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The Sūtra of the Moon (2)

Candrasūtra

· Toh 331 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 72 (mdo sde, sa), folios 259.b–260.a



Translated by the Pema Yeshé Dé Translation Team
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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* is a short text that presents a Buddhist description of a lunar eclipse. On one occasion, while the Buddha is residing in Campā, the moon is covered by Rāhu, lord of the asuras, which causes an eclipse. The god of the moon asks the Buddha for refuge, after which the Buddha urges Rāhu to release the moon. Seeing this, Bali, another lord of the asuras, asks Rāhu why he did so. Rāhu explains that if he had not released the moon, his head would have split into seven pieces. Thereafter, Bali utters a verse praising the emergence of buddhas. Besides being included in the Kangyur, in the Chinese Āgamas, and the Pali Nikāyas, *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* was included in collections of texts recited for protection.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by the Pema Yeshé Dé Translation Group. The translation, introduction, and notes were produced and edited by Giuliano Proença. The English translation and ancillary materials were proofread by Daniela Espíndola. Thanks are due to Karin Kerb for making otherwise unavailable bibliographical material accessible to us.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* is a short sūtra explaining how a lunar eclipse involves the covering of the moon by the asura Rāhu. While the Buddha Śākyamuni is staying at the Traveler's Pond in Campā, the moon is covered by Rāhu, lord of the asuras. Candramas, the god of the moon, asks the Buddha for refuge, after which the Buddha urges Rāhu to release the moon. Seeing that Rāhu has set the moon free, Bali, another lord of the asuras, asks Rāhu why he did so. The asura explains that if he had not released the moon, his head would have split into seven pieces. The text concludes with a verse praising the emergence of buddhas.

i.2 *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* is one of a few closely related texts in the Kangyur, versions of which are also found in the Chinese Āgamas and the Pali Nikāyas of the Theravāda canon. Different versions of this text are also included in the Paritta and Rakṣā collections, which have the function of providing both spiritual and worldly protection through their recitation.

i.3 In the Kangyur there are two texts with the title *The Sūtra of the Moon*, both of which have the same basic content. There is the text translated here, designated *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* (Toh 331), which was translated from Sanskrit in the time of the "early diffusion," and *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* (Toh 42),¹ which was probably translated from Pali in the fourteenth century. An almost identical narrative is also found in *The Sūtra of the Sun* (Toh 41)² concerning a solar eclipse. *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and *The Sūtra of the Sun* remain popular among Tibetans today,³ appearing in recent Tibetan collections of mantras and incantations for recitation. Six of seven verses from *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* are also quoted verbatim in *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra*, Toh 563, 1.33, one of the Tibetan Pañcarakṣā texts.

i.4 Neither the colophons, nor the imperial catalogs, nor Tibetan historical works mention the translators of *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*. However, the fact that *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* is listed in the Denkarma catalog from the early

- ninth century confirms that the translation was probably produced either during or prior to that period, probably from Sanskrit.
- i.5 *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* is available in the Kangyurs of the Tshalpa, Thempangma, and mixed lines, in independent collections such as the Phukdrak Kangyur, the Langdo collection, and the Namgyal Kangyur, and in some collections from Western Tibet, namely Gondhla and Tholing. It is also included in Hemis I Kangyur from Ladakh. All versions of this text are to be found in the Sūtra section of the respective collections.
- i.6 The colophons of the majority of the Kangyurs only indicate the conclusion of the sūtra, but the Thengpangma texts have the following observation at the colophon: “It is evident that this and the sūtra translated by Tharpa Lotsāwa are the same,” referring to *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)*.⁴ In the same way, the colophon of *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* in the Narthang edition states that “there is also an early translation,” referring to *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*. Although the Tibetan texts present the Sanskrit title *Candrasūtra*, this title is not attested in Sanskrit works, but the title *Candramaṇḍalasūtra* is documented in a Sanskrit fragment from Central Asia that lists different sūtras.⁵
- i.7 No complete Sanskrit version of *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* exists, but Waldschmidt⁶ and Klaus Wille⁷ prepared annotated editions based on Sanskrit fragments that correspond to this text. It is also extant in two Chinese translations of the Saṃyuktāgama.⁸ It is likewise quoted in the **Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (大智度論).⁹
- i.8 In the Pali Saṃyutta Nikāya we find the *Candimasutta* (SN 2.9), which is the probably close to the source text for *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)*, but differs slightly from *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*.¹⁰ Some passages from the Chinese Āgamas were translated into Old Uyghur, and there are two different Old Uyghur renditions of the verses of *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* from Taishō 99, both edited by Zieme. Feer presents the legend of Rāhu according to Hindu and Buddhist texts, and his translations of both versions of *The Sūtra of the Moon* include extensive notes.
- i.9 *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*, the Sanskrit fragments edited by Klaus Wille, and the Chinese canonical translations in the Saṃyuktāgama would seem to belong to related textual traditions, while *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and the Pali *Candimasutta* can be grouped together as representing the Theravāda tradition. They all share the same basic content, but the texts differ in wording and in the number of verses and passages in prose. For example, *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* has seven verses, while *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* has only four. Among them the setting also differs in that only *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* is set in Campā, while all the other versions are set in Śrāvastī. The characters differ too. For instance, in *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and the Pali

