

On the Beginning of *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, Chapter II:

Reexamining the Dialogue Between Bhagavat and Mahāmāti

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0. Introduction

As in other chapters, the beginning of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS) in Ch. II (Nj.22ff.) is primarily comprised of dialogue between Bhagavat and the preculator Mahāmāti.¹⁾ The chapter structure is as follows:

1. Mahāmāti praises the Bhagavat²⁾ (vv.1–8 (correspond to Sag.1, 3, 2, 4, 5, 6))
2. Dialogue 1
 - 2.1. Mahāmāti asks Bhagavat for permission to raise questions to him (v.9)
 - 2.2. Bhagavat permits Mahāmāti to ask questions (vv.10–11)
3. Dialogue 2
 - 3.1. Mahāmāti asks questions (vv.12–59, Nj.24.2–29.8) [the so-called “108 questions”]
 - 3.2. Bhagavat answers questions (vv.60–98, Nj.29.9–34.10) [the so-called “108 answers”]
4. A total of 108 *padas* are enumerated
- (5. The body of the LAS begins (Nj.37.6ff.) and continues into other chapters)

As pointed out in previous research, Dialogue 2 is unconventional compared to the rest of the work. First, although some of Mahāmāti’s questions (above 3.1) relate to Buddhism (or to broad spiritual matters) as Suzuki (1930, 38) says, furthermore, the Bhagavat’s answers (above 3.2) are also unconventional. Namely, Bhagavat’s answers (A) (vv.60–98) to Mahāmāti’s questions (Q) (vv.12–59) are mostly rephrasings of the questions themselves. This is evident in the following passage:

(Q) *kathaṃ hi śudhyate tarkaḥ kasmāt tarkaḥ pravartate* | v.12ab

(A) *kathaṃ hi śudhyate tarkaḥ kena tarkaḥ pravartate* || v.86cd

(Q) *kriyā pravartate kena gamanaṃ dehadhāraṇam* | v.17ab

(A) *kriyā pravartate kena gamanaṃ brūṣi me katham* | v.87ab

Suzuki (1930, 40) harshly criticized the nature of this dialogue. On the other hand, Takasaki (1980)³⁾ considered these issues more meticulously. Although Takasaki's evaluation seems meticulously considered, further investigation reveals that the dialogue does correspond to the body of the sutra and the Sag. Evaluation of the commentary also reveals the significance of Mahāmati's questions, which initially seem irrelevant to the sutra's main topic.

1. Q (vv.12–59) and A (vv.60–98) correspondence

Izumi Hōkei 泉芳璟 created a correspondence list for the Q and A section.⁵⁾ Although it does not agree in some cases, the necessary elements for this article are mentioned in section 3.

2. The Bhagavat's answers

2.1. The structure the Bhagavat's answers

The structure of these answers can be analyzed as follows:

vv.60–61: I shall answer

vv.62–71: Mostly a repetition of the questions, albeit in different order

vv.72–79: The question to be done (i.e., that should have been done by Mahāmati)
(there is no correspondence to the question section)

vv.80–96: Mostly another repetition of the questions

vv.97: Your questions are good

vv.98: I will answer your question

108 *padas*

Of these, I separated vv.72–79 from the other parts of A because they are unique (i.e., none of them do not correspondence to the Q section). Two examples are illustrative of this. First, v.71 corresponds to the Q section (71ab=53ab, 71c=55c). The second is v.80, which also corresponds (80a: *dhaneśvarā narāḥ kena*=42c(d): *dhaneśvarāḥ katham kena*), 80b=33c, 80c=34a). On the other hand, vv.72–79 do not correspond to the Q section. Next, I will examine the contents of these verses.

