

། །ཚེ་ཚད་ཀྱི་ལུ་

The Chapter on the Scale of Life

ཤིན་ཏུ་རྒྱས་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ་སངས་རྒྱས་པལ་པོ་ཆེཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལས་ཚོའི་ཚད་ཀྱི་ལེའུ་སྟེ་སྤུམ་བུ་བདུན་པ།

*shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo sangs rgyas phal po che zhes bya ba las tshe'i tshad kyi
le'u ste sum cu bdun pa*

“The Scale of Life,” Chapter 37 of the Extensive Sūtra “The Ornaments of the
Buddhas”



Toh 44-37
Degé Kangyur, vol. 36 (phal chen, kha), folios 393.b–394.b.

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 The bodhisattva King of Mind gives a teaching to an assembly of bodhisattvas on the relativity of time among 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.

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i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Chapter on the Scale of Life is the thirty-seventh of the forty-five chapters in the *Ornaments of the Buddhas* (Skt. *Buddhāvataṃsaka*; Tib. *sangs rgyas phal po che*). This chapter continues the *Ornaments of the Buddhas'* series of dialogues, which occur not long after the Buddha's awakening in Magadha. In this chapter a bodhisattva named King of Mind offers a discourse on the relativity of time between buddhafiels. In the preceding chapter, he had expounded on the incalculable numbers of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the worlds in which they appear. In this chapter, he focuses more particularly on the theme of time. The chapter's title, "The Scale of Life," makes it clear that the central theme of the varying spans of time found across different buddhafiels has a direct bearing on the immense lifespans of the buddhas who live in them, preside over them, and are also responsible for their manifestation, as well as the lifespans of the bodhisattvas and other beings who inhabit them. Eleven buddhafiels are enumerated in a formulaic manner, 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. In this way, a hierarchy of buddhafiels is presented that begins with our world and culminates with the paramount buddhafielf, 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.

i.2

The Chapter on the Scale of Life is nearly identical to two other sūtras, *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones' Buddhafiels* (Toh 104)¹ and *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable* (Toh 268).² Of the three versions, *The Chapter on the Scale of Life* is the most abbreviated because it lacks the narrative elements that frame the discourse in the other two sūtras. Whereas Toh 104 and 268 are stand-alone sūtras that need to be established in the historical narrative of the Buddha's teaching career, *The Chapter on the Scale of Life* is part

of the more extensive discourse presented in the *Ornaments of the Buddhas* collection, and thus is integrated into its narrative frame.³ The name of the primary interlocutor also differs across the three texts, as do some of the names of the buddhas and buddhafiels listed in them. In the case of Toh 268, the names of most of the buddhafiels are omitted altogether. Apart from these differences, the structure, terminology, and content of the three texts is largely the same. A Sanskrit witness of Toh 104 with the slightly variant title *Anantabuddhakṣetraguṇodbhāvana* (*Proclaiming the Qualities of the Infinite Buddhafiels*) provides an important resource for accessing the Sanskrit text for all three of these closely related sūtras.⁴

i.3 The *Ornaments of the Buddhas* is listed in both the Denkarma (Tib. *ldan/lhan dkar ma*) and Phangthangma (Tib. *'phang thang ma*) catalogs, the two extant inventories of translations from the Imperial Period (629–841 CE).⁵ While there is no colophon specific to *The Chapter on the Scale of Life*, the colophon to the complete *Ornaments of the Buddhas* text states that it was translated by the chief editor-translator Yeshé Dé, together with the Indian scholars Jinamitra, Surendrabodhi, and others.

i.4 The translation offered here is based on the version found in the Degé Kangyur in consultation with the Sanskrit attested in the *Anantabuddhakṣetraguṇodbhāvana*. Additionally, the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyurs were consulted, and *Expounding the Qualities of the Thus-Gone Ones' Buddhafiels* and *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable* informed the translation. A Chinese translation of the *Ornaments of the Buddhas* was produced by Buddhahadra (359–429) in the fifth century and is included in the Chinese canon (Taishō 278, *Da fang guang fo hua yan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經). The “Scale of Life” chapter has been translated from the Chinese in *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, Thomas Cleary's translation of the entire *Ornaments of the Buddhas*.⁶ Where possible, the Sanskrit names of buddhas and buddhafiels have been supplied by the *Anantabuddhakṣetraguṇodbhāvana*.

