none blind;
And no lepers with stumps for arms.

1.25 "At that time the sun and moon, fire, lightning, and gems

Will no longer be what shines,
For the guide Bodhyaṅgapuṣpakara's mighty light
Will everywhere be all-illuminating.

1.26 "The same stature, marks, and complexion
As those of the supreme gods of the Thirty-Three
Will be natural to those beings who at that time
Will fill that exceptional buddhafield.

1.27 "There will be no women belonging to Māra's faction,
No female māras, no retinue of Māra.
When the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma there,
Even the word *tīrthika* will be unknown.

1.28 "When the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma there,
Even the words *the lower realms*,
The pretas, *animal birth*, *the beings of hell*,
And even the word *woman* will ever stay unheard.

1.29 "At that time, there will be no classifications of vehicles,
Like the vehicles of the śrāvakas and the pratyekabuddhas in this world.
All will be endowed with a complete mind of enlightenment,
Dwell in loving-kindness, and be compassionate.

1.30 "As birth in that buddhafield will always be miraculous,
Everyone there will be free from birth in the womb.
They will remember past lives and, supremely intelligent and learned,
Retain upon hearing them whatever excellent teachings they study.

1.31 "Such are the qualities arrayed as features of that realm
That, even by speaking of them for eons at a time,
The tiny fraction of them one could thus describe

Would be less than a single drop of water compared to the ocean.”

1.32 When the Bhagavān had spoken, the venerable Ānanda and the old lady, the bodhisattvas and bhikṣus, and the world with its gods, humans, demigods, and gandharvas all rejoiced and praised highly what the Bhagavān had taught.

1.33 *This completes The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra, “The Questions of an Old Lady.”*

Colophon

c.1 The translation was made, edited, and approved by the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Dānaśīla, and the chief editor and translator Bandé Yeshé Dé.

Abbreviations

D Degé Kangyur

N Narthang Kangyur

Notes

1. The results of three types (*'bras bu rnam pa gsum*) may refer to three sorts of karmic "ripening" (*vipāka*), i.e., pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral.

2. Whereas the previous paragraph spoke of the visual or eye consciousness, the present paragraph now discusses the "mental consciousness" (*manovijñāna*, *yid kyi rnam par shes pa*) that is able to grasp all that exists, i.e., all phenomena (*dharmas*). See glossary.

3. N *gang yang sogs pa med*; D *gang yang sogs pa yang*. N is probably correct as it is consistent with previous similar passages.

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Glossary

aggregate

phung po

ཕུང་པོ།

skandha

Five collections or “heaps” of impersonal mental and physical elements (*dharma*).

Amitābha

’od dpag med

འོད་དཔག་མེད།

amitābha

Amitāyus

tshe dpag med

ཚེ་དཔག་མེད།

amitāyus

Another name for Amitābha.

Ānanda

kun dga’ bo

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

ānanda

A major śrāvaka disciple and personal attendant of the Buddha Śākyamuni during the last twenty-five years of his life. He was a cousin of the Buddha (according to the *Mahāvastu*, he was a son of Śuklodana, one of the brothers of King Śuddhodana, which means he was a brother of Devadatta; other sources say he was a son of Amṛtodana, another brother of King Śuddhodana, which means he would have been a brother of Aniruddha).

Ānanda, having always been in the Buddha's presence, is said to have memorized all the teachings he heard and is celebrated for having recited all the Buddha's teachings by memory at the first council of the Buddhist saṅgha, thus preserving the teachings after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. The phrase "Thus did I hear at one time," found at the beginning of the sūtras, usually stands for his recitation of the teachings. He became a patriarch after the passing of Mahākāśyapa.

arhat

dgra bcom pa

དགྲ་བཅོམ་པ།

arhat

According to Buddhist tradition, one who is worthy of worship (*pūjām arhati*), or one who has conquered the enemies, the mental afflictions (*kleśa-ari-hata-vat*), and reached liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. It is the fourth and highest of the four fruits attainable by śrāvakas. Also used as an epithet of the Buddha.

bases of cognition

skye mched

སྐྱེ་མཆེད།

āyatana

There are twelve bases of cognition in all: the five physical sense organs plus the mind and their respective six sorts of objects. The six inner bases from eye to mind are what apprehend, and the six outer bases from form to mental objects are the objects that are apprehended.

