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Notes on the Textual History of the  
*Laṅkāvatārasūtra* ~Part One~

Florin Deleanu



## Notes on the Textual History of the *Lankāvatārasūtra*

~ Part One ~

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This paper grew out of a comparative analysis of the extant textual witnesses of the ‘Tathāgatagarbha passage’ in the *Lankāvatārasūtra*, one of the key documents in the history of Buddhist philosophy. The passage itself remains to be tackled in a future contribution, but preparing for it highlighted how important it is to contextualise such philologically oriented studies in the larger historical picture of the textual formation. As my conjectures on the historical picture kept piling up, I have concluded that rather than cramming them into footnotes it may be clearer to discuss the relevant data in a separate paper. Unfortunately, this paper, too, got out of hand and gradually gained excessive length, which made it preferable to divide it into two parts.

In Part One, I shall review the main textual witnesses and look into the traditional Chinese historiographical views expressed by Fāzàng. The latter, especially as far as the original Indic is regarded, may be termed as a synchronic approach to textual history. i.e. the belief that a text exists in multiple versions (typically of different lengths) at the same time and as a result of the wish of their original author (more often than not, this being identified as the Buddha Himself).

In Part Two, I intend to explore the textual history of the *Lankāvatārasūtra* from a modern historical perspective, surmising a diachronic scenario based on the presupposition that the text went through a gradual process of formation stretching over nearly two centuries.

To give a foretaste of the thrust of my argumentation in Part Two, I

surmise that in its final form, i.e. post-Bodhiruci versions (therefore from early 6th century on), the *Lankāvatārasūtra* was part of a larger Buddhist strategy to absorb and integrate itself into the pan-Indian mythical intertextuality. Seen as such, our text represents an attempt at re-writing some basic motifs of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a Buddhist vein. Narratively, the original Hindu version is far more interesting, but the main philosophical point which the final editors of the *Lankāvatārasūtra* wanted to stress was that the *Rāmāyaṇa* tensions and conflicts could be solved quite differently and such doctrines as the *ālayavijñāna* = *tathāgatagarbha* equation can function as a viable model of the pan-Indian theme of the manifestation of the Absolute into particular phenomena. Whether this new Bollywood – or rather ‘Bodhiwood’... – remake (and the numerous dramatic elements present in the text warrant the use of such a description) was successful on the larger Indian scene remains a moot point, but the Buddhists did formulate their original reply.

Not everything in the history of the *Lankāvatārasūtra*, especially the earlier stages of the ur-text, can be explained from the *Rāmāyaṇa* angle, but such a working hypothesis also helps tackling the thorny issue of whether the origins of the *Lankāvatārasūtra* should geographically connected to the Laṅkā (modern Sri Lanka?) island. Not necessarily, I would argue, although this does not rule out the possibility entirely. Furthermore, it certainly does not amount to assuming that the *Lankāvatārasūtra* authors and editors were oblivious of the importance of the Buddhist heritage in what is modern Sri Lanka as well as of the mythical significance of ‘Laṅkā’ theme.

I cannot claim total originality for my views, but I believe it is important to remind us of the larger context of pan-Indian spirituality and the role it played in the formation of the Buddhist texts. The discussion will also review some of the earlier hypotheses, especially put forward by Japanese scholars, concerning the textual history and date of the *Lankāvatārasūtra*.

For more on these subjects, I am afraid, we shall have to wait for Part

Two of this article. Meanwhile, let us take a peek at the main textual witnesses as well as to the Chinese historiographical views on its formation.

### 1. The main textual witnesses<sup>1</sup>

Here are the main textual witnesses of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* arranged in a chronological order which is more or less warranted by the generally trustworthy dating of the Chinese translations. Rather untypically, we shall therefore start with the Chinese versions rather than the Indian original, which will be briefly discussed in the next section.

#### A. Chinese translations/versions

(1) **Guṇabhadra** 求那跋陀羅 (Qiúnábátuóluó) (394-468),<sup>2</sup> *Léngqié ābádūoluó bǎo jīng* 楞伽阿跋多羅寶經 (\**Laṅkāvatāraratnasūtra*), in four scrolls 四卷. Rendered into Chinese in 443, it is also known as the ‘translation of the [Liu] Song Dynasty’ 宋譯.

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<sup>1</sup> For a bibliographical survey of the primary sources and secondary literature on the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, see Deleanu 2018. Unfortunately, I cannot give here an update on the latest publications, but one remarkable contribution deserves special mention, i.e. Lambert Schmithausen’s meticulous three-volume-long monograph (2020) dedicated to meat-eating and vegetarianism in Indian Buddhism, which is itself a landmark in the study of this topic. Directly relevant to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* are vol. 1, pp. 238-270, which contains a detailed study of Chapter 8; vol. 1, pp. 363-381, which represents the translation of the same chapter into German; vol. 3, 41-141, which includes a Skt. critical edition of Chapter 8 as well as concordances of the Skt. Mss and with the Tib. Translation. Last but not least, mention should also be made of the annotations to the study and the German translation found in the huge vol. 2 (which has more than 600 pages!).

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the transcription above, Guṇabhadra’s name was translated into Chinese as Gōngdélián 功德賢. For Guṇabhadra’s biography, see the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* 高僧傳 (T 50.344a-445a). For more details, see Deleanu 2018, 21-22.