Candimasutta, it is Vemacitra who speaks to Rāhu, not Bali, as in the other versions. Furthermore, Bali is mentioned by name in Sanskrit and Chinese, but in *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* he is addressed as the great son of Virocana. *The Sūtra of the Sun* is almost identical in wording to *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* but of course reads “sun” instead of “moon” and includes one additional verse, as is the case with the Pali canonical versions. This extra verse, in which the Buddha explains how the sun dispels darkness, corresponds to a verse in *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*.

i.10 We have based our translation on the Degé edition while also consulting the Comparative Edition of the Kangyur, and the Stok Palace, Phukdrak, Hemis I, and Gondhla manuscripts. We compared Wille’s edition of the Sanskrit with the Tibetan. When significant variants from Tibetan Kangyur manuscripts are supported by Sanskrit, they were preferred. Our translation benefited from Feer’s notes on *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)*, as well as from his translations.¹¹ We sometimes referred in the notes to *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and *The Sūtra of the Sun*. We also consulted passages from *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* quoted in the English translation of *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra*,¹² translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee for 84000. We have on occasion referred to variants found in this text and its commentary.

i.11 Apart from its role as a text for protection that shows the Buddha’s power to bring eclipses to an end, it is noteworthy that linguistic expressions relating to Indian views on eclipses can be heard in regions far beyond the influence of Buddhism. In present-day Turkey, for instance, Jens Peter Laut has shown the connection between Old Turkish Buddhist culture from Central Asia with Modern Turkish expressions such as “the moon was seized,” meaning that the moon is eclipsed. This same expression is found in *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* and the Pali *Candimasutta*, though here in *The Sūtra of the Moon (2)* we find the expression that the moon “was covered.”

The Sūtra of the Moon (2)

1.

The Translation

[F.259.b]

1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling on the bank of Traveler's Pond in the country of Campā.¹³ At that time, the entire moon was covered by Rāhu, lord of the asuras.¹⁴ Then the god who dwells on the disk of the moon, frightened, terrified, and dismayed,¹⁵ approached the Blessed One, bowed his head to the Blessed One's feet, and sat to one side. He then appealed to him in verse:

1.2 "I pay homage to you,
Thoroughly liberated, heroic Buddha!
I am in distress.
Please grant me refuge!

1.3 "Candramas took refuge
In the Worthy One in the world, the Well-Gone One.
Therefore, free the moon from Rāhu!
Buddhas have compassion for the world."

1.4 The Blessed One said:

1.5 "Rāhu! The moon dispels darkness.
Illuminating the sky,
It is radiant, [F.260.a]
Shining with white and pristine light.
Instead of seizing it in the sky,
Instantly release the lamp of beings!"¹⁶

1.6 Then Rāhu, in a hurry,
Covered in sweat, agitated,

- And confused like a sick person,¹⁷
Released the moon.
- 1.7 When the great son of Virocana¹⁸ saw that Rāhu, lord of the asuras, had very swiftly released the moon, he asked him in verse:
- 1.8 “Why did you, Rāhu,
Covered in sweat, agitated,
And confused like a sick person,
Hurriedly release the moon?”¹⁹
- 1.9 Rāhu replied:
- 1.10 “As the Buddha uttered that verse,
If I had not released the moon,
My head would have split into seven pieces,²⁰
And even while alive I would not find happiness.”
- 1.11 The great son of Virocana exclaimed:
- 1.12 “Oh wonder! Amazing is the emergence of buddhas,
Who see peace!²¹
If they utter a verse,
Rāhu will free the moon.”
- 1.13 *This concludes “The Sūtra of the Moon.”*

