

༄༅། །བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱུང་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོའི་མདོ།

The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable

Acintyarājasūtra

འཕགས་པ་བསམ་གྱིས་མི་བྱས་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོའི་མདོའི་མདོ་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i rgyal po'i mdo zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra "The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable"



Toh 268
Degé Kangyur, vol. 68, (mdo sde, ya), folios 5.b–7.a.

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 While the Buddha is staying in the kingdom of Magadha with an assembly of countless bodhisattvas, the bodhisattva King of the Inconceivable gives a teaching on the relativity of time between different buddhafiels. Eleven buddhafiels are enumerated, with an eon in the first being equivalent to a day in the following buddhafielf, where an eon is, in turn, the equivalent of a day in the next, and so forth.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated, edited, and finalized by the Subhashita Translation Group. The translation was produced by Lowell Cook, who also wrote the introduction. Benjamin Ewing checked the translation against the Tibetan and edited the text and introduction.

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

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable takes place in the kingdom of Magadha where the Buddha is dwelling amid an incalculable assembly of bodhisattvas. Among the bodhisattvas is the titular King of the Inconceivable, who offers a discourse on the relativity of time between buddhafiels. He enumerates eleven buddhafiels, with an eon in the first being equivalent to a day in the following buddhafiels, where an eon is, in turn, the equivalent of a day in the next, and so forth. The sūtra thus presents a hierarchy of buddhafiels that begins with our world and culminates with the paramount buddhafiels, Padmaśrī. This language of incredibly vast scales of time has the effect of testing the limits of human conception, thereby demonstrating that the qualities of the buddhas and their buddhafiels are beyond quantification or conceptualization. King of the Inconceivable concludes his discourse by emphasizing its rarity, stating that the names of the buddhas he enumerated can only be heard by bodhisattvas with certain unique qualities. Upon completion of the discourse, the gathering of bodhisattvas and the entire world praise the teaching, which is said to have been taught by both the Blessed One and King of the Inconceivable.

i.2

The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable is nearly identical to “The Chapter on the Scale of Life,” the thirty-seventh chapter of the *Ornaments of the Buddhas* (Toh 44, Skt. *Buddhāvataṃsaka*),¹ and *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones’ Buddhafiels* (Toh 104).² Of the three texts, *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable* is more elaborate than “The Chapter on the Scale of Life” in that it includes an opening narrative (Skt. *nidāna*) and a conclusion. However, whereas “The Chapter on the Scale of Life” and *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones’ Buddhafiels* explicitly reference the names of the buddhafiels and their buddhas, *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable* gives only the names of the buddhas in most instances. Though there is no extant Sanskrit version of *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable*, there is a Sanskrit

witness of *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones' Buddhafields* (Toh 104) titled *Anantabuddhakṣetraguṇodbhāvana*, which aligns closely with Toh 268 in terms of vocabulary and structure.³

i.3 *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable* lacks a colophon identifying the translators, presenting a challenge to establishing a date for the translation. The sūtra is listed in both the Denkarma (Tib. *ldan/lhan dkar ma*) and Phangthangma (Tib. *'phang thang ma*) catalogs, the two extant indexes of translations from the Imperial Period (629–841 CE).⁴ The translation can thus be dated roughly to the early ninth century, as the Denkarma catalog was first compiled in 812, with additional titles added until 830.

i.4 The translation offered here is based on the version found in the Degé Kangyur. Additionally, the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyurs were also consulted, and “The Chapter on the Scale of Life” of the *Ornaments of the Buddhas* and *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones' Buddhafields* informed the translation. *The Sūtra of the Inconceivable King* has not been translated into any Western language or received any substantial scholarly attention. Where possible, the Sanskrit names of buddhas and buddhafields have been supplied by the *Anantabuddhakṣetraguṇodbhāvana*.

The Translation

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable

1. The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable

[F.5.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling at the seat of awakening, a secluded hermitage in the land of Magadha, where he was seated upon a lion throne in the center of a lotus, inlaid with vajras and precious jewels. He was accompanied by a great bodhisattva assembly of as many bodhisattva great beings as there are atoms in the millions of billions of utterly indescribable buddhafiels throughout the ten directions.