The Translation

The Chapter on the Scale of Life

1. The Chapter on the Scale of Life

[F.393.b]

- 1.1 It was then that the bodhisattva King of Mind addressed those bodhisattvas: “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in this Sahā world, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Śākyamuni, is but a single day in Sukhāvātī, the buddhafiield of the Thus-Gone One Amitāyus. [F.394.a]
- 1.2 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in Sukhāvātī is but a single day in the realm of Kaṣāyadhvajā, the buddhafiield of the Thus-Gone One Vajrapramardin.
- 1.3 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Kaṣāyadhvajā is but a single day in the realm of Avaivartikacakranirghoṣā, the buddhafiield of the Thus-Gone One Padmaphullitagātra.
- 1.4 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Avaivartikacakranirghoṣā is but a single day in the realm of Virajā, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Dharmadhvaja.
- 1.5 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Virajā is but a single day in the realm of Excellent Lamp, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Simha.
- 1.6 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Excellent Lamp is but a single day in the realm of Suprabhā, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Vairocanagarbha.
- 1.7 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Suprabhā is but a single day in the realm of Duratikramā, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Lotus Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma.
- 1.8 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Duratikramā is [F.394.b] but a single day in the realm of Vyūhā, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Light of All Supernatural Abilities.

- 1.9 “O children of the Victorious One, the extent of an eon in the realm of Vyūhā is but a single day in the realm of Color of the Mirror Disk, the buddhafiield of the blessed Thus-Gone One Candrabuddhi.
- 1.10 “O children of the Victorious One, continuing with this system for calculating eons and traversing tens of thousands of countless realms, we arrive at the equivalent of a single day in the realm of Padmaśrī, the buddhafiield where the blessed Thus-Gone One Bhadraśrī resides.
- 1.11 “According to this system of calculation, all realms are brimming with bodhisattvas who follow the conduct of Samantabhadra.”
- 1.12 *This was “The Scale of Life,” the thirty-seventh chapter of the extensive sūtra, the Ornaments of the Buddhas.*

NOTES

n.

- n.1 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.2 See Subhashita Translation Group, trans., *The Sūtra of King of the Inconceivable* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh268.html>), Toh 268 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022).
- n.3 Skilling and Saerji 2012, p. 128. For an accessible and informative discussion of the complexities regarding the origin, content, and structure of the *Ornaments of the Buddhas* collections, see Hamar 2015.
- n.4 A critical edition and translation of the *Anantabuddhakṣetraṅodbhāvana* is available in Vinītā 2010. For more information on this Sanskrit text and its relationship to Toh 104, see the introduction to Toh 104 (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh104.html>).
- n.5 See Denkarma, folios 295.a–b, and Herrmann-Pfandt, pp. 12–13. Phangthangma, p. 5.
- n.6 In Cleary's translation, this chapter is numbered 31, and has the title "Life Span." See Cleary 1985 p 905.

b.

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g.

GLOSSARY

g.1

Amitāyus

tshe dpag tu med pa

ཚེ་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་པ།

Amitāyus

The buddha in the western realm of Sukhāvātī. Later and presently better known by his alternative name Amitābha.

g.2

Avaivartikacakranirghoṣā

phyir mi ldog pa'i 'khor lo rab tu sgrog pa

ཕྱིར་མི་ལྷོག་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ་རབ་ཏུ་སློག་པ།

Avaivartikacakranirghoṣā

Avaivartikacakranirghoṣā (Where the Wheel of Nonregression Is Proclaimed) is a buddhfield inhabited by the Buddha Padmaphullitagātra. “Nonregression” (Skt. *avaivartika*, Tib. *phyir mi ldog pa*) refers to a stage on the bodhisattva path where the practitioner will never turn back, or be turned back, from progress toward the full awakening of a buddha.

