The Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā and the Sky as a Symbol of Mahāyāna Doctrines and Aspirations

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Abstract: The Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā is a Mahāyāna dharmaparyāya and is the eighth chapter of the great canonical collection of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Mahāsaṃnipātā. The text is lost in the original Indic, but survives in Chinese and Tibetan translations, with several passages of the Sanskrit version preserved as quotations in later commentaries. It has been regarded as an authoritative canonical source throughout the intellectual history of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but scant scholarly attention has been paid to this important text. Thus, this paper aims to provide a concise yet comprehensive introduction of the Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā, including its textual history, its basic structure, and its reception in Indian, Tibetan, and East Asian Buddhist traditions. It also examines how the fundamental concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as emptiness, endlessness, and imperishability, are signified in the Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā by the image of the sky (Skt. gagana), the central metaphor of the text.

Keywords: Gaganagāñja; Mahāsaṃnipātā; Mahāyāna literature; sky symbolism; metaphor studies

1. Introduction

The Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā (hereafter Ggn), which can be translated as “Questions of [the bodhisatva] Gaganagāñja,” is a Mahāyāna dharmaparyāya and is the eighth chapter of the Mahāsaṃnipātā. As is the case for many Mahāyāna texts, the original Sanskrit of Ggn is not extant, but there are three full-length translations in Tibetan and Chinese. This text has been considered as an authoritative canonical source in the intellectual history of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. This is documented by the fact that Ggn was translated into Tibetan and at least twice into Chinese, and that it was quoted in various commentaries and exegetical works by Indian, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean thinkers. Thus, adequate scholarly treatment of such an important text is required, but it has been almost entirely neglected by modern scholarship, partly because there is no full Sanskrit text available. In this paper, I will first investigate its textual history, its content, and the later reception in Mahāyāna Buddhist literary traditions as an introductory overview of the text. Then, I will analyze the symbolic image of the sky, gagana in Sanskrit, used to illustrate the bodhisatvacaryā throughout the text.

2. The Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā: Its Textual History, Structure, and Reception

2.1. The Gaganagāñjaparipṛcchā in Tibetan and Chinese Translations

The complete text of Ggn is now accessible in the following secondary versions:

(a) ’Phags pa nam mkha’i mdzod kyi zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo (*Āryagaganagāñjaparipṛcchāmamahāyānasūtra*). According to the colophon, it was translated by the team Vijayaśila, Śilendrabodhi, and Ye shes sde in the late eighth or early ninth century CE during the first propagation (snga dar) in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. Consisting of eight bam pos, the text is composed of 175 block-print pages in the Derge Kanjur.

(b) Dafangdeng daji jing xukongzang pusa pin 大方等大集經虛空藏菩薩品 (*Mahāvaipulya mahāsaṃnipātatasātragaganagāñjaparivarta*), T.397(8), juan pp. 14–18, translated by the...
Indian monk *Dharmakṣema (薬無讖, pp. 385–433) during the Northern Liang 北凉 dynasty in Guzang 姑臧 between 420 and 421.8 It is the earliest extant version and is listed as the eighth chapter (pin 賢) of the Mahāsaṃnipīṭha (Daji jing 大集經) corpus.

(c) *Daji da xukongzang pusa suowen jing 大集大虚空藏菩薩所問經 (*Mahāsaṃnipīṭhatamaḥāgā ganagañjabodhisattvapurapraptaśūtra), T.404, juan pp. 1–8, translated by the Tantric Buddhist monk-translator Amoghavajra (不空, pp. 704–74). He translated this sūtra, according to the colophon of T. 404, at the Daxingshan monastery 大興善寺 in Chang'an 長安, the capital of Tang dynasty, and it was during the An Lushan Rebellion (755–63) that he ensconced himself in the Daxingshan monastery. Since An Lushan and his rebel forces captured Chang’an at the beginning of 756, and it was not recaptured by Tang imperial forces until 757, we can assume that Amoghavajra translated this text between 756 and 757.9

As for the textual history of the Chinese translations of Ggn, two points should be mentioned:

(1) According to Chinese catalogues, besides the above-mentioned translations, there appears to have been another translation of Ggn made by Shengjian 聖堅 (fl. 385–422)10 during the Western Qin 西秦 dynasty. The oldest extant canonical catalogue, the Chu sanzang jiji 出三藏記集,11 describes that it was translated during the reign of Qifo Chipan 乞伏乾歸, which lasted from 412 to 428 (cf. T.2145, 14c13-15). However, the Zhongjing mulu I 經目錄 and Zhongjing mulu II 經目錄,12 both complied approximately 80 years after the the Chu sanzang jiji was composed, record that it was done during the reign of Qifu Guoren 乞伏國仁, namely, from 385 to 388 (cf. T.2146, 120a7; T.2147, 159b13-14). The *Lidai sanbao ji 歷代三寶紀,13 nearly contemporary with the Zhongjing mulu I, mentions that Shengjian translated Ggn for Qifu Qiangui 乞伏乾歸, who ruled the Western Qin from 388 to 412 (cf. T.2034, 83b18-19). The *Datang neidianlu 大唐內典錄,14 compiled 150 years later than the Chu sanzang jiji, simply refers to the existence of the “second” translation of Ggn, produced by Shenyuan of the Western Qin (cf. T.2149, 55c23). Judging from these records, we can see that the bibliographic information of the second rendition of Ggn was already indefinite and inconsistent even at the early stage of Chinese Buddhist translation.

(2) It is also notable that not every text associated with the term xukongzang pusa 古空藏菩薩 in the Chinese Tripitaka, as well as in the Chinese catalogues, is related to the Ggn or the Sanskrit term gaganagañja. The reason for this is that, since the earliest Chinese Buddhist translations, both words, gaganagañja “the treasury of the sky” and akṣaśagarbha “the essence of the sky,” have been rendered as the same term xukongzang 虛空藏 by such translators as Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍, Dharmamitra 稲摩蜜多, Dharmakṣema 薬無讖, and Amoghavajra 不空金剛 (e.g., the Xukongzang pusa jing 虛空藏菩薩經 T.405 by Buddhayaśas between 403 and 413, and the Fushuo xukong zang pusa shenzhou jing 佛虛空藏菩薩經 T.406 by Dharmamitra between 424 and 441).15 In the *Taishō shinshō daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經, there are twelve sūtras whose titles contain the term xukongzang pusa 虛空藏菩薩 or just xukongzang 古空藏, and among them, only two sūtras, translated by Dharmakṣema T.397(8) and Amoghavajra T.404, are identified as relevant to the Ggn or the Sanskrit gaganagañja.16 The same rendering of two different words such as this has often caused confusion among scholars, examples of which can be found in Visser (de Visser 1931, pp. 17–18) and Park (1979, pp. 127–28). In both places, one can see that the term xukongzang 虛空藏 is misinterpreted as akṣaśagarbha, which should be understood as gaganagañja. Visser counts T.397(8) and T.404 in the texts related to the bodhisatva Akṣāśagarbha, and Park fails to recognize a quotation from Ggn in his annotated translation of Dasheng qixinlun shu 大乘起信論疏 (cf. T.1844, 202c2-22) since he reads the Xukongzang jing 虛空藏經 as the Akṣaśagarbhasūtra (see also footnote 64 in Park 1979, pp. 210–11).