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

D Degé (*sde dge*) Kangyur

Go Gondhla proto-Kangyur

He Hemis I Kangyur

Hi Hemis II Kangyur

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Pema Yeshe De (2023), trans., *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh42.html>), Toh 42 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha).
- n.2 Pema Yeshe De (2023), trans., *The Sūtra of the Sun* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh41.html>), Toh 41 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha).
- n.3 See Skilling 1993, p. 133.
- n.4 The colophon of the *Sūtra of the Moon (1)* mentions the translators Ānandaśrī and Tharpa Lotsāwa Nyima Gyaltsen (*thar pa lo tsa ba nyi ma rgyal mtshan*). Skilling dates the translation of *The Sūtra of the Moon (1)* to the first decade of the fourteenth century. See Skilling 1993, p. 97.
- n.5 See Wille 2008, p. 339, n. 4.
- n.6 Waldschmidt (1970) edited four fragments found in Xinjiang in the Turfan expeditions; they are currently housed in Berlin.
- n.7 Wille (2008) adds five new fragments to the ones edited by Waldschmidt, two from the Turfan collection and three from the Pelliot collection. His edition is also available at http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/4_rellit/buddh/candras_tr.txt (http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/4_rellit/buddh/candras_tr.txt).
- n.8 Sūtra no. 583 of the Saṃyuktāgama (雜阿含經, Taishō 99), translated by Guṇabhadra in the Song state (宋) between 435–43 CE in Jiankang (today's Nanjing), and sūtra no. 167 of the Alternative Translation of the Saṃyuktāgama (別譯雜阿含經, Taishō 100), from an unknown translator in

the Three Qin (三秦) period. The latter was probably translated between 385–431 CE in the Gansu corridor (Bingenheimer 2011, p. 6).

- n.9 Taishō 1509. For an English translation of this quotation and from sūtra no. 583 of Taishō 99, see Lamotte 2001, pp. 475–77.
- n.10 See *Candimasutta* and Grimblot and Feer’s edition and translation (1871) from the Paritta collection in the bibliography.
- n.11 Feer’s French translation of Toh 331 (1865) is the only translation into Western languages that we know of. However, there are many translations of other versions, such as Feer’s translation of the *Candimasutta* from Pali into French (1871), Geiger’s translation from Pali into German (1930), Rhys Davids’ translation from Pali to English (1950), Lamotte’s translation from Taishō 99 (sūtra no. 583) into French, and Peter Zieme’s translation from the verses of an Uyghur version into German (2000). There are many translations from Pali into modern languages available on the internet.
- n.12 Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans., *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh563.html>), Toh 563 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022).
- n.13 The Sanskrit edition, the Chinese versions, and the Theravāda parallels are set in Śrāvastī. It seems that the Sanskrit fragment 8 (Wille 2008, p. 345) had the same setting as the Tibetan translation of this sūtra, since the few *akṣaras* left read *tīre* (“on the shore”). Wille identifies this pond as Gargā Pond, known also from many Pali suttas as Gaggarā Pond, but we could not confirm it in the lexical resources we consulted.
- n.14 Read with the Sanskrit. The Tibetan reads *de’i tshe lha ma yin gyi dbang po sgra gcan gyis zla ba’i dkyil ’khor thams cad ’od kyis bkab par gyur to*.
- n.15 The Sanskrit adds *āhṛṣṭaromakūpā* (“with his hair standing on end”). Note that this term has a feminine ending in this context because it is in apposition to the feminine noun *devatā*.
- n.16 After this verse the Sanskrit adds *atha rāhuṇā asurendreṇa tvaritatvaritaṃ candramaṇḍalam utsṛṣṭam* (“Then the disk of the moon was very swiftly released by Rāhu, lord of the asuras”).
- n.17 Read with the Sanskrit *saṃbhr(ānta āturo ya)thā* and with Go, which reads *nad pa bzhin du rtab pa yis*. The quotation from *The Sūtra of the Moon* in the *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra* in Hi also supports this reading. D reads *nad pa bzhin du brtad pa yis*: “like a sick person, he released with haste the moon.”

- n.18 The Sanskrit reads *adrākṣīd baḍir vairocāno* (“Bali Vairocana saw that...”). The Chinese translations also mention Bali by his name; Taishō 100 (sūtra no. 167) uses Bali’s epithet exactly as the Sanskrit. In the Theravāda parallels, it is Vemacitra who is Rāhu’s interlocutor. These asuras are often associated, and also accredited with the role of leaders. See *The White Lotus of the Good Dharma*, Toh 113 (1.8) and *The Play in Full*, Toh 95 (16.15).
- n.19 Read with Sanskrit *saṃ(bhrānta āturo yathā)* and *Go nad pa bzhin du brtab pa’i*. The quotation from *The Sūtra of the Moon in Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra* in Hi also supports this reading. D reads *nad pa bzhin du brtab pa yis* “like a sick person, he hastily and hurriedly released the moon.”
- n.20 This topos is found elsewhere in the Kangyur. See *The White Lotus of the Good Dharma*, Toh 113 (21.20), *The Hundred Deeds*, Toh 340 (6.196), *The Root Manual of the Rites of Mañjuśrī*, Toh 543 (15.107) and *Destroyer of the Great Trichiliocosm*, Toh 558 (1.286).
- n.21 Read with He: *kye ma bde ba gzigs pa’i /sang rgyas rnam ni ’byung ba rmad*. The Sanskrit fragment 8 reads *madarśi(nāṃ)*. Wille’s speculation that the akṣara *ma* is possibly from *kṣema = bde ba* (*Mahāvīyutpatti* entry 6415) finds support not only in He but also in Go, in the corresponding sūtra in Taishō 100, and in the quotation from the *The Sūtra of the Moon* in the commentary on the *Great Upholder of the Secret Mantra* in D. See Wille 2008, p. 349, n. 67. D: *kye ma bden pa gzigs pa yi /sang rgyas rnam ni ’byung ba rmad* (“Oh wonder! Amazing is the emergence of buddhas, who see the truth!”).