Main canonical editions: Taishō No. 670; T 16. 480a-514b; Z-Ch. No. 168, vol. 17, pp. 560-621.<sup>3</sup>

### **Chapter structure**

Guṇabhadra's Chinese translation contains only one chapter:

一切佛語心品 (\**Sarvabuddhapravacanahrdayaparivarta*) 'Essence of the Instructions of All the Buddhas'

This corresponds more or less to the extant Sanskrit text from Chapter 2 to Chapter 8 (the latter, however, in an abbreviated form most likely representing an earlier version).

(2) **Bodhiruci** 菩提流支 (Pútíliúzhī) (d. 527),<sup>4</sup> *Rù Léngqié jīng* 入楞伽經 (\**Laṅkāvatārasūtra*), in ten scrolls 十卷. Translated in 514. It is also known as the 'translation of the Wei Dynasty' 魏譯.

Main canonical editions: Taishō No. 671; T 16.514c-586b; Z-Ch No. 169, vol. 17, pp. 622-732.<sup>5</sup>

### **Chapter structure**

Bodhiruci's Chinese translation contains 14 chapters, by and large corresponding to the extant Sanskrit text but making a more detailed division of the chapters according to the main topic dealt with in each of them:

Ch. I 請佛品 (\**Ādhyeṣanāparivarta*) 'Chapter on [King Rāvaṇa's] Entreaty to the Buddha [to teach the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*]'

Ch. II 問答品 (\**Praśnaparivarta*) 'Chapter on Questions and Answers'

Ch. III 集一切法品 (\**Sarvadharmasamuccayaparivarta*) 'Chapter

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<sup>3</sup> This version was also translated into Tibetan (see below).

<sup>4</sup> Bodhiruci's name was also transcribed as Pútíliúzhī 菩提留支. It was translated into Chinese as Daòxī 道希. For Bodhiruci's biography, see the *Sequel to Biographies of Eminent Monks* 續高僧傳 (T 50.428a-b). No details surrounding his rendering of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* into Chinese are, however, mentioned in the latter.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see Deleanu 2018, 21-22.

- Collecting All Teachings [relevant to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*]<sup>6</sup>
- Ch. IV 佛心品 (*\*Buddhacittaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on the Buddha's Mind’
- Ch. V 盧迦耶陀品 (*\*Lokāyataparivarta*) ‘Chapter on the Worldly Philosophy (*\*lokāyata*)’
- Ch. VI 涅槃品 (*\*Nirvāṇaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Nirvāṇa’
- Ch. VII 法身品 (*\*Dharmakāyaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on the Truth-Body (*\*dharmakāya*)’
- Ch. VIII 無常品 (*\*Anityatāparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Impermanence’<sup>7</sup>
- Ch. IX 入道品 (*\*Abhisamayaparivarta* [?]) ‘Chapter on the Entry into the Path’<sup>8</sup>
- Ch. X 如來常無常品 (*\*Tathāgatānityānityaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Tathāgata's Permanence or Impermanence’<sup>9</sup>
- Ch. XI 佛性品 (*\*Buddhatāparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Buddhahood’
- Ch. XII 五法門品 (*\*Pañcadharmaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on the Five Categories’
- Ch. XIII 恒河沙品 (*\*Gaṅgānadīvālukaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on [the analogies connected to] the Sand of the Ganges [River]’
- Ch. XIV 剎那品 (*\*Kṣaṇīkaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Momentariness’<sup>10</sup>
- Ch. XV 化品 (*\*Nairmāṇīkaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Transformation’<sup>11</sup>
- Ch. XVI 遮食肉品 (*\*Māṃsabhakṣaṇaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Stopping

<sup>6</sup> Chs. II and III correspond to Chapter II in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>7</sup> Chs. IV and VIII correspond to Chapter III in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>8</sup> Ch. IX corresponds to Chapter IV *Abhisamayaparivarta* in the extant Skt. text (see below), but a more faithful reconstruction of the Chinese title would be *\*Mārgāvatāraparivarta*. Its content, however, deals with ‘spiritual realisation’ (*abhisamaya*), which suggests that 入道 ‘entry into the path’ may have been Bodhiruci's rendering of *abhisamaya*.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. X corresponds to Chapter V in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>10</sup> Chs. XI and XIV correspond to Chapter VI in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>11</sup> Ch. XV corresponds to Chapter VII in the extant Skt. text (see below).

Meat-Eating'<sup>12</sup>

Ch. XVII 陀羅尼品 (*\*Dhāraṇīparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Mnemonic Formulae’<sup>13</sup>

Ch. XVIII 總品 (*\*Sāmānyaparivarta*) ‘Comprehensive Chapter [of verses]’<sup>14</sup>

(3) **Śikṣānanda** 實叉難陀 (Shíchānántuó) (652-710),<sup>15</sup> *Dàshèng rù Léngqié jīng* 大乘入楞伽經 (*\*Mahāyānalāṅkāvatārasūtra*), in seven scrolls 七卷. Translated between 700-704. It is also known as the ‘translation of the Tang Dynasty’ 唐譯.

Main canonical editions: Taishō No. 672; T 16. 587a-640c; Z-Ch No. 170, vol. 17, pp. 733-809.

This is the closest version to the extant Sanskrit text as well as to the Tibetan translation *'Phags pa lang-kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo* (see Tib. translation No. 1 below).

### Chapter structure

Śikṣānanda's Chinese translation is divided into 10 chapters closely corresponding to the extant Sanskrit text.