2.2. Textual Structure and Content

The main interlocutor of the Ggn is the bodhisatva Gaganagañja, who came from the *Mahāvyūha Universe (Tib. bkod pa chen po′i ’jig rten gyi kham), seeking the teachings of
the Buddha, namely, the exposition of the dharma (dharmaparyāya) called “Chapter of the Great Collection (mahāsaṃsānmitaparivarta).” The Ggn is divided into two parts, which are structured into seven chapters. The first part is, as the title itself suggests, centered on the bodhisatva Gaganagañja’s inquiries to the Buddha. It consists of the first four chapters: (1) occasion (nidāna); (2) introduction (upodghāta); (3) Gaganagañja’s thirty-six questions; (4) Buddha’s answers to these questions. The second part is composed of the later three chapters: (5) Gaganagañja’s seven miracles; (6) metaphysical dialogues between various figures, including the Buddha, Gaganagañja, Śāriputra, Ānanda, and Māra, on the fundamental principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism; (7) transmission (parīndanā) of the true dharma (saddharma). This structure of the Ggn, consisting of nidāna, upodghāta, main body, and parīndanā, appears to be shared by many Mahāyāna texts, regardless of genre, i.e., -nirdēsa, -paripr.cchā, -vyākaraṇa, -samādhi, and -dharāni. Although the main part may differ depending on the text and subject, most of the Mahāyāna sūtras have the monologue and/or dialogue part as their main body in which the Buddha, or in some cases the main interlocutor of the text, delivers sermons on the various topics of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the case of the Ggn, the first part, especially the third and fourth chapters, Gaganagañja’s thirty-six questions and the Buddha’s answers to them, belong to the monologue part, and the second part is by and large included in the dialogue part.

Throughout the text, the supernatural abilities of the bodhisatva Gaganagañja are highlighted as one of his distinguishing qualities. In particular, the second part of Ggn begins with a description of various kinds of miracles Gaganagañja displays. First, he pours down rains of flowers, jewels, food, clothing, ambrosia, and six pāramitās all over the world (cf. D281b3-284a5). Then, at the request of five hundred widows, he sends down their husbands from the sky to relieve them and further to rouse their bodhicitta (cf. D284a5-b5). Lastly, five hundred magically created beings are bestowed on five hundred merchants who are in danger of robbery and death (cf. D284b5-285a7).

However, to understand the Ggn as a whole, it should be noted that such magical displays are nothing but “expedient means” (upāyakauśalya), which are, after all, designed to emphasize the main ideas of the text, namely, emptiness (śūnyatā), non-duality (advaya), sameness (samatā), original purity (ādīviśuddhi), and inexhaustibility (āksayasat) inherent all dharmas. Indeed, except for the part of Gaganagañja’s miracle, the second half of the Ggn consists, for the most part, of a series of philosophical and metaphysical discussions between the Buddha, Gaganagañja, and other characters. Here, the understanding of such ideas is consistently emphasized as the ultimate goal of the bodhisatva, and the expedient means merely serves as motivation for bodhicitta.

Table 1 below presents a synoptic outline of the contents of Ggn.

Table 2 below shows a list of the topics of the thirty-six questions and answers between Gaganagañja and the Buddha.

### Table 1. Synoptic outline of the contents of Ggn.

| Section | Character(s) | Topic(s) | Derge | Peking | Stog | T.397(8) | T.404 |
|---------|--------------|----------|-------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| Title   |              |          | 243a1-2 | 204b4-5 | 1b1-2a2 | 93a4-6 | 613a4-9 |
| Part I  |              |          |        |        |      |          |       |
| 1. Occasion | Opening; list of attendants. | 243a2-244a1 | 204b5-205b4 | 2a2-4a3 | 93a7-27 | 613a10-b5 |
| 2. Introduction | Setting the dharma-wheel in motion; occurrence of pavilion; arrival of Gaganagañja; verses 1–30. | 244a1-251b6 | 205b4-213b4 | 4a3-15a1 | 93a28-96a4 | 613b6-616a20 |
| 3.36 Questions | Bs. Gaganagañja | See Table 2. | 251b6-252b4 | 213b4-214b3 | 15a1-16a4 | 96a5-b2 | 616a21-b19 |
| 4.36 Answers | Buddha | See Table 2. | 252b4-281b3 | 214b3-243b4 | 16a5-57a4 | 96b3-108a6 | 616b20-626c14 |
### Table 1. Cont.

| Section | Character(s) | Topic(s) | Derge | Peking | Stog | T.397(b) | T.404 |
|---------|--------------|----------|--------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| **5. Miracle** | | | | | | | |
| Various bodhisatvas | Rains of flowers, jewels, food and clothing, ambrosia, six *pāramitās*. | 281b3-284a5 | 243b4-246a8 | 57a4-61a2 | No parallels (Han 2021b, pp. 635–46) | 626c15-628c17 |
| 500 widows | Bestowal of 500 husbands; verses 119–122. | 284a5-b5 | 246a8-b8 | 61a2-b5 | No parallels | 628c18-629a8 |
| 500 merchants | Bestowal of 500 merchants. | 284b5-285a7 | 246b8-247b3 | 61b5-62b4 | No parallels | 629a9-b3 |