bhagavān

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས།

bhagavat, bhagavān

In Buddhist literature, this is an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means “possessing fortune,” but in specifically Buddhist contexts it implies that a buddha is in possession of six auspicious qualities (*bhaga*) associated with complete awakening. The Tibetan term—where *bcom* is said to refer to “subduing” the four māras, *ldan* to “possessing” the great qualities of buddhahood, and *’das* to “going beyond” saṃsāra and nirvāṇa—possibly reflects the commentarial tradition where the Sanskrit *bhagavat* is interpreted, in addition, as “one who destroys the four māras.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root √*bhañj* (“to break”).

Bodhyaṅgapuṣpakara

byang chub kyi yan lag gi me tog byed

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་ཡན་ལག་གི་མེ་ཏོག་བྱེད།

bodhyaṅgapuṣpakara

Name of a buddha.

born of Manu

shed bu, shed las skyes

ཤེད་བུ།, ཤེད་ལས་སྐྱེས།

manuja, mānava

Manu being the archetypal human, the progenitor of mankind, in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Purāṇas*, and other Indian texts, “born of Manu” is a synonym of “human being” or mankind in general. Also rendered “son of Manu.”

cause

rgyu

རྒྱུ།

hetu, kāraṇa

The primary cause.

condition

rkyen

རྐྱེན།

pratyaya

The concomitant circumstances and influences in a causal process.

demigod

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

asura

The titans who inhabit one of the six types of “worlds” (*loka*) that make up saṃsāra.

final reality

yang dag pa’i mtha’

ཡང་དག་པའི་མཐའ།

bhūtakoṭi

The ultimate state that can be experienced in the realization of reality, and a near-synonym of *nirvāṇa*; sometimes also translated as “the reality limit” in contexts describing a partial nirvāṇa that needs to be transcended.

formative factors

mngon par ’du byed

མངོན་པར་འདུ་བྱེད།

abhisaṃskāra

The term is used in this text in the same way as *saṃskāra* (“formative factors,” q.v. second entry).

formative factors

’du byed

འདུ་བྱེད།

saṃskāra

The various conditioning factors and circumstances that affect rebirth, including primarily (but not only) karma. Formative factors also constitute one of the five aggregates and figure as one of the links in the twelve links of dependent arising to account for how karma eventually leads to rebirth.

formless realm

gzugs med khams

གཟུགས་མེད་ཁམས།

ārūpyadhātu

One of the three realms. See glossary s.v. “three realms” (*khams gsum*).

gandharva

dri za

དྲི་ཟ།

gandharva

Lit. “smell eater.” Gandharvas are a class of spirits and minor gods (*deva*) in both Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies. They are supposedly messengers, singers, and skilled musicians and dancers. Often closely associated with various nature spirits (*yakṣa*), they are on occasion depicted as disturbing to monks practicing meditation.

great sage

drang song chen po

དྲང་སོང་ཆེན་པོ།

mahāṛṣi

Epithet of the Buddha.

Krakucchanda

’khor ba ’jig

འཁོར་བ་འཇིག

krakucchanda

The first buddha of our eon; the fifth buddha of the “seven generations of buddhas” (*sangs rgyas rab bdun*). Also found as Kakutsanda, Kakutsunda, etc. See Edgerton (1985), s.v. Krakucchanda, for the various spellings.

Lord of Death

gshin rje

གཤིན་རྗེ།

yama

God of the lower realms.

mental consciousness

yid kyi rnam par shes pa

ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ།

manovijñāna

The Abhidharma speaks of five consciousnesses that grasp physical objects (form, sound, smells, tastes, bodily sensations) and are correlated with their respective physical sense faculties (*indriya*, *dbang po*), i.e., the eye, ear, etc. The mental consciousness, on the other hand, is said to have as its faculty simply the mind (*manas*, *yid*). It grasps all that exists, including what is presented by the physical consciousnesses as well as mental and abstract objects. These six consciousnesses, added to the twelve bases of cognition, constitute the Abhidharma schema of eighteen domains or spheres (*dhātu*, *khams*).