Ch. I 羅婆那王勸請品 (*\*Rāvaṇādhyeṣanāparivarta*) ‘Chapter on King Rāvaṇa's Entreaty [to the Buddha to teach the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*]’

Ch. II 集一切法品 (*\*Sarvadharmasamuccayaparivarta*) ‘Chapter Collecting All Teachings [relevant to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*]’

Ch. III 無常品 (*\*Anityatāparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Impermanence’

<sup>12</sup> Ch. XVI corresponds to Chapter VIII in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>13</sup> Ch. XVII corresponds to Chapter IX in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>14</sup> Ch. XVIII corresponds to Chapter X in the extant Skt. text (see below).

<sup>15</sup> Śikṣānanda's name was also transcribed as Qīchānántuó 乞叉難陀. It was translated into Chinese as Xuéxī 學喜. For Śikṣānanda's biography, see the *Biographies of Eminent Monks [Compiled Under the] Song Dynasty* 宋高僧傳 (T 50.718c-719a).

- Ch. IV 現證品 (\**Abhisamayaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Realisation’  
 Ch. V 如來常無常品 (\**Tathāgatānityānityaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on  
 Tathāgata’s Permanence or Impermanence’  
 Ch. VI 剎那品 (\**Kṣaṇikaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Momentariness’  
 Ch. VII 變化品 (\**Nairmāṇikaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Transformation’  
 Ch. VIII 斷食肉品 (\**Māṃsabhakṣaṇaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Cutting  
 Meat-Eating’  
 Ch. IX 陀羅尼品 (\**Dhāraṇīparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Mnemonic  
 Formulae’  
 Ch. X 偈頌品 (\**Sāgathaka*) ‘Chapter [consisting of] Verses’

### B. Sanskrit Text<sup>16</sup>

In spite of its imperfections, Nanjio’s *editio princeps* [1923] 1956, based on 6 Sanskrit witnesses as well as the Tibetan rendering and the three Chinese translations, remains the most reliable edition of the entire text. The fact that the *Lankāvatārasūtra* has been revered as one of the ‘nine [fundamental] teachings’ (*navadharmā*) or ‘nine books’ (*navagrantha*), a group of Mahāyāna scriptures which have been the focus of special devotion among the Newar Buddhist community (see Buswell and Lopez ed. 2014, 577), led to a long tradition of conserving and copying of the text in Nepal. This resulted in a plethora of Sanskrit manuscripts, mostly preserved in Nepalese collections. The more recent partial editions of Takasaki 1981 and Schmithausen 2020 have taken into consideration this wealth of textual witnesses as well as new findings of Sanskrit manuscripts in other collections.

Takasaki’s edition (1981) of the Chapter VI *Kṣaṇikaparivarta*, for instance, makes use of 17 Sanskrit manuscripts as well as Nanjio’s and Vaidya’s editions, Tibetan translation, and the three Chinese versions.

<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive coverage of the Sanskrit editions, see Deleanu 2018, 16-18.

Schmithausen's state-of-the-art edition (2020, vol. 3, pp. 41ff) of Chapter VIII *Māmsabhakṣaṇaparivarta* is even more thorough: it is based on 30 manuscripts and fragments. Both editions also contain useful analyses of the manuscript stemmata of the respective chapters, which will no doubt prove invaluable for any further critical edition and study of the entire text.

### **Chapter structure**

The extant Sanskrit text is divided into 10 chapters:

- Ch. I *Rāvaṇādhyeṣanāparivarta* ‘Chapter on Rāvaṇa’s Entreaty [to the Buddha to teach the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*]’
- Ch. II *Ṣaṭtriṃśatsāhasrasarvadharmasamuccayaparivarta* ‘Chapter on the Collection of All Teachings [relevant to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*] [in/from the] 36,000 [*śloka*-version]’<sup>17</sup>
- Ch. III *Anityatāparivarta* ‘Chapter on Impermanence’
- Ch. IV *Abhisamayaparivarta* ‘Chapter on Realisation’
- Ch. V *Tathāgatānityānityaprasaṅgaparivarta* ‘Chapter on Reductio ad Absurdum Inference (*prasaṅga*) concerning Tathāgata’s Permanence or Impermanence’
- Ch. VI *Kṣaṇikaparivarta* ‘Chapter on Momentariness’
- Ch. VII *Nairmāṇikaparivarta* ‘Chapter on Transformation’
- Ch. VIII *Māmsabhakṣaṇaparivarta* ‘Chapter on Meat-Eating’
- Ch. IX *Dhāraṇīparivarta* ‘Chapter on Mnemonic Formulae’
- Ch. X *Sāgathaka* ‘Chapter [consisting of] Verses’

Given the fact that the extant Sanskrit text more or less corresponds to Śikṣānanda's Chinese rendition (as well as to the Tibetan translation '*Phags pa lang-kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo* (= No. (1) in my description below) we can conjecture that its basic structure and wording reflects the

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<sup>17</sup> I am tentatively following Suzuki's interpretation ([1932] 1956, p. Xliii and p. 117) which takes the numeral as suggesting an extraction from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* version in 36,000 *ślokas*.

final textual phase of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* in India, going back to the latter half of the 6th century.