| 6. Dialogues | | | | | | |
| Šāriputra | Meaning of the treasury of the sky; *bodhicitta*; the first narrative of the past; purification. | 285a7-287a6 | 247b3-249b3 | 62b4-68b2 | No parallels | 629b4-630a9 |
| Bs. Dharmariṣa | Hearing of the dharma; verses 123–164. | 287a6-289a3 | 249b2-251a7 | 65b2-68a5 | No parallels | 630a10-631a8 |
| Bs. *Kutūhalajāta | Sound of the dharma; profundness. | 289a3-290a4 | 251a7-252a7 | 68a5-69b5 | No parallels (cf. 110c20-118a27) | 631a9-631b13 |
| Bs. Ratnaśrī | 81 Samādhis; *sāṇḍhimukha*; the second narrative of the past; verses 165–184. | 290a4-296b2 | 252a7-258b6 | 69b5-79a1 | No parallels (cf. 110c20-118a27) | 631b13-634a10 |
| Buddha | Supramundane path; the great armor; the great vehicle. | 296b2-302a6 | 258b6-264b4 | 79a1-87b4 | No parallels (cf. 110c20-118a27) | 634a11-636a4 |
| Bs. Ratnaśrī | Purity of the world; purity of the dharma; *bodhisatvarcya*; eloquence; dependent origination; *dhammacittā*; matter of dispute. | 302a6-305b5 | 264b4-268a3 | 87b4-93a2 | 116b7-12 (cf. 110c20-118a27) | 636a8-637b12 |
| Ānanda | Meaning of arhat; the Buddha’s smile. | 305b5-307a2 | 268a3-269a8 | 93a2-95a1 | 118a28-c19 | 637b12-638a2 |
| Brahman Prabhāvyūha | Roots of good, merits, and knowledge; *ekapada*; the word without a word. | 307a2-310b2 | 269a8-273a3 | 95a1-100a4 | 118c19-120a5 | 638a3-639a28 |
| Bs. Ratnapaṇi | A concise explanation of all dharmas; verses 185–192. | 310b2-314b3 | 273a3-277a3 | 100a4-106a3 | 120a5-121c24 | 639a29-640c25 |
| Māra Pāpiyān | Disguise of Māra; the works of Māra; Māra’s surrender. | 314b3-318b3 | 277a3-281a4 | 106a3-112a2 | 122a3-123c27 | 640c26-642b16 |
| Durmukha | Son of the Māra; the first *vidyāmantra*; 500 *Vajrapānas*; Buddha’s smile. | 318b3-320a5 | 281a4-282b6 | 112a2-114a7 | 123c27-124b29 | 642b16-643b8 |
| Indra, Brahman, and Lokapālas | Buddha-fields; the correct view; the light of the dharma. | 320a5-321b4 | 282b6-284a5 | 114a7-116b1 | 124c1-125a8 | 643b3-643c20 |
| Upāsaka Śrīgupta | The light of the dharma; verses 193–232; unattached knowledge; one who generates more merits. | 321b4-325a3 | 284a5-287b4 | 116b1-121b2 | 125a8-126a18 | 643c20-645b17 |

| **7. Transmission** | | | | | | |
| Four Great Kings | The second *vidyāmantra*; keeping this *dhammaparyayā* | 325a3-325b7 | 287b4-288a8 | 121b2-122b4 | 126a18-c6 | 645b18-c18 |
| Section | Character(s) | Topic(s) | Derge | Peking | Stog | T.397(8) | T.404 |
|---------|--------------|----------|-------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| Śakra | The third *vidyāmantra*; protecting this *dharmanarayana*. | 325b7-326b1 | 288a8-289a2 | 122b4-123b1 | 126c6-20 | 645c8-646a11 |
| Brahmatā Mahāśāṃpati | The fourth *vidyāmantra*; upholding *saddharmā*. | 326b1-327b2 | 289a2-290a2 | 123b2-125a1 | 126c21-27 | 646a12-c1 |
| Bs. Maitreyā | Non-interruption of the lineage of the three jewels\(^\text{22}\). | 327b2-328a4 | 290a2-291a2 | 126a1-126a2 | 126c28-127a23 | 646c2-25 |
| Mahākāśyapa and Ananda | Upholding the awakening of the Tathāgata. | 328a4-b2 | 290b7-291a2 | 127a23-b2 | 127b2-128a1 | 647a2-647c8 |
| Bs. Punyālāmkāra | Qualities of Ggn; verses 223–238; adorning *saddharmā*; the light of the Buddha; closing. | 328b2-330a6 | 291a2-293a1 | 126a6-129a2 | 127b2-128a1 | 647a2-647c8 |

### Table 2. Topics of the thirty-six questions and answers between Gaganagañja and the Buddha.

| Topics | Derge | Peking | Stog | T.397(8) | T.404 |
|--------|-------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| 1–6 | Six perfections (*pāramitā*) | 253a2-262b1 | 215a2-224b4 | 168b5-29b5 | 96b15-100a20 | 616c3-620b27 |
| 7–8 | Accumulation of merit and knowledge (*puṇyayajñānasamābhaṇa*) | 262b4-264a1 | 224b8-226a5 | 30a2-31b6 | 100b2-100c16 | 620c5-621a6 |
| 9–14 | Six recollections (*anusmṛti*): on buddha, dharma, saṅgha, tyāga, śīla, and deva | 264a1-266a5 | 226a5-228b2 | 31b6-35a1 | 100c17-102a20 | 621a7-c16 |
| 15 | Bodhisattva practice (*bodhisattvacarita*) | 266a5-b3 | 228b2-8 | 35a1-b1 | 102a21-b5 | 621c17-27 |
| 16 | Characteristics of all beings’ behavior (*sarasvatvacarita*) | 266b3-267a2 | 229a7-230a1 | 36a3-37a1 | 102b27-c19 | 622a16-b10 |
| 17 | Treasury of the dharma jewels (*dharmanarayana*) | 267a2-b4 | 230a7-230a1 | 36a3-37a1 | 102b27-c19 | 622a16-b10 |
| 18 | Essential character of dharmas (*dharmanarayana*) | 267b4-268a2 | 230a1-6 | 37a1-b1 | 102c19-103a1 | 622b10-22 |
| 19 | Bringing all beings to maturity (*sarasvatvacarita*) | 268a2-6 | 230a6-b3 | 37b1-7 | 103a2-b20 | 622b22-c3 |
| 20 | Thorough practice (*yoniṣṭhāprayoga*) | 268a6-b7 | 230b3-231a7 | 37b7-39a1 | 103a17-b20 | 622c4-26 |
| 21 | Supernormal knowledge (*abhiṣiktā*) | 268b7-269b3 | 231a7-b7 | 39a1-b5 | 103b21-c2 | 622c27-623a14 |
| 22 | Guiding principle of the dharma (*dharmanarayana*) | 269b3-270b3 | 231b5-232b6 | 39b5-41a3 | 103c3-13 | 623a15-b1 |
| 23 | Dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) | 270b3-271a4 | 232b7-233a7 | 41a4-b7 | 103c13-104a4 | 623b1-c1 |
| 24 | Seal of the tathāgata (*tathāgatamudrā*) | 271a4-b5 | 233a7-b8 | 41b7-42b5 | 104a4-17 | 623c2-22 |
| 25 | Realm of the dharma (*dharmanarayana*) | 271b5-272b6 | 233b8-235a1 | 42b5-44a4 | 104a18-b5 | 623c23-624a19 |
| 26 | Resolve as firm as a diamond (*dr. havajrā´ saya*) | 272b6-273a1 | 235a1-8 | 44a5-45a1 | 104b6-29 | 624a20-b6 |
| 27 | Realm of the Buddha (*buddhavijñāna*) | 273a1-274a1 | 235a8-236a2 | 45a1-46a1 | 104b29-c10 | 624b1-c6 |
| 28 | Memory (*dhāraṇī*) | 274a1-275a1 | 236a2-237a5 | 46a1-47b5 | 104c11-105a22 | 624c2-625a13 |
| 29 | Eloquence (*pratibhāna*) | 275a1-276b3 | 237a5-238b3 | 47b5-49b5 | 105b22-b28 | 625a13-b21 |
| 30 | Mastery in the arising of birth and death (*jītisvayamapattasatiāra*) | 276b3-277a2 | 238a3-239a2 | 49b5-50a7 | 105b29-c11 | 625b21-c6 |
| 31 | Mara (*māra*) | 277a2-278a1 | 239a2-240a1 | 50a7-51b6 | 105c11-106a18 | 625c7-626a11 |
| 32 | Nourishing all beings (*sattvaprayoga*) | 278a1-6 | 240a1-7 | 51b6-52a6 | 106a19-b8 | 626a12-23 |
| 33 | Buddha-activities (*buddhakāra*) | 278a6-b4 | 240a7-b5 | 52a6-66 | 106b8-21 | 626a24-b5 |
| 34 | Concentration called the Ocean-Seal (*śāgaramudrāsamādhi*) | 278b4-279a5 | 240b5-241a6 | 52b7-53b4 | 106b21-c16 | 626b6-c23 |
| 35 | Transcending all attachments (*sarasvatvamātakrama*) | 279a5-7 | 241a6-7 | 53b4-6 | 106c17-23 | 626b24-c1 |
| 36 | Self-originated knowledge (*svayambhujñāna*) | 279a7-b3 | 241b8-b3 | 53b6-54a4 | 106c24-107a12 | 626c5-18 |
2.3. Citations in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese Literature