1.2 The bodhisattva great being King of the Inconceivable addressed those bodhisattva great beings: “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in this Sahā world, the buddhafiels of the blessed, thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Śākyamuni, is but a single day in the realm of Sukhāvātī, the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Amitāyus. [F.6.a]

1.3 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the realm of Sukhāvātī, the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Amitāyus, is but a single day in the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Vajrapramardin.

1.4 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Vajrapramardin is but a single day in the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Lotus Body Blooming from Dense Light Rays.

1.5 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Lotus Body Blooming from Dense Light Rays is but a single day in the buddhafiels of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Dharmadhvaja.

- 1.6 “O children of the Victorious One, an eon in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Dharmadhvaja is but a single day in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Siṃha.
- 1.7 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Siṃha is but a single day in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Vairocana.
- 1.8 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Vairocana is but a single day in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Flower Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma. [F.6.b]
- 1.9 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Flower Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma is but a single day in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha King of Wisdom Light.
- 1.10 “O children of the Victorious One, a single eon in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha King of Wisdom Light is but a single day in the buddhafiield of the thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect Buddha Candrabuddhi.
- 1.11 “O children of the Victorious One, continuing with this system of calculating eons, after a distance equal to the total atoms in ten oceans of buddhafiield realms, we arrive at the equivalent of a single day in the realm of Padmaśrī, the buddhafiield where the blessed, thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect buddha, the victorious Bhadraśrī resides.
- 1.12 “O children of the Victorious One, the names of these thus-gone, worthy, and completely perfect buddhas will be heard by bodhisattva great beings who uphold the conduct of the bodhisattva great being Samantabhadra and who are under the care of a spiritual teacher. They will not, however, be heard by anyone else.”
- 1.13 After the Blessed One had spoken these words,⁵ the bodhisattva great being King of the Inconceivable, and the entire retinue of bodhisattva great beings and the whole world with its gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas, all rejoiced [F.7.a] and praised the words of the Blessed One and the bodhisattva great being King of the Inconceivable.⁶
- 1.14 *This completes the noble Mahāyāna sūtra “The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable.”*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 See Subhashita Translation Group, trans., *The Chapter on The Scale of Life* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html>), Toh 44-37 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022).
- n.2 See Subhashita Translation Group, trans., *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones' Buddhafields* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html>), Toh 104 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022).
- n.3 This sūtra was edited and translated in Vinīṭā 2010.
- n.4 See Denkarma, folio 299.b, and Herrmann-Pfandt, p. 116.
- n.5 As indicated at the beginning of the sūtra, it was the bodhisattva King of the Inconceivable who delivered this discourse. Nonetheless, “the Blessed One” appears to refer to Śākyamuni here.
- n.6 Based on the Tibetan syntax, it does appear that King of the Inconceivable is praising his own words in this passage.

b.

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g.

GLOSSARY

g.1

Amitāyus

tshe dpag med

ཚེ་དཔག་མེད།

Amitāyus

The buddha in the western realm of Sukhāvātī, also known as Amitābha.

g.2

Bhadraśrī

bzang po'i dpal

བཟང་པོའི་དཔལ།

Bhadraśrī

Bhadraśrī (Excellent Glory) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafiield Padmaśrī.

g.3

Buddhafiield

sangs rgyas kyi zhing

སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཞིང།

buddhakṣetra

A buddhafiield is the particular world system over which a specific buddha presides. There are innumerable such fiields in Mahāyāna Buddhist cosmology.

g.4

Candrabuddhi

zla ba'i blo gros

ལྷ་བའི་བློ་གྲོས།

Candrabuddhi

Candrabuddhi (Moon-Like Intellect) is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiield. In Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-60>) his buddhafiield is named Color of the Mirror Disk, and in Toh 104 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-73>) it is named Ādarśamaṇḍalacakranirghoṣā.

g.5 Dharmadhvaja

chos kyi rgyal mtshan

ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

Dharmadhvaja

Dharmadhvaja (Dharma Banner) is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiield. This buddhafiield is specifically said to be *Virajā* (Dustless) in Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-68>) and Toh 104. (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-83>).

g.6 Flower Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma

chos kyi 'od zer me tog rab tu rgyas pa'i sku

ཚོས་ཀྱི་འོད་ཟེར་མེ་ཏོག་རབ་ཏུ་རྒྱས་པའི་སྐུ།

—

Flower Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiield. Buddhas with similar names are said to inhabit the buddhafiield Duratikramā (Difficult to Transcend) (Tib. *'da' bar dka' ba*) in Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-61>) and Toh 104. (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-75>).