2.2. Vv.72–79 as questions that should have been raised⁶⁾

acalānāṃ tathā meroḥ pramāṇaṃ hi kṣiteḥ katham |
udadheś candrasūryāṇāṃ pramāṇaṃ brūhi me katham || 72 || ^[Nj.31]
sattvadehe kati rajāṃsi hīnotkṛṣṭamadhyamāḥ |
kṣetre kṣetre rajāḥ kṃanto dhanve dhanve bhavet kati || 73 ||
haste dhanuḥ krame krośaṃ yojanaṃ hy ardhayojane |
śaśavātāyanaṃ likṣā eḍakaṃ hi yavāḥ kati || 74 ||
prasthe hi syād yavāḥ kṃantaḥ prasthārdhe ca yavāḥ kati |
droṇe khāryāṃ tathā lakṣāḥ koṭyo vai viṇavarāḥ kati || 75 ||
sarṣape hy aṇavaḥ kṃanto raktikā sarṣapāḥ kati |
katiraktiko bhaven māśo dharaṇaṃ māśakāḥ kati || 76 ||
karṣe hi dharaṇāḥ kṃantaḥ palaṃ vai katikārṣikaṃ |
etena piṇḍalakṣeṇa meruḥ katipalo bhavet || 77 ||
evaṃ hi prccha mām putra anyathā kiṃ nu prcchasi |
pratyekaśrāvakāṇāṃ hi buddhānāṃ ca jinaurasām || ^[Nj.32]
katyaṇuko bhavet kāyaḥ kiṃ nu evaṃ na prcchasi || 78 ||
vahneḥ śikhā katyaṇukā pavane hy aṇavaḥ kati |
indriye indriye kṃanto romakūpe bhruvoḥ kati || 79 ||

Several features should be pointed out here. First, these contents do not correspond to the Q section. Second, they can be understood as questions that Mahāmāti asked the Bhagavat. This is obvious in v.78. Third, as mentioned in section 2.1, the range of this set/section can be understood through vv.72–79.

Thus, the Bhagavat’s repetition of Mahāmāti’s question in vv.62–71 and vv.80–96 can be understood as a reproach (i.e., “why you ask such things”).

2.3. Background to vv.72–79

Here, I investigate the background to these verses. They are related to *rajas* or *aṇu* (i.e., atoms). This seems irrelevant to the content of the LAS.⁷⁾ On the other hand, the eighth *bhūmi* (or stage of the bodhisattva delineated in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (DBh)) is sometimes mentioned in the LAS in relation to the technical term “without appearance (*nirābhāsa*).” The description of the eighth *bhūmi* in the DBh includes the following sentences, which relate the knowledge of atoms within the bodhisattva at that stage:

DBh, Rahder ed., Ch. VIII.L:

sa paramāṇurajahsūkṣmatām ca prajānāti, mahadgatatām cāpramāṇatām ca vibhaktitām ca prajānāti |... sa evaṃ paramāṇurajahprabheda-jñānāvātīrṇaḥ kāmadhātusaṃvartam ca prajānāti |...

Although careful investigation is required, I emphasize the possibility that this teaching in DBh is the background for vv.72–79.

3. The significance of the questions not “answered” by the Bhagavat

Next, I examine the significance of Mahāmati’s unanswered questions in addition to those that are simply repeated by the Bhagavat. Because of the page limitation, only v.12–v.18 will be used to illustrate my point.

(1) The answers to some of the questions are given in the body of the sutra (i.e., those surrounded by a square (□)). We can thus trace the previously unnoticed connections of these beginning parts of Ch. II to the body of the sutra. However, there are also (2) some cases in which the Bhagavat provides no answer in either the verse or the body of the sutra (I marked such cases as “ \varnothing ”) as well as (3) cases that (although they are answered by the Bhagavat in A) correspond to the body of the sutra (here, I apply *italics*). In cases where both (1) and (3) are applicable, I apply the \varnothing and the italics.