The Ggn has been quoted in many Indian commentaries, such as the Ratnagotravibhāga by Asanga (ca. 4th century CE)\(^{23}\) the Prasannapāda\(^{24}\) and the Madhyamakāvatāratrāhāsa\(^{25}\) by Candrakīrti (ca. 600–650), the Śīksāsamuccaya by Sāntideva (ca. 685–763),\(^ {26}\) and the Bhavanākrama by Kalamaśīla (ca. 740–795).\(^ {27}\) The citations of Ggn are also found in the Tibetan translations of Indian śūtras, including the mDo kun las btus pa by Nāgārjuna (if the attribution is correct),\(^ {28}\) the Cig car 'jug pa rman par mi rtog pa'i bsam don by Vimalamitra (ca. 8th century CE),\(^ {29}\) the Shes rab kyi phy rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mgon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i 'grel bshad tshig rab tu gsal ba by Dharmamitra (ca. 9th century CE),\(^ {30}\) the dBu ma'i man ngag rin po che'i za ma tog kha phyed ba, the Byang chub lam gyi sgron ma'i dka' 'grel, and the mDo kun las btus pa chen po by Atiśa (982–1054).\(^ {31}\) Further, it is referenced in the following philosophical texts composed by Tibetan masters—the Be'u bum sgon po by Dolpa Sherap Gyatso (1059–1419),\(^ {32}\) the Tshogs bshad chen mo by Sange Gyompa (1179–1250),\(^ {33}\) the rTsa she tik chen rigs pa'i rgya mtsho by Tsong khapa (1357–1419)\(^ {34}\), and most recently, the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment by Lhundub Sopa (1923–2014).\(^ {35}\) (For a comprehensive list of references to the Ggn, see Han 2021a, pp. 19–21.)

The reception of Ggn as an authoritative source is not confined to Buddhist traditions in India and Tibet. The Ggn was first introduced into China by the Indian monk-translator Dharmakṣema, who played a vital role in propagating Mahāyāna doctrines and practices in Northwest China during the early decades of the fifth century CE. Since then, his translation has had a widespread influence on East Asian Buddhist traditions, being quoted in various works by Chinese, Korean, and Japanese thinkers. Here, I will give some examples to describe its historical trajectory, passing through different cultural and social milieus in East Asian countries.

First, the second narrative of the past (bhūtapārvav) that relates the story of the King Punyālaṃkāra (T.397(8), 294b4-296a7) was extracted with a small revision and circulated as a chapter of the Jinglu yixiang 經律異相 “Extraordinary Affairs from the Sūtras and Vinayas.” (T.2121, 146c11-147a19)\(^ {36}\) The Jinglu yixiang is a collection of essential passages from various canonical texts, compiled by Baochang 寶唱 et al. in 516, by the decree of emperor Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (r. 502–549) to spread the marvelous wonders of Buddhism.\(^ {37}\) This canonical anthology was transmitted to Japan already in the Heian period (9–12th century CE), and had an influence on later indigenous literature, such as the Hōbutsushū 言泉集, the Gensenshū 言泉集, and the Kingenruijushō 金言類聚抄 (cf. Komine 1982). It also circulated in Korea, as part of the second Koryō Tripitaka (jaejo taeryanggyong 再雕大藏經), completed in the middle of the thirteenth century CE, and has been referenced in various local texts, even to the modern times.\(^ {38}\)

Second, the Korean scholarly monk Wonhyo 元曉 (617–686) quoted some passages of Ggn in his Daeusung gisillon so大乘起信論疏 “Commentary on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith.” The quotation deals with the concept of “mahāyāna” (T.397(8), 114c27-115a28), in which its orientation and characteristics are metaphorically described using various parts of a vehicle (T.1844, 202c2-21).\(^ {39}\) Wonhyo is one of the most influential philosophers in the history of Korean Buddhism, and his Daeusung gisillon so has had a great impact on Korean intellectual history.