### C. Tibetan translations/versions<sup>18</sup>

The Tibetan Canon contains two translations, or rather versions, of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*:

#### (1) *'Phags pa lang-kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo*

(Skt. \**Āryalaṅkāvatāramahāyānasūtra*)

This represents the rendering of the entire Sanskrit text (to which it closely corresponds, especially to the text transmitted by the Nepalese stemma), undertaken during the period of imperially sponsored translations at the end of the 8th century and beginning of the 9th century.

#### **Chapter structure**

Although the Tibetan text closely corresponds to the extant Sanskrit text, the titles of chapters VII, IX, and X (of the Sanskrit extant text) are missing in both the sDe dge and Peking editions. This suggests either a faulty manuscript transmission in Tibet or the translators' reliance on a Sanskrit manuscript which failed to clearly mark the titles of these chapters.

Here is the chapter structure according to both the sDe dge and Peking editions:

- Ch. I     *'Bod 'groggs kyis gsol ba bstab pa'i le'u*  
           (\**Rāvaṇādhyeṣanāparivarta*) 'Chapter on Rāvaṇa's Entreaty  
           [to the Buddha to teach the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*]'
- Ch. II   *Chos thams cad bsdud pa zhes bya ba'i* <sup>19</sup> *le'u*  
           (\**Sarvadharmasamuccaya-nāmaparivarta*) 'Chapter named  
           the Collection of All Teachings [relevant to the

<sup>18</sup> For additional details, see also Deleanu 2018, 18-20.

<sup>19</sup> Peking ed. reads: *Chos thams cad bsdud pa*.

*Laṅkāvatārasūtra*’

- Ch. III *Mi rtag pa’i le’u* (\**Anityatāparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Impermanence’
- Ch. IV *mNgon par rtogs pa’i le’u* (\**Abhisamayaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Realisation’
- Ch. V *De bzhin gshegs pa rtag pa dang mi rtag par ’gyur ba’i zhes bya ba’i*<sup>20</sup> *le’u* (\**Tathāgatanityānityaparivarta*) ‘Chapter Named the Tathāgata’s Permanence or Impermanence’
- Ch. VI *Skad cig ma’i le’u* (\**Kṣaṇikaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Momentariness’
- Ch. VII *Sha mi za*<sup>21</sup> *ba’i le’u* (\**Māmsabhakṣaṇaparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Meat-Eating’<sup>22</sup>
- [Chapter title missing] (\**Dhāraṇīparivarta*) ‘Chapter on Mnemonic Formulae’
- [Chapter title missing] (\**Sāgathaka*) ‘Chapter [consisting of] Verses’

The translation can be found in the following editions of the Tibetan Canon:<sup>23</sup>

- (i) *bKa’ ’gyur* (Peking edition), *mDo sna tshogs* No. 775 (Ngu 60b7-208b2; Otani facsimile ed. vol. 29, pp. 26-85). The *Otani Catalogue* 大谷勘同目錄 contains no reference to the translator’s name.
- (ii) *bKa’ ’gyur* (sDe dge edition), *mDo-sde* No. 107 (Ca 56a1-

<sup>20</sup> Peking ed. reads: *De bzhin gshegs pa rtag pa dang mi rtag par ’gyur ba*.

<sup>21</sup> Peking ed. reads: *bza’*.

<sup>22</sup> *Sha mi za ba’i le’u* also includes the *Nairmāṇīkaparivarta* ‘Chapter on Transformation’, chapter VII of the extant Sanskrit text (see above).

<sup>23</sup> I give here only the most widely available editions of the Canon. A more thorough survey should, no doubt, include all Canon editions, traditional as well as modern.

191b7)

The translator is wrongly identified as 'Gos chos grub.<sup>24</sup>

(iii) *bKa' 'gyur* (Z-Tib. edition), *mDo-sde* No. 0125, vol. 49, pp. 141-506<sup>25</sup>

The modern editors reproduce the sDe dge colophon which wrongly identifies the translator as Chos grub:

'*Gos Chos grub kyis rGya'i dpe las bsgyur te gtan la phab* (vol. 49, p. 2, Table of Contents) 'Translated and Established [in its current form] by Chos Grub [of the region of] 'Gos from the Indian text.'

(2) '*Phags pa lang-kar gshegs pa'i rin po che'i mdo las sangs rgyas thmas cad kyi gsung gi sning po zhes bya ba'i le'u* (聖入楞伽寶經中一切佛語心品).

This is a Tibetan translation of Guṇabhadra's Chinese rendering of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* which was done by Chos grub 法成 (Fāchéng) (circa 750-850), an influential bilingual scholar-monk based in Dunhuang.<sup>26</sup> Although it reflects an earlier textual version of the text, Chos grub's translation seems to postdate the imperially sponsored translation, i.e.

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<sup>24</sup> The *sNar thang* Canon also regards it as a translation from the Chinese (see Takasaki 2009, 360). The later editors most likely wrongly confused this translation with the next one, which indeed goes back to Chos grub (see below). The same colophon is also adopted by the modern editors of Z-Tib edition (see below).

<sup>25</sup> The Z-Tib. edition takes the *sDe dge Canon* 德格版 as its basic source (though the number assigned to the texts is different from the *Otani Catalogue*) and provides endnotes which collate readings from the Yongle 永樂, Lithang 理塘, Peking 北京, Cone 卓尼, sNar thang 那塘, and Lhasa 拉薩 woodblock editions of the Canon as well as the London 倫敦 manuscript. In spite of its helpful collation notes as well as the usage of the modern fonts, which makes it more legible than the traditional woodblock editions, the Z-Tib. ed. seems to remain less frequently consulted by scholars outside mainland China.