g.7 King of the Inconceivable

bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i rgyal po

བསམ་གྱིས་མི་ཁྱབ་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོ།

Acintyarāja

A bodhisattva who is the primary speaker in Toh 268.

g.8 King of Wisdom Light

ye shes 'od zer rgyal po

ཡེ་ཤེས་འོད་ཟེར་རྒྱལ་པོ།

—

King of Wisdom Light is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiield.

g.9 Lotus Body Blooming from Dense Light Rays

'od zer shin tu stug po pad ma rab tu rgyas pa'i sku

འོད་ཟེར་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྤུག་པོ་པད་མ་རབ་ཏུ་བྱུང་པའི་སྐུ།

—

Lotus Body Blooming from Dense Light Rays is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiield. Buddhas with similar names are said to inhabit the buddhafiield Avaivartikacakranirghoṣā in Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-59>) and Toh 104. (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-74>).

g.10 Magadha

ma ga d+hA

མ་ག་རྒྱ།

Magadha

An ancient Indian kingdom that lay to the south of the Ganges River in what today is the state of Bihar. Magadha was the largest of the sixteen “great states” (*mahājanapada*) that flourished between the sixth and third centuries BCE in northern India. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, it was ruled by King Bimbisāra and was home to many of the most important Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gayā, Nālandā, and Rājagṛha. Its capital was initially Rājagṛha but was later moved to Pāṭaliputra (modern-day Patna) sometime after the reign of Bimbisāra's usurper son, Ajātaśatru.

g.11 Padmaśrī

pad ma'i dpal

པད་མའི་དཔལ།

Padmaśrī

Padmaśrī (Lotus Glory) is a buddhafiield inhabited by the Buddha Bhadraśrī.

g.12 Sahā world

mi mjed

མི་མཇེད།

sahā

This universe of ours, or the trichiliocosm (but sometimes referring to just this world system of four continents), presided over by Brahmā. The term is variously interpreted as meaning the world of suffering, of endurance, of fearlessness, or of concomitance (of karmic cause and effect).

g.13 Samantabhadra

kun tu bzang po

ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ།

Samantabhadra

Samantabhadra (Entirely Excellent) is one of the eight principal bodhisattvas. He is known for embodying the conduct of bodhisattvas through his vast aspirations, offerings, and deeds for the benefit of beings.

g.14 Seat of awakening

byang chub kyi snying po

བྱང་ལུབ་ཀྱི་སྣོད་པོ།

bodhimāṇḍa

The exact place where every buddha in this world will manifest the attainment of buddhahood. Specifically, this is the place beneath the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gayā.

g.15 Siṃha

seng ge

སེང་གེ།

Siṃha

Siṃha (Lion) is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafield. This buddhafield is specifically said to be Excellent Lamp (Tib. *sgron ma bzang po*) in Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-62>) and Pradīpā in Toh 104. (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-79>)

g.16 Sukhāvati

bde ba can

བདེ་བ་ཅན།

Sukhāvati

Sukhāvātī (Blissful) is the buddhafiend to the west inhabited by the Buddha Amitāyus, who is also known as Amitābha. It is classically described in *The Display of the Pure Land of Sukhāvātī* (*Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh115.html>)).

g.17 Vairocana

rnam par snang mdzad

རྣམ་པར་སྣང་མཛད།

Vairocana

Vairocana is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiend. This buddhafiend is specifically said to be Suprabhā in Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-67>) and Toh 104 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-82>). He also appears in Toh 44-37 with the name Vairocanagarbha.

g.18 Vajrapramardin

rdo rje rab tu 'joms pa

རྡོ་རྗེ་རབ་ཏུ་འཇོམས་པ།

Vajrapramardin

Vajrapramardin (Vajra Vanquisher) is a buddha who inhabits a buddhafiend. This buddhafiend is specifically said to be *Kaṣāyadhvajā* in Toh 44-37 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh44-37.html#UT22084-036-008-63>) and Toh 104 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html#UT22084-048-004-76>). In Toh 104 he is named Vajrasārapramardin (Vajra Essence Vanquisher).