Lastly, Goḥō 奧寶 (1306–1362), a Japanese monk who was active in the late Kamakura and early Muromachi periods, quoted Dharmakṣema’s translation in his sub-commentary to the commentary of the Mahāvairocanaśūtra, the Dainichikyōshō enko 邪日經疏演証 (T.2216, 166a28-b13). The passage quoted here is about the meaning of the name of Gaganagaṇja (T.397(8), 108a15-26). It is interesting that Goḥō, an adherent of Shingon Buddhism, referred to Dharmakṣema’s translation (T.397(8)), but not that of Amoghavajra (T.404), who has been acknowledged as the sixth of the eight patriarchs in the history of Shingon lineages.\(^ {40}\)
Apart from these examples, it is also notable that the Ggn may be referenced in the sixth chapter of the Book of Zambasta, a fifth-century Khotanese Buddhist poem (Chen and Loukota 2018, p. 138). The quotation identified (verse nr. 6. 44) has not yet been fully discussed. However, if this identification is correct, it can show that the Ggn was distributed not only in India, Tibet, and East Asian countries, but also in Central Asia, already in the fifth century CE. It further implies that the Ggn had, at least to some extent, an influence on Khotanese Buddhist literature as well as its religious and intellectual tradition.

3. The Symbolism of the Sky Embedded in the Gaganagañjaparipr. cch¯a

A central concept, or even the central concept, of Mah¯ay¯ana Buddhism, may be said to be that of “emptiness (śunyat¯a).” This concept is frequently symbolized by the space, āk¯a´ sa, or the sky, gagana, as in the sūtra in question here. Thus, the sky is a symbol of emptiness and is chosen as the leitmotif of our text. The sky also becomes a metaphor for the teachings of the Mah¯ay¯ana, the p¯aramit¯as, the apram¯an, etc., as this symbol runs throughout the whole text, being a leitmotif that is related to all the items of Mah¯ay¯ana ideology. In a study published in 1995, Harrison remarked that the key factor influencing the success of religions is not their intellectual or moral superiority, but rather their capacity to capture people’s imagination.

Since the Ggn has had an impact, directly or indirectly, on Buddhist traditions almost all over Asia, it is assumed that its authors, or editors, have achieved some degree of success in capturing the reader’s imagination, and that such utilization has probably played a significant role there. In what follows, I will briefly describe how the image of the sky is used in constructing the text, and further, how the core concepts of Mah¯ay¯ana Buddhism (e.g., śunyat¯a, p¯aramita, and aks.ayat¯a) are interpreted and symbolized in the Ggn by the image of the sky.

3.1. The Bodhisatva Gaganagañja—A Personification of the Mah¯ay¯ana Doctrines

The main character of this sūtra is the bodhisatva Gaganagañja, “The One Whose Treasury is like the Sky.” He is a celestial bodhisatva, created to promulgate Mah¯ay¯ana doctrines and practices. The term gagana literally means “the sky, atmosphere, firmament” and is an old Sanskrit word, probably dating back to the Vedic period. In P¯ali Buddhist literature, it is often used in connection with the moon (candra), though not in the Mah¯ay¯ana context or that of Sanskrit literature. In Ggn, the sky (gagana) is used as a symbolic image to represent various features of the bodhisatva practices (e.g., greatness, expansiveness, boundlessness, and purity), but also the concept of emptiness (śunyat¯a) inherent in such activities, and beyond, in all dharmas.

The term gañja means “treasury, heap [of grain], grain store.” Its etymon is unclear, but it is probably a Persian loanword (Burrow [1955] 1973, p. 389). It occurs in the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions from Niya (G. gañña, gañni, draniga) and late Sanskrit works, but not in any of P¯ali texts. Throughout Ggn, the treasury (gañja) is described as the source of the bodhisatva Gaganagañja’s wonder-workings, from which he brings down various gifts, including rains of flowers, jewels, food and clothing, ambrosia, and the teaching on the six p¯aramit¯as. Then, the notion of gaganañja can be understood as “a treasury in the sky (Tib. nam mkha’ la mchod).” At the same time, however, it can be also interpreted as “a treasury like the sky,” since the treasury signifies Gaganagañja’s accumulation of merit and knowledge (punyaç¯a´ nasambl¯h¯a), his roots of good (kausalam¯ula), his resolution to awakening (bodhicitta), and the like, all of which are described as inexhaustible, imperishable, pure, and everlasting (cf. Part II, Chapter 6, §1–4, cf. Han 2021b, pp. 467–76). In the dialogue between Śariputra and Gaganagañja, gaganañja is explained as follows:

The venerable Śariputra addressed himself to the bodhisatva Gaganagañja: “After you set this treasury in the sky, which is inexhaustible, imperishable, and everlasting, son of good family, how long will it last?”

Gaganagañja said: “Venerable Śariputra, do you think the sky will be exhausted, destroyed, or disappear?”
Sāriputra replied: “No indeed, son of good family.”

Gaganagañja said: “Venerable Sāriputra, in the same way that the awakening (bodhi) is of the essential character of the sky, my roots of good are transformed into the [treasury]. Therefore, this treasury in the sky (gaganagañja) is inexhaustible, imperishable, and everlasting.”

In Mahāyāna literature, bodhisatva names, created evidently for particular sūtras, are personifications of various Mahāyāna doctrines (e.g., the bodhisatva Āksayamati “Imperishable Intelligence” in the Āksayamatinirdeśa, the twelfth chapter of the Mahāsamnipāta corpus). However, several of them are also generated with nature or meteorological metaphors, some examples of which are the bodhisatvas Ākāśagarbha “Essence of Space,” Sāgaramati “Oceanic Intelligence,” Kṣitigarbha “Essence of Earth,” Mahāmeghagarbha “Essence of the Great Cloud,” Vajrapāṇi “Thunderbolt in Hand,” Śūryagarbha “Essence of the Sun,” Candragarbha “Essence of the Moon,” Dhāranīsvararāja “The Earth Ruler” and, as in our case, Gaganagañja “Treasury of the Sky.”

In the Ggn, the image of the sky is exploited in the construction of the text itself, and in constructing the bodhisatva character around which the text is built. Taken all together, these bodhisatva names portray the whole universe in which we live, and the authors/editors appear to have exploited the metaphors of various elements of this existential world to construct Mahāyāna literature, as well as its own belief system. Thus, one can say that these names are nothing but symbolic expressions, and do not represent historical personalities. Further, the bodhisatva Gaganagañja functions here as a literary tool to mirror the idea that all phenomena are empty of an essential substance.