12ab=86cd (cf. 0.Introduction) ; $\boxed{12cd}$ =(70b), [36]—[38](deal with *bhrānti* in detail)

13ab=85d; $\boxed{13c}$ (*nirābhāsaḥ kramaḥ kena*)=(#71a), [78]IV. 7d(Nj. 216.4: *nirābhāse kramaḥ kutaḥ*), Sag. 206d (*nirābhāse kramaḥ kutaḥ*)

14a–c=85a–c; $\boxed{14d}$ (*katham yānatrayaṃ bhavet*)=(67c(*yānākaraṇi gotrāṇi?*)), [50]

$\boxed{15ab}$ =[1](acc. to Jv), [74][75]; 15b=70a; $\boxed{15c}$ (d)=[6](Jv), *passim*

16ab; $\boxed{16abc}$ =[16] (Ch.II.133, 176, Sag.114)

17a=87ab; $\boxed{17c}$ =[25]; 17d=62c (Jv)

18ab=88ab; 18cd= \varnothing

Next, I examine three other remarkable instances, as follows:

40b(*katham icchantiko bhavet*)=68a(*icchantikā*)=[17]

$\boxed{45}$ =[86] (Ch. VIII: Non meat eating)

$\boxed{56a-c}$: =[54](Ch.III. 6a—c(cf. Sag. 802a(b)))

Thus, I traced some of the links to the Q and A section (i.e., the beginning part of the LAS (Ch. II)) to the body of the sutra and the Sag. in three or four additional cases.

4. The significance of Mahāmāti's questions (according to Jv):

In the concluding remarks of the answers section (v.97), the Bhagavat praises Mahāmāti for asking good questions that contained appropriate characteristics and which were free from [wrong] views. However, as Suzuki (1930: 40) doubted, in what sense were his questions regarded as proper? This point is somewhat answered by Indian commentator Jv. I therefore introduce his account.

[Q] In such cases, wouldn't it be that the word of the question by the bodhisattva (Mahāmāti) was at fault?

[A] No, it would not. Since it (i.e., the word of the question) has the purpose (**prajojana*) of creating understanding that "the meaning that is not necessary (*nye bar mkho ba med pa*) at that time (*skabs su=da ltar<=>dus gzhan*) should not be determined by those who are wise, but the meaning that should mainly be determined is the thusness (**tathatā*), which is the nature of mind (**citta-dharmatā*) which includes everything" after having based such continuity of objection and answer (**codya-parihāra*).

5. Conclusion

The results of this investigation are as follows:

Among the Bhagavat's answers (vv.60–98), vv.72–79 are unique. They are understood to be the questions that Mahāmāti should have asked. These relate to the *rajas* or *aṇu* and the background to this statement involves the description of the eighth *bhūmi* in DBh.

Mahāmāti and Bhagavat's questions and answers are related to the body of the sutra and possibly with the Sag.

Jv elucidates the significance of Mahāmāti's questions in relation to the basic tenets of this sutra.

Notes

1) I thank Prof. Seishi Karashima and all participants of his study meeting as well as Prof. Harunaga Isaacson for reading the passages of text discussed in this article. All mistakes in this paper are mine.

2) See. Skilling (2014–2015: 43–44).

3) See Takasaki and Horiuchi (2015, 38–39).

4) According to Kokan Shiren (a Japanese monk who wrote a commentary to Guṇabhadra's Chinese translation of the LAS), this sutra can be divided into 86 paragraphs. I follow his separation of the paragraphs in this paper for consistency. See Takasaki and Horiuchi (2015 424ff.), Horiuchi (2017).

5) See Takasaki and Horiuchi (2015, 39).

6) Standard Roman type indicates an emendation to Nj. (only some are emended by previous studies (Vaidya (1963, 15), 黄 (2011, 67–70), Tokiwa (2018, 9)).) Although my edition is based on manuscripts, I will not indicate the detail, which amounts to approximately 20.

7) The analysis of atoms forms an important part of the proof of mind only. Cf. *aṇuśo bhajyamānaṃ hi naiva rūpaṃ vikalpayet* (LAS, Ch. II.v.128ab, Sag. 439ab).

Abbreviations

DBh: Rahder, J. *Daśabhūmikasūtra*. Louvain: Institut Belges des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1926.; Jv: Jñānavajra: **Āryalaṅkāvatāra-nāma-mahāyānasūtravṛtti tathāgatahṛdayālaṃkāra-nāma*, D No. 4019, P No. 5520.; Nj: Nanjio, Bunyiu. ed., 1923. *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. Bibliotheca Otaniensis 1, Kyoto: Japan.

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