<sup>26</sup> For more on Chos grub, see Ueyama 1990 and Hadano et al. 1993, VIII=XI.

*'Phags pa lang-kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo* (No. (1) in my description above), whose vocabulary and wording were most likely consulted and followed by Chos grub. Furthermore, the language of the latter follows the vocabulary and style prescribed by the *Mahāvīyūtpatti*, another testimony to the fact that Chos grub did his translation sometime after the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* (*Bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa chen po*) became influential in Tibetan Buddhist communities during the first half of the 9th century.<sup>27</sup>

The translation can be found in the following editions of the Canon:

- (i) *bKa' 'gyur* (Peking edition), *mDo sna tshogs* No. 776 (Ngu 208b3-313a8; Otani facsimile ed. vol. 29, pp. 85-127). This is identified as being a translation by Chos grub from the Chinese.<sup>28</sup>
- (ii) *bKa' 'gyur* (sDe dge edition), *mDo-sde* No. 108 (Ca 192a1-284b7). Similarly identified as being a translation by Chos grub from the Chinese.
- (iii) *bKa' 'gyur* (Z-Tib. edition), *mDo-sde* No. 0125, vol. 49, pp. 507-747.

## **2. Traditional historiography of the Indian original and the assessment of the various translations into Chinese<sup>29</sup>**

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<sup>27</sup> The exact date of the compilation of the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* remains unknown. It is traditionally attributed to the reign of Ral pa can (ca 815-838), but Snellgrove's conjecture seems more likely: '[the text] undoubtedly goes back to his predecessor Sad-na-legs [circa 800-815], and one might well assume, in its actual conception, even back to the time of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan [755-circa 800], when these problems were first seriously confronted.' (1987, Vol. II, p. 441, n. 110)

<sup>28</sup> The colophon is translated into Japanese in the *Otani Catalogue* and in Takasaki 2009, 360.

<sup>29</sup> A similar approach is also taken by Lamotte ([1976] 1994, LXXXVIII-LXXXIX) in his analysis of the date of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. The Belgian scholar begins his discussion with a presentation of the Buddhist traditional historiography dedicated to this text.

Fǎzàng 法藏 (642-712) is not only known for his outstanding exegetical and philosophical contributions to the Huáyán 華嚴 tradition, which guaranteed him the place of the third patriarch of the school in China. His writings also contain important historiographical testimonies, especially connected to those texts with which he came to be closely associated. One of them is the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.

As a member of the team which assisted Śikṣānanda's as well as \*Mitrāsena's efforts to render the text into Chinese, Fǎzàng became familiar not only with the translation process (on which we shall have more to say below) but also with the traditional historiography surrounding the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. In the *Arcane Meaning of the Essence of the Laṅkāvatāra* 楞伽心玄義, one of the most famous commentaries on the text in the Eastern Asian tradition, Fǎzàng gives us an important testimony on what was traditionally perceived to be the historical background and state of the Indic original at his time. This seems to reflect not only a Chinese historiographical perspective but also a tradition probably prevalent in Central Asia and India, tradition with which Fǎzàng must have become familiar through Śikṣānanda and \*Mitrāsena (as well as other scholar-monks coming from the Western Regions?). Here are some relevant passages from the *Arcane Meaning of the Essence of the Laṅkāvatāra*:

Regarding the eighth [point, i.e.] the [original] versions and the transmitted translations, let us first clarify the [problem of the original] versions. According to what I have seen and heard, there are three [original] versions:

- (1) The large version in 100,000 *śloka*s. According to the explanation of the *Kaihuang Tripiṭaka Catalogue*, in the

mountains of the Country of Zhējùpán<sup>30</sup> [situated] south of Khotan there are versions each [amounting to] 100,000 *ślokas* of ten major scriptures, including the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*].

<sup>30</sup> 遮俱槃 *Zhējùpán* (mediaeval Chinese pronunciation: /t͡ɕiɑ-kio-buan/) (In this as well as other cases, the mediaeval pronunciation agrees with the variant adopted on the *Wiktionary* digital source, itself based on several leading historical dictionaries and glossaries.) The original name of the region could be (very!) tentatively reconstructed as \**Čakuban*. The exact name as well as geographical location of this land remain, however, shrouded in mystery.

Fāzàng (as well as a few other sources probably based on his account) speaks of the country of *Zhējùpán* 遮俱槃 as also being the place of origin of the larger *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* in 100,000 *ślokas*. See, for instance, 法藏《華嚴經探玄記》：下本者有十萬頌三十八品。龍樹將此本出現傳天竺，即《攝論》百千為十萬也。《西域記》說，在于闐國南遮俱槃國山中具有此本。(T 35.122b18-21; cf. T.36.710c13 and T45.593b18, likewise identifying this land as the place of origin of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*).