3.2. The Sky as a Metaphor for the Six Perfections

The Ggn is characterized as having a symbolic image of the sky. In the Ggn, the sky is used as a strong metaphor that carries multiple connotations related to the bodhisatva path (bodhisatramārga). Additionally, it serves as the central motif that recurs throughout the entire text, generating various types of thematic imagery. The use of such literary devices as image, metaphor, and motif, allows the author to provide more concrete and specific meanings, and further to enhance the artistic quality of the text itself. Let us look at the following example, taken from the Buddha’s teachings on the first perfection, the perfection of generosity (dānapāramitā). Here, one can see how the metaphor of the sky is used to describe the fulfillment of six perfections, which is one of the most important principles in Mahāyāna literature:

“Son of good family, when the bodhisatva is endowed with four qualities, his generosity becomes like the sky. What are those four? To wit, (1) entering living beings into the purity through the self-purification; (2) entering into the purity of generosity (dāna) with the purity of living beings; (3) entering into the purity of transformation (parinītana) by purification of generosity; (4) entering into the purity of awakening (bodhi) through the purification of transformation. When he is endowed with those four dharmas, son of good family, the generosity of the bodhisatva becomes like sky.”

The underlined parts can be understood in various ways, depending on the interpretation of the term gagana (Tib. nam mkha‘). First, it can simply indicate “the expanse of the sky.” Then, the sentence would mean that the bodhisatva should have a vast amount of generosity like the sky that is endlessly open. At the same time, gagana can also signify “empty space.” In this case, the generosity of the bodhisatva should be understood from the perspective of the concept of emptiness (śūnyatā), which is a fundamental idea in Mahāyāna metaphysics. Further, it may denote “the clarity of the sky.” If so, the sentence should be understood from the perspective of the generosity of, or more specifically, the principle of the threefold purity (trimanḍalaparipārisuddhi), that is “being pure of the giver, recipient, and giving itself.” Lastly, it can imply the sky without boundary or obstruction. Then, the sentence means that, when the bodhisatva cultivates the perfection of generosity, he
should be free from discrimination or prejudice. In this manner, the term *gagana* can be interpreted in many ways, and such multiple connotations embedded in a single word can carry different levels of meaning, which is more profound and complex than its literal sense. The same metaphor is continually applied to the rest of the perfections, and similar interpretations can be made for them. Thus, the image of the sky, metaphorically used in the Ggn, enriches the reading of the text, stimulating the reader’s literary and visual imagination. See, also, the following passage, in which the third perfection, the perfection of patience (*ksañtipāramitā*), is described with a more varied use of the sky-metaphor (here the term *gagana* is differently translated as “the sky” or “empty space” according to the context in which it is used):

“How, then, son of good family, does the patience (*ksañti*) of the bodhisatvas become like the sky? When the bodhisatva is endowed with four qualities, his patience becomes like the sky. What are those four? To wit, (1) never responding to abuse with more abuse because the speech is just like empty space (*ākruṣo na pratyākroṣati vāco gaganasamatvāt*); (2) never responding to beatings with more beatings because the body is just like empty space (*tādilo na pratitādaṇyati kāyasya gaganasamatvāt*); (3) never responding to insults with more insults because the thought is just like empty space (*paribhāṣito na pratiparibhāṣyati cittasya gaganasamatvāt*); (4) never responding to anger with more anger because the intention is just like empty space (*roṣito na pratiroṣayati dāṣya gaganasamatvāt*).

When the bodhisatva is endowed with those four dharmas, son of good family, his patience becomes like the sky.”

3.3. Various Elements Related to the Sky

The image of the sky is used as a central metaphor for different aspects of the *bodhisat-vacara*, but it also serves as a leitmotif that runs deep throughout the entire text. In the Ggn, one can find various symbolic images and events with which the image of the sky is directly or indirectly associated. Perhaps the most important example of them is various sky-related miracles performed by Gaganagañja, such as the rains of flowers, jewels, food and clothing, falling down from the sky (see Chapter 5, Han 2021b, pp. 435–66). In this section, I will present several such examples.

(a) Pavilions shining in the sky

The Ggn opens with a spectacular event that a marvelous pavilion (*kāṭāgāra*) illuminates the world. When the Buddha sets the wheel of the dharma in motion, the pavilion in which an assembly of monks and bodhisatvas are sitting appears suddenly, shining in the vault of the sky. Then, the rest of the world is eclipsed and disappear (cf. Part I, Chapter 2, §1–4; Han 2021b, pp. 35–40). According to Vreese (de Vreese 1947, pp. 323–25), the term *kāṭāgāra* (lit. a point-house) means nothing but a type of building that has a gabled roof. It is depicted as a house, or just a hut, with the gabled roof in the early Buddhist literature, as well as in Indian inscriptions (see, for example, Skilling 2009, p. 69). In the Ggn, however, the *kāṭāgāra* is represented not just as an ordinary building with a gabled roof, but as a splendid large pavilion, appearing in the vault of the sky. Such a magnificent image of *kāṭāgāra* can be found in Chapter on Entering the Dharma-realm (*Dharmadhātupravēśanapravīra* or *Gandavyūha*). In this sūtra, that the main character Sudhana enters the dharmadhātu is described as entering the Maitreya’s *kāṭāgāra* which is very luxurious and spacious as the sky (cf. T.293, 831c1-832a2). As such, it is assumed that the image of *kāṭāgāra* has been developed as time went by, from an ordinary building to a luxury mansion. It is also likely that the Ggn makes use of the expanded image of *kāṭāgāra* shining in the sky as an auspicious sign (*pūraṇimitta*) at the very beginning of the text, probably for dramatic purposes. The passage concerned runs as follows:

When the Lord revealed the exposition of the dharma, *Chapter of the Great Collection*, to bodhisatvas, the great beings, the whole assembly thought that “I am sitting in a pavilion in the vault of the sky.” The display of these marvelous
pavilions illuminated the sight of living beings. Save for the bodhisatvas, the great beings, the great disciples, devas, nāgas, yaksas, and gandharvas, who were seated in the pavilions, the rest of the beings in this trigarlicial megagalactic world-system, appearing as a form, became nothing. All of them thought that “I am just like empty space.” At the time, just like the manifestations of forms in the great three-thousands of worlds disappeared in the sky at the end of the aeon, the manifestations of forms disappeared from the sight of anyone . . . Save for those who were sitting in the pavilion in the sky, the rest of them in the great three-thousands of worlds, staying on the surface of the earth, fade away . . . However, with the lion’s throne (simhāsana) of the Lord it was another matter, they perceived it as shining ten thousand yojanas high as placed in these pavilions placed in the vault of the sky.