g.3

Bhadraśrī

dpal bzang po

དཔལ་བཟང་པོ།

Bhadraśrī

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

g.4

Buddhfield

sangs rgyas kyi zhing

སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཞིང་།

buddhakṣetra

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

g.5 Candrabuddhi

thugs zla ba

ཐུགས་ལྗོངས་བ།

Candrabuddhi

Candrabuddhi (Moon-Like Mind) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafiield Color of the Mirror Disk.

g.6 Color of the Mirror Disk

me long dkyil 'khor mdog

མེ་ལོང་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་མདོག་

—

Color of the Mirror Disk is a buddhafiield inhabited by the Buddha Candrabuddhi.

g.7 Dharmadhvaja

chos kyi rgyal mtshan

ཚོས་གྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

Dharmadhvaja

Dharmadhvaja (Dharma Banner) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafiield Virajā.

g.8 Duratikramā

'da' bar dka' ba

འདའ་བར་དཀའ་བ།

Duratikramā

Duratikramā (Difficult to Transcend) is a buddhafiield inhabited by the Buddha Lotus Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma.

g.9 Excellent Lamp

sgron ma bzang po

སྒྲོན་མ་བཟང་པོ།

—

Excellent Lamp is a buddhafield inhabited by the Buddha Siṃha.

g.10 Kaṣāyadhvajā

ngur smrig rgyal mtshan

ཏུར་སྒྲིག་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

Kaṣāyadhvajā

Kaṣāyadhvajā (Saffron-Colored Banners) is a buddhafield inhabited by the Buddha Vajrapramardin.

g.11 King of Mind

sems kyi rgyal po

སེམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ།

—

A bodhisattva who is the primary interlocutor for the “Scale of Life” chapter (Ch. 37) of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*.

g.12 Light of All Supernatural Abilities

mngon par mkhyen pa thams cad kyi 'od zer

མངོན་པར་མཆོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འོད་ཟེར།

—

Light of All Supernatural Abilities is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafield Vyūhā.

g.13 Lotus Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma

chos kyi 'od zer gyi sku'i pad mo shin tu rgyas pa

ཚོས་ཀྱི་འོད་ཟེར་གྱི་སྐུ་འེངས་པ་མེད་ཏུ་རྒྱས་པ།

—

Lotus Body Blooming from the Light of the Dharma is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafield Duratikramā.

g.14 Padmaphullitagātra

sku pad mo shin tu rgyas pa

སྐུ་པ་མེད་ཏུ་རྒྱས་པ།

Padmaphullitagātra

Padmaphullitagātra (Blooming Lotus Body) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafield Avaivartikacakraṅghoṣā.

g.15 Padmaśrī

pad mo'i dpal

པད་མོ་འི་དཔལ།

Padmaśrī

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

g.16 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.17 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.18 Siṃha

seng ge

སེང་གེ།

Siṃha

Siṃha (Lion) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafiield Excellent Lamp.

g.19 Sukhāvātī

bde ba yod pa

བདེ་བ་ཡོད་པ།

Sukhāvātī

Sukhāvātī (Blissful) is the buddhafiield to the west inhabited by the Buddha Amitāyus, more commonly 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.20 Suprabhā

'od bzang po

འོད་བཟང་པོ།

Suprabhā

Suprabhā (Beautiful Light) is a buddhafield inhabited by the Buddha Vairocanagarbha.

g.21 Vairocanagarbha

rnam par snang ba'i snying po

རྣམ་པར་སྐྱང་བའི་སྤྱིང་པོ།

Vairocanagarbha

Vairocanagarbha (Core of the Sun) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafield Suprabhā.

g.22 Vajrapramardin

rdo rjes rab du 'joms pa

རྡོ་རྗེས་རབ་དུ་འཛོམས་པ།

Vajrapramardin

Vajrapramardin (Vajra Vanquisher) is a buddha who inhabits the buddhafield Kaṣāyadhvajā.

g.23 Virajā

rdul med pa

རྩལ་མེད་པ།

Virajā

Virajā (Dustless) is a buddhafield inhabited by the Buddha Dharmadhvaja.

g.24 Vyūhā

rgyan dang ldan pa

རྒྱལ་དང་ལྷན་པ།

Vyūhā

Vyūhā (Ornamented) is a buddhafield inhabited by the Buddha Light of All Supernatural Abilities.