In spite of Fāzàng's testimony, the extant text of Xuánzàng's 玄奘 *Dà Táng Xī yù jì* 大唐西域記 makes, however, no mention of a country/region named *Zhējùpán* 遮俱槃. Although the transcription and the exact location differ, it is, nonetheless, possible that *Zhējùpán* 遮俱槃 may have identical (or close?) to what (the extant text of) Xuánzàng's work calls the 'Land of *Zhuójiǎ*' 斫句迦國 (mediaeval Chinese pronunciation: /t͡ɕiɛk-kioH-kial; the latter character can also be reconstructed as /k'ʌ/) (for the *Dà Táng Xī yù jì* description of this region, see T 51.942c-943a). The original name of (what in modern Mandarin is) *Zhuójiǎ* 斫句迦 has been tentatively reconstructed as 'Chakuka?' (and identified as 'Yarkiang') by Beal ([1884] 1981, vol. 2, p. 307), 'Cukuka' by Li (1996, 374), or \**čukuban*, \**čakupa*, \**čakuban*' by Ji (1985, note 1 to page 998). As usual in his remarkable edition of the *Dà Táng Xī yù jì*, Ji's note is extremely detailed, also listing various transcriptions of this region in Chinese historical sources. One of them, i.e. *the Book of the Wei Dynasty* 魏書, calls the land 'Xījūpàn' 悉居半 (mediaeval pronunciation: /sɿt-kʌ-puanH/). The latter pronunciation is indeed quite close to our 遮俱槃 *Zhējùpán* = /t͡ɕiɑ-kio-buan/.

For reconstructions of old pronunciations and identification of geographical locations, 'close' however, is not good enough. Lack of perfect phonetical identity as well as the use of different characters for the transcription is not the only factor precluding a clear identification. Further complications arise from the fact that the Xuánzàng's 'Land of *Zhuójiǎ*' 斫句迦國 was located about 500 *li* 里 southeast of the Country of Kasha 佉沙國. And it takes another 800 *li* to the east from the 'Land of *Zhuójiǎ*' to reach the Country of Gostana (i.e. Khotan) 瞿薩

且那國。If we identify *Zhējùpán* 遮俱槃 with *Zhuójiǔjiā* 斫句迦, this would imply that the land would have been situated west of Khotan rather than south as stated by Fāzàng in the material cited and translated above.

It is, nonetheless, interesting to note that in his account of *Zhuójiǔjiā*, Xuánzàng speaks of a great mountain on the southern border of this land (國南境有大山; T 51.943a2) which is a spiritual site famous as far as India. We are told that many Indian ascetics who have attained the results of sainthood (i.e. the four ‘fruits’ including and above that of *śrotāpanna* or ‘stream-entrer’) display their supernatural faculties and come to rest in this land by the power of levitation (印度果人多運神通, 輕舉遠遊棲止於此。; T 51.943a3-4). Moreover, no other region surpasses *Zhuójiǔjiā* in terms of its extraordinary collections of *Mahāyāna* scriptures. Ten such scriptures are actually preserved in their 100,000-*śloka* versions. (而此國中大乘經典部數尤多, 佛法至處莫斯為盛也。十萬頌為部者, 凡有十數。T 51.943a8-10). Xuánzàng does not specify the titles of these scriptures, but there are undeniable similarities with Fāzàng’s account.

It is hard to determine how precise Fāzàng’s geographical details as well as phonetic transcription were. Encyclopaedic as it may have been, Fāzàng’s knowledge of the region was most likely based on hearsay and secondary sources, not always containing exact geographical data in the modern sense of the word. Rather than trying to pinpoint a precise location on the map of Central Asia, it may thus be wiser to conclude, provisionally as it may be, that the mountains of the *Zhējùpán* 遮俱槃 region refer to (the central part of?) the Kunlun Mountains 崑崙山, which are indeed situated in the south of the ancient kingdom of Khotan (as well as the modern region of Khotan/Yútián).

It is necessary to add here, however, that the modern definition of the Kunlun range, stretching for about 3000 kilometres from the Pamir Plateau on the northern border of the Tibetan Plateau and to the south of the Tarim Basin, is quite different from the traditional, and largely mythical, understanding of the ‘Kunlun Mountains’ in traditional China (see Morohashi [1955] 1976, vol. 4, pp. 269b-270d, s.v. 崑崙, also citing relevant classical sources). The latter vaguely included a wide range of Western mountainous regions from as far as the Hindu Kush and Mount Kailash (the latter being the sacred peak not only for the Hindus but also for the Buddhists) to Southeast Asia (see the *Wikipedia* entry on ‘Kunlun’, accessed in August 2022). Traditional Chinese Buddhist sources also identified Kunlun with Mount Sumeru 須彌山 (see Morohashi [1955] 1976, vol. 4, pp. 269b, s.v. 崑崙), which must have further contributed to making it a sacred place particularly fit for hosting the larger versions of the main *Mahāyāna* scriptures.

Additional information regarding the traditional location of the *Zhējùpán* 遮俱槃 region further comes from the *Dàfāngguǎng Fó huáyán jīng gǎnyìng zhuàn* 大方廣佛華嚴經感應傳, a work authored by the Tang scholar-monk Huiyīng 惠英. The text mentions the 100,000-*śloka* version of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*,

- (2) Next, there is the version in 36,000 *ślokas*. All the Sanskrit versions translated [into Chinese?] refer to it as the [*Laṅkāvatārasūtra in*] 36,000 *Ślokas*. One of its chapters

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further adding that the Western Sà 西薩 is the location of the *Zhējūpán* country (惠英撰、胡幽貞纂《大方廣佛華嚴經感應傳》：西薩遮俱槃國山中有具足下本一十萬偈，《不思議解脫大方廣佛華嚴經》。T 51.177c21-22).