(b) Māra stuck in the dark sky

In Chapter 6, there is a section on Māra Pāpyān and his followers. He disguises himself as a householder, comes to the presence of the Buddha, and asks how many people will believe in his teachings in the future. The Buddha replies that there will be few such people left. Having heard this, the Māra reveals his true colors and flies up to the sky to go back to his territory. However, then, Gaganagañja stops him in mid-air and makes him listen to various teachings from Mañjuśrī, Maitreya, Ratnapāṇi, Dharmarāja, etc., in which diverse ways to transcend the territory of Māra (māragocara) and to overcome the works of Māra (māракarmam) are explained (cf. Part II, Chapter 6, §58–70; Han 2021b, pp. 731–62). What is notable here is that the bodhisatvas see the sky as clear and open space, but, on the contrary, that Māra and his followers cannot see anything else but the darkness in the sky. The story of Māra stuck in the dark sky is depicted as follows:

After hearing this, Māra the Wicked One became delighted, pleased, joyous, and overjoyed. He danced and tried to leave the congregation . . . At that moment, the bodhisatva Gaganagañja said to the wicked Māra: “Wicked One, why are you leaving after having shown your true colors?”

Māra thought: “Even Gaganagañja and other bodhisatvas, to say nothing of the tathagata, perceived [my leaving], but I am going to go back to my territory.”

Then, the bodhisatva Gaganagañja, having stopped the Wicked Māra and his servants in the sky, exercised his magical power in such a way that they could not go back to his territory, saying: “Wicked One, just like the sky has no obstruction (anavṛti), why do you not go back to your territory?”

Māra replied: “Son of good family, the sky is without obstruction to you, but it looks dark to us. The only we can see in front of us is darkness (tamo ‘ndhakāra), except for the congregation of the Buddha on the ground. It looks luminous.”

Gaganagañja said: “So it is, Wicked One. They are those who have the brightness of the dharma (śukladharma) in their mind, and the darkness in front of you is because of the works of Māra (māракarmam).”

Māra replied: “O good man, from now on I will never do the works of Māra.”

(c) A flying bird that leaves no trace

A bird flying in the sky often serves as a metaphor for being free or unattached in Buddhist literature. Especially, the trace that a bird leaves in the sky is used to represent the spiritual, or rather “ethereal,” dimension of an arhat, bodhisatva, or even the buddha, as it can neither be seen nor measured by our perceptual ability. According to Lamotte ([1962] 2011, p. 154, fn. 11), it is an old comparison, and its early example can be found in the Dhammapada. Here, the path of an arhat, whose field of the senses (gocara) is empty, signless, and liberated, is compared to the “footstep (pada)” of a bird in the air. The same comparison also occurs in Mahāyāna literature. For example, it is found once each in the Daśabhūmikasūtra and the Vimalakīrtinirdèśa. In the Daśabhūmikasūtra, the stage (bhūmi) of
Son of the Conqueror (jinaputra) is described by the metaphor of the track of a bird in the sky as it is invisible and ineffable.\(^63\) In the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa, the same metaphor is used to explain how the bodhisatva should consider all living beings.\(^64\) In the Ggn, the metaphor of bird tracks occurs in three (!) different places and contexts (see below). It is notable that this metaphor is straightforwardly used in the Dhammapada, the Daśabhūmikasūtra, and the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa (e.g., “Just like the track of a bird in the sky, one should . . . ”), while in the Ggn, it is used in a paradoxical way (e.g., “although bird tracks do not remain in the sky, one still . . . ” and “bird tracks in the sky is expressible, but . . . ”), which appears to be a more developed use of this metaphor.

1. Just as a bird\(^65\) flying in the sky does not leave any trace, one who practices for awakening does not have any distinguishing mark (nimitta) in their behavior.\(^66\)
2. Just as, even though bird tracks do not remain in the sky, we still talk about its place by word, in the same way, whether the buddha is born or unborn, we still talk about it with the word to be born.\(^67\)
3. The water in the ocean of three thousandfold worlds is measurable, bird tracks in the sky in ten directions are expressible, and someone can have the same thought as all living beings; but the great qualities (mahāguna) of the son of the Sage are inexhaustible.\(^68\)

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I investigated an important sūtra belonging to the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Gaganaganjaparipṛcchā, by focusing on its textual history, its content and structure, and its influence on Indian, Tibetan, and East Asian Buddhist traditions. I also reflected on how the image of the sky is used in this text to describe the central concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and how it can be interpreted from a literary, specifically metaphorical, point of view. As such, this paper is divided into two parts: (1) a textual survey of the Ggn, which is mainly philological and historical in nature, and (2) a metaphorical analysis of the sky around which the key concepts and distinctive features of the text are constructed.

The Gaganaganjaparipṛcchā is a typical Mahāyāna dharma-paryaya, which has similar textual elements\(^69\) and metaphysics to other Mahāyāna texts, such as the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa, the Aksayamatinirdeśa, and the Sūgaramatiparipṛcchā. However, it also has its own uniqueness and characteristics as a religious, as well as a literary text—that is, the ample utilization of the image of the sky throughout the text. In the Ggn, the sky, gagana, is pointing to the central idea of the Mahāyāna creed, namely, emptiness, endlessness, and imperishability of that which is empty and unborn. Gagana is then also made part of the name of the main interlocutor of the sūtra, namely, Ganganaganja, who is scarcely a historical person, but rather a personification of Mahāyāna teachings, expanded through his dialogue with the Buddha. Thus, the sky here functions as a central reference point and an expressive symbol throughout the text for śūnyata, but also for the space in which the various virtues of the Mahāyāna unfolds, the compassion and generosity, the six pāramīs, and so forth.

It is a frequent trait in the literature we are relating to, then, that the singular texts are constructed on a basic symbol representing Mahāyāna tenets, gagana in our case. Further, the symbol is used to give the particular text its individuality by naming the main interlocutor by means of the symbol and naming the text itself accordingly. This principle is widely employed in the whole collection of Mahāsāṃnipata.\(^70\) In the Aksayamatinirdeśa, for example, we find that the concept of imperishability, aksayatā, is personified in yet a fictitious personality, namely, Aksayamati, “The One with Imperishable Intelligence (cf. Braarvig 1993b, pp. l–li)” It is also found in the Sūgaramatiparipṛcchā that the endless ocean, sāgara, is employed as a symbol of the endlessness of existence and personified in the main figure Sūgaramati, “The One Whose Intelligence is (Endless) like the Ocean” (for more examples, the Dhāranīśvararājaparivarta, the Sūtryagarbhaparivarta, the Candragarbh-
Thus, one might argue that it was among the principles employed by the authors/editors of Mahāyāna texts when they were constructing their grand literature based on probably the most popular form of Buddhism in India sometimes in the first or second centuries CE.