nāga

klu

ཀླུ།

nāga

Nāgas are associated with springs, streams, rivers, and water in general, and among their many magical powers is the ability to produce rain.

nāga-power

klu’i mthu

ཀླུའི་མཐུ།

Among the many magical powers of the nāgas is the ability to produce rain. Presumably this ability is what is meant here by “nāga-power,” although this appears to be the only mention of the term in the Kangyur in connection with clouds and rain.

notions

’du shes

འདུ་ཤེས།

saṃjñā

One of the five aggregates. It is also one of the five mental omnipresent (*sarvatraga*, *kun ’gro*) mental factors that necessarily accompany any cognition.

sacrificial post

mchod sdong

མཆོད་སྡོང་།

yūpa

A post set up as a marker to which offerings may be presented. Described in the *Maitreyāvadāna* (“The Story of Maitreya”), which in the Kangyur is found within the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (in *Vinayavastu*, Toh 1, Degé Kangyur, vol. kha, folios 29.a–32.b); a matching passage from the *Divyāvadāna* is translated in Rotman (2008), pp. 121–24.

Sukhāvatī

bde ba can

བདེ་བ་ཅན།

sukhāvatī

The buddhafield of the Buddha Amitābha.

tathāgata

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

A frequently used synonym for *buddha*. According to different explanations, it can be read as *tathā-gata*, literally meaning “one who has thus gone,” or as *tathā-āgata*, “one who has thus come.” *Gata*, though literally meaning “gone,” is a past passive participle used to describe a state or condition of existence. *Tatha(tā)*, often rendered as “suchness” or “thusness,” is the quality or condition of things as they really are, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms. Therefore, this epithet is interpreted in different ways, but in general it implies one who has departed in the wake of the buddhas of the past, or one who has manifested the supreme awakening dependent on the reality that does not abide in the two extremes of existence and quiescence. It is also often used as a specific epithet of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

Thirty-Three

sum cu rtsa gsum

སུམ་ཅུ་རྩ་གསུམ།

trāyastriṃśa

Indra’s paradise on the summit of Sumeru.

thirty-two signs

mtshan sum cu rtsa gnyis

མཚན་སུམ་ཅུ་རྩ་གཉིས།

dvātriṃśan mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni

The distinctive physical attributes of the Buddha. These are the “signs of a great man” (Skt. *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*, Tib. *skye bu chen po’i mtshan bzang*) that, following Indian tradition, characterize cakravartin kings (world sovereigns) as well as buddhas. For a descriptive list, see Dharmachakra (2013), 26.145-173.

three realms

khams gsum

ཁམས་གསུམ།

tridhātu

The three realms are the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*, *’dod khams*), form realm (*rūpadhātu*, *gzugs khams*), and the formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*, *gzugs med khams*), i.e., the three worlds that make up saṃsāra. The first is composed of the six sorts of beings (gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings), whereas the latter two are only realms of gods and are thus higher, more ethereal states of saṃsāra.

Trichiliocosm

stong gsum gyi stong chen po’i ’jig rten

སྟོང་གསུམ་གྱི་སྟོང་ཆེན་པོའི་འཇིག་རྟེན།

trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu

This term in Abhidharma cosmology refers to 1,000³ world systems, i.e., 1,000 “dichiliocosms,” or “two thousand great thousand world realms” (*dvisāhasra-mahāsāhasralokadhātu*), which are in turn made up of 1,000 first-order world systems, each with its own Mt. Meru, continents, sun, and moon, as well as desire, form, and formless realms, heavens of gods, etc.

Vaiśālī

yangs pa can

ཡངས་པ་ཅན།

vaiśālī

The ancient capital of the Vṛji (q.v.) confederacy and Licchavi republic.

Vṛji

bri dzi na

བྲི་ཛི་ན།

vaji, vṛji

The land and people of Vṛji or Vaji (Pāli *Vajji*), a country situated on the northeastern Gangetic plain, and one of the sixteen mahājanapada of ancient

India. It was run by a confederacy of eight or nine clans, including the Vṛji, Licchavi, and Videha, who sent representatives to an administrative council led by an elected ruler. Its capital was Vaiśālī. See Edgerton, s.v. Vṛji and Vaji.