The Western Sà 西薩 region adds another conundrum to our growing list of unknowns, but I would tentatively identify it with the western parts of Sàzhōu 薩州, a province established under the Tang and roughly corresponding to the modern Gōng County 珙縣 (see Morohashi [1955] 1976, vol. 9, p. 964c, s.v. 薩州) in southern Sichuan 四川 Province, near the border with Yunnan 雲南. The Sàzhōu conjectural identification as well Huiyīng's sources of his data may not be exactly reliable, but if there is some truth behind them, in the latter half of the Tang Dynasty the *Zhējūpán* 遮俱槃 country may have been regarded as being located in Eastern Tibet or covering larger areas from the northern boundaries of the Tibetan plateau to its southern slopes in Sichuan.

Historically speaking, it is, however, highly unlikely that the *Zhējūpán* 遮俱槃 region, wherever its precise location may have been, represents the place of origin of the larger *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* as well as of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and other *Mahāyāna* scriptures alluded to in our passage. A *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* version in 100,000 *ślokas* may be the stuff of legend/hagiographical history, but this does not rule out the possibility of a larger version (probably known as the *Buddhāvataṃsakavaipulyapīṭaka*) which may have circulated in India (see Hamre 2015, 122-123) as well as Central Asia. We also know that the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* was quite popular in Central Asia (ibid.), which may have further contributed to the (legendary) accounts placing its origin in or near Khotan.

Lastly, let us add Lamotte's mention of the account provided by the Indian scholar-monk Jinagupta. According to this, around the year 560 CE 'there was in existence in Khotan, to be more precise Karghalik, a collection of twelve *Mahāyānasūtras*, each one consisting of 100,000 *gāthā*' (Lamotte [1976] 1994, LXXXIX). I believe 'Karghalik' refers to what in modern spelling is 'Kargilik', a county or town administered by the Khashgar Prefecture in southwestern Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. (It seems quite unlikely, however, that phonetically 遮俱槃 could have served as a transcription for 'Karghalik/Kargilik'. Incidentally, in modern Chinese, the latter is transcribed as 喀格勒克.)

(I gratefully acknowledge here my indebtedness to Mr Tatsuya Saitō, Chief Librarian of the ICPBS Library, who kindly drew my attention to the phonetic similarity of *Zhējūpán* 遮俱槃 with *Xījūpán* 悉居半 as well as to the note in Ji 1985, 998.)

thoroughly answers the 108 questions [also found in the short version]. It appears that the *Tripitaka* Master Mituoshan (\*Mitrāsena)<sup>31</sup> of Tokhara personally received this version in India. It is also said that in the Western lands there is actually a commentary authored by Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna which elucidates this version.

- (3) The short version has a little over one thousand *ślokas*. It is entitled \**Lankāhṛdaya*, [which translated] in our language is *The Heart [Essence] of Lankā*. This version was formerly called *The Hṛdaya Essence* [sic], which represents a corruption [of the original title]. The four-scroll version is nothing but a further abridged text [of this short version]. This is called the transmitted translation of the four-scroll version.<sup>32</sup>

第八部類傳 譯者，先明部類。依所見聞，有其三部：

- 一、大本有十萬頌。如《開皇三寶錄》說，在于闐南遮俱槃國山中。具有《楞伽》等，十本大經各十萬頌。
- 二、次本有三萬六千頌，如此所翻諸梵本中皆云《三萬六千偈》。經中某品即備答一百八問。如吐火羅三藏彌陀山，親於天竺受持本。復云西國現有龍樹菩薩所造釋論，解此一部。
- 三、小本千頌有餘，名《楞伽紇伐耶》，此云《楞伽心》。即此本是舊云《乾栗太心》者訛也。其四卷本就中人更重略之耳。言傳譯者其四卷本。(T 39.430b3-12)<sup>33</sup>

The passage displays the typical synchronic perspective of the traditional historiography. The paradigm for which Fāzàng stands views all these

<sup>31</sup> Mediaeval Chinese pronunciation: /miɛ-da-ʃʌn/.

<sup>32</sup> The passage is also translated in Suzuki 1930 [1975], 42.

<sup>33</sup> Here and below, I follow the Taishō Canon text having, however, punctuated the Chinese original according to the conventions used in modern Chinese publications.

versions as originating from the Buddha (or at least from a spiritual community which faithfully transmitted his message). From a modern historical perspective, such a paradigm does, however, raise a few problems. First and foremost, the existence of a 100,000-*śloka* version is rather doubtful unless a text of this size will indeed be ever discovered.<sup>34</sup>

The 36,000-*śloka* text may, however, hint at an expanded version more or less approximating this length. One could imagine a larger *Sagathāka* chapter, which anyway represents a later addition to the text. This hypothetical large *Sagathāka* chapter may have later been trimmed down (or lost?) and then replaced with a shorter version.

Needless to say, this scenario is largely based on guesswork, but this is not the only evidence suggesting the existence of a 36,000-*śloka* version of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. If we are to believe Fǎzàng's account (and this information cannot be readily dismissed as fiction), the Tripiṭaka Master \*Mitrasena had received such a text in India. \*Mitrasena was the very person in charge with revising Śikṣānanda's rough translation of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, therefore someone with whom Fǎzàng was personally acquainted. According to the same *Arcane Meaning of the Essence of the Laṅkāvatāra*,<sup>35</sup>

Not long after finishing the translation of the *Avatamsaka[sūtra]* at the Fóshòu Temple in the Divine Capital<sup>36</sup> in Year 1 of the Sacred Calendar of the Great Zhou [i.e. 700], the Khotanese

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<sup>34</sup> In the absence of the text, it is difficult to ascertain whether *śloka* should be taken as referring here to a verse pattern (most likely *anuṣṭubh*, like the majority of post-Vedic poetical productions) or a textual unit, whether prose or poetry, amounting to 32 syllables (assuming that the *anuṣṭubh* was a basic textual 'yard' used for the computation).