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Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Description |
|--------------|-------------|
| Aks | Aksaśamatinirdesa (cf. Braarvig 1993a) |
| AksTib | Aksaśamatinirdesa (cf. Braarvig 1993b) |
| Bspt | Bodhisattvapitaka (cf. Braarvig et al. Forthcoming) |
| CDIAL | A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages (Turner, Ralph Lilley 1962–1966). Available online: https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/soas/ (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| D | Derge Kanjur edition of the Tibetan translation of the Ggn, D148, mdo sde, pa 250a4-369a4. Available online: https://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/sub/index.php (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| G | Gandhārī |
| Ggn | Gāndhārī Gāndhāra (cf. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya et al. 2002) |
| Mvy | Mahāvyutpatti (Sakaki Ryozaburo 1916) |
| MW | A Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Monier-Williams, Monier 1899). Available online: https://gandhari.org/dictionary (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| Peking Kanjur edition of the Tibetan translation of the Ggn, Q815, mdo sna tshogs, nu 204b4-293a3. Available online: https://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/dr.ktsneu/sub/index.php (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| PTSD | The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary (Rhys Davids and William Stede 1921–1925). Available online: https://gandhari.org/dictionary (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| S | A paper manuscript of the Śiksāsamuccaya at Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 1478. Available online: https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01478/1 (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| Skt. | Sanskrit |
| T. | Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏経. Available online: https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT2012/index.html (accessed on 27 August 2021) |
| Tib. | Tibetan |

Notes

1 In this paper, I use the spelling bodhisatva with a single t rather than bodhisattva with a double t in accordance with the usage in the recent works of Braarvig (2020a, 2020b) and Skilling (2013, Skilling 2014–2015, 2018a, 2020, etc.). It is the spelling used in manuscripts and inscriptions written in Sanskrit and Gândhārī. It is also found in Khotanese, Sogdian loanwords, Tibetan transliterations, and Thai old documents. For a detailed discussion on the spelling of the term bodhisatva, see (Bhattacharya 2010). See, also, (Skilling 2013, p. 69; Skilling 2014–2015, p. 49n6).
According to Skilling (Skilling 2014–2015, p. 49n1; 2021, pp. 37–38), the term dharmaparyāya (P. dhammapariyāya, G. dharmapāryāya, Tib. chos kyi nraya) is the earliest term used for the titles of Buddhist texts, the surviving evidence of which can be found in King Asoka’s “Bairat-Calcutta” inscription. It is probably used to indicate “a self-contained sermon of the Buddha or others, which is described internally, in the very text itself, by the Buddha or others (email from Peter Skilling, 13 July 2021).” It is also likely that the term dharmaparyāya or just paryāya was later replaced by editors with the well-known term sūtra (P. sutta, G. sutra, Tib. mdo) to give authority to them as legitimate budhavacana in the process of compilation, or rather “canonization,” of Buddhist texts. Here, I quote an excerpt from Skilling’s personal note on the term dharmaparyāya: “What is the difference between dharmaparyāya and sūtra? The word sūtra/sutta was also current; it stands at the head of the lists of nine/twelve anāgā and in manuscripts it is often used for the closing statement that ends the document: ‘such and such sūtra is finished’, the latter surely a written editorial or scribal convention rather than an internal or integral part of the discourse. Sūtra is rarely used as an internal title, and context suggests that the term sūtra refers to the complete package, with the introduction and closing (nidāna, nighamana) as well as internal narratives, while the dharmaparyāya is the discourse properly speaking. But sometimes dharmaparyāya is used for the entire text, and it is also used for long and expanded Vaitulya/Mahāyāna compilations. It appears that the scope and meaning of the two terms changed and expanded with time and circumstances (email of 13 July, quoted with permission).”

The Mahāsāṃnipitā, which can be interpreted as “Great Collection of Sūtras” or “Great Congregation of Monks and Bodhisattvas” (Braarvig 1993b, p. xxv), is a voluminous canonical collection, consisting of seventeen independent parivartas that share a common tendency to promote the fundamental principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The place and date of the compilation are unclear, but it was probably in Central Asia or China around the third century CE. It appears that each text in this collection was originally composed and circulated independently, but that they were collected at a certain point under the title of Mahāsāṃnipitā. It is also likely that after the collection was compiled, new texts, such as the Pratyiṣṭanabuddhasamudrakāśītasaṁmahāsūtra, was inserted as new parivartas. For the formation of the Mahāsāṃnipitā corpus and its complex textual development, see (Braarvig 1993b; Saerji 2005, 2019). It is also briefly touched upon in (Kurumiya 1978; Tudkeao 2016; Skilling 2018a; Chen and Loukota 2020; Han 2021a). Saerji’s works (Saerji 2005, 2019), both written in Chinese, are introduced in (Silk 2021, pp. 61–62).

The text-critical analysis of the Tibetan translation of Ggn shows that twenty-four Kanjur editions share the same colophon (with only minor variants). The editions consulted are as follows: Cone, Derge, Peking, Lithang, Ragya, London, Stog, Shey, Lhasa, Nanthang, Hemis I, Hemis II, Basgo, Phubrag I, Phubrag II, Lang, Tabo, Gondhla, Chizhi, Dodedarak, Dongkarla, Gangteng, Neyphug, and Phajoding. See (Han 2021a, pp. 234–42). Digital images of all the materials are available from Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies (rKts: https://www.isbt.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/sub/index.php) and Endangered Archives Programme (EAP: https://eap.bl.uk) (both accessed on 5 June 2021).

It is confirmed by the fact that the Tibetan translation of Gnn is indexed in one of the earliest catalogues produced in the ninth century, the rHan kar ma (Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, pp. 50–51). The same colophon is also given in other relatively early catalogues, such as Gondhla and early Mustang. See, respectively, (Tauscher 2008, p. 37; Eimer 1999, p. 101). It is regrettable that I could not check the ’Phang thang ma in this study, which is also regarded as one of the earliest catalogues. For more information about the three translators, their lives and works, see (Han 2021a, pp. 12–13).

The locations of Gnn in various Kanjur editions are as follows: Derge, no.148, mdo sde, pa 243a1-330a7; Peking, no.815, mdo sna tshogs, no.204b4-293a3; Cone, no.788, mdo sde, pa 212b4-312a7; London, no.115, mdo sde, tsha 1b1-114a6; Stog palace, no.160, mdo sde, tsha 1b1-129a3; Ulanchaabat, no.210, mdo sde, tsha 1b1-113a8. Two versions of the Gnn included in Phubrag: no.159, mdo sde, tsha 237a7-350b5, and no.343, mdo