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·
source language

| | |
|----|--|
| AS | <i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation. |
| AO | <i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context. |
| AD | <i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language. |
| AA | <i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts. |
| RP | <i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term. |
| RS | <i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation. |
| SU | <i>Source unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary. |

g.1 asura

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

asura^{AD}*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A type of nonhuman being whose precise status is subject to different views, but is included as one of the six classes of beings in the sixfold classification of realms of rebirth. In the Buddhist context, asuras are powerful beings said to be dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility. They are also known in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Vedic mythologies of India and Iran, and feature prominently in Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmanical mythology, as well as in the Buddhist tradition. In these traditions, asuras are often described as being engaged in interminable conflict with the devas (gods).

g.2 Bali

stobs can

སྟོབས་ཅན།

bali^{AD}

A lord of the asuras, son of Virocana.

g.3 blessed one

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavat^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, 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 $\sqrt{bhañj}$ (“to break”).

g.4 buddha

sangs rgyas

སངས་རྒྱས།

buddha^{AD}

A fully realized (“awakened”) being.

g.5 Campā

tsam pa · tsam pa can

ཙམ་པ། · ཙམ་པ་ཅན།

campā^{AD}

A city in ancient India, located on the Campā River. It was the capital of the Aṅga state, which was located east of Magadha.

g.6 Candramas

zla ba

ཟླ་བ།

candramas^{AD}

The god of the moon; the moon.

g.7 happiness

bde ba

བདེ་བ།

sukha^{AD}

Also translated as “bliss.”

g.8 Rāhu

sgra gcan · sgra gcan 'dzin

སྒྲ་གཅན། · སྒྲ་གཅན་འཛིན།

rāhu^{AD}

A lord of the asuras, who is supposed to seize the sun and moon and thus cause eclipses.

g.9 Three Jewels

dkon mchog gsum

དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ།

triratna^{AD}

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—the three objects of Buddhist refuge.

g.10 Traveler's Pond

'gro ba po'i rdzing bu

འགོ་བ་པོའི་རྫིང་བུ།

—

The setting in Campā mentioned in this sūtra, which might refer to Gargā Pond, also known from many Pali suttas as Gaggarā (“Gurgling”) Pond.

g.11 Vemacitra
thags bzangs ris
ཐགས་བཟངས་རིས།
vemacitrin^{AD} · *vemacitra*^{AD}
A lord of the asuras.

g.12 Virocana
rnam par snang byed
རྣམ་པར་སྣང་བྱེད།
virocana^{AD}
The father of the asura king Bali.

g.13 Well-Gone One
bde bar gshegs pa · *bde gshegs*
བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ། · བདེ་གཤེགས།
sugata^{AD}
Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:
One of the standard epithets of the buddhas. A recurrent explanation offers three different meanings for *su-* that are meant to show the special qualities of “accomplishment of one’s own purpose” (*svārthasampad*) for a complete buddha. Thus, the Sugata is “well” gone, as in the expression *su-rūpa* (“having a good form”); he is gone “in a way that he shall not come back,” as in the expression *su-naṣṭa-jvara* (“a fever that has utterly gone”); and he has gone “without any remainder” as in the expression *su-pūrṇa-ghaṭa* (“a pot that is completely full”). According to Buddhaghōṣa, the term means that the way the Buddha went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*) and where he went (Skt. *gata*) is good (Skt. *su*).

g.14 worthy one
dgra bcom · *dgra bcom pa*
དགའ་བཅོམ། · དགའ་བཅོམ་པ།
arhat^{AD}
One who has achieved the fourth and final level of attainment on the hearer’s path and who has attained liberation from saṃsāra with the cessation of all defilements. Also used as an epithet of the buddhas.