<sup>35</sup> The passage is also translated in Suzuki 1930 [1975], 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> This was the name of city of Luoyang 洛陽 during the Zhou Dynasty (690-705).

Tripitaka [Master] Śikṣānanda received an imperial order to translate anew the *Lankāvatārasūtra*. But Śikṣānanda returned to the Capital before finishing [his translation] and was allowed to reside at the Qīngchán Temple not far from the Court. A rough translation [of the *Lankāvatārasūtra*] was finished [there], but the Tripitaka [Master] was allowed by imperial order to return to the Western Regions [= Khotan] before revising [/editing his translation].

In year 2 of the Chang'an era [i.e. 702], the Tokharian Tripitaka [Master] \*Mitrasena, who had spent 25 years in India, thoroughly studying the *Tripitaka* and becoming versed especially in the *Lankāvatārasūtra*, was ordered by imperial edict to revise the translation together with the translator-monks Fùlǐ, Fǎzàng, and so on.

大周聖曆元年于闐三藏實叉難陀，於神都佛授記寺譯《華嚴》了，尋奉敕令再譯《楞伽》。文猶未畢，陀駕入京，令近朝安置清禪寺。麤譯畢猶未再勘，三藏奉敕歸蕃。至長安二年有吐火羅三藏彌陀山其初曾歷天竺廿五年，備窮三藏，尤善《楞伽》，奉敕令共翻經沙門復禮、法藏等，再更勘譯。

(T 39.430b16-23)

Fǎzàng's views were not, however, hopelessly stuck in a synchronic perspective. In another passage of the *Arcane Meaning of the Essence of the Lankāvatāra*, he gives a realistic account of the historical process of the translation of the text in China and offers a fair assessment of the stylistic differences and quality of the three Chinese versions. In spite a certain bias towards Śikṣānanda's project, with which he was intimately involved, by and

large, Fǎzàng's comments maintain their validity to this day.<sup>37</sup> Here is the passage in question:

The wording of the translation in four scrolls [by Guṇabhadra] is incomplete, the language follows the Western [i.e. Indic] pronunciation [to such a degree] that it leaves no way [even] for the distinguished, intelligent [readers] to understand it and makes fools and common folk overstretch their conjectures and construe it in an erroneous manner.

Although the translation in ten scrolls [by Bodhiruci] is slightly more complete in its wording and chapters, the holy purport [of the scripture] makes itself clear with difficulty and the [unnecessary] addition of words and muddling of the sentences beclouds the meaning or leads to mistakes. Eventually, the clear and correct truth [of the *sūtra*] becomes obstructed in the local wording [i.e. natural way of expressing in Chinese].

The Sacred Empress [Wǔ Zétiān 則天武后] deplored [the fact the *sūtra*] was [so] difficult to understand and ordered a new translation. Now [for this translation, Master Śikṣānanda and his team have] carefully checked<sup>38</sup> five Sanskrit manuscripts and compared the two [previous] Chinese translations, adopting their good points and correcting their shortcomings. Building [upon such] outstanding achievements, [this translation] surely [succeeds in] fully conveying the meaning [of the *sūtra*]. [Master Śikṣānanda and his team] hope that those studying [it] will fortunately be free

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<sup>37</sup> For a well-weighed judgement of the merits of the three translations, see Horiuchi 2015.

<sup>38</sup> A more literal translation of 詳 *xiáng* in this context would be 'to clarify/explain in detail'.

from any errors [of understanding].<sup>39</sup>

其四卷迴文不盡，語順西音，致令髦彥英哲措解無由，愚類庸夫強推邪解。

其十卷雖文品少具，聖意難顯，加字混文者泥於意，或致有錯，遂使明明正理，滯以方言。

聖上慨此難通，復令更譯。今則詳五梵本，勘二漢文，取其所得，正其所失。累載優業，當盡其旨。庶令學者，幸無訛謬。

(T 39.430b24-c1)<sup>40</sup>

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### Abbreviations

Ch.: Chinese translation/language

ed.: edited/edition

P.: Peking edition of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon (see Suzuki ed. 1955-1958 below)

Skt.: Sanskrit original/language

T: Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon (see Takakusu and Watanabe ed. below)

Tib.: Tibetan translation/language

tr.: translated/translation

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<sup>39</sup> Literally, 'beseech/hope the students [of the text] will fortunately have no error'.

<sup>40</sup> The passage is also translated in Deleanu 2018, 23-24. For the translation above, I have, however, made a few corrections and changes to my earlier rendering.

<sup>41</sup> The Bibliography below also includes sources which will be cited or referred to in Part Two of the study.

Z-Ch: Chinese version of the *Zhonghua dazangjing* edition of the Buddhist Canon (see *Zhonghua Canon* Editing Bureau ed. below)

Z-Tib.: Tibetan version of the *Zhonghua dazangjing* edition of the Buddhist Canon (see *Tripitaka* Collation Bureau of China Tibetology Centre ed. below)

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*Professor,  
International College  
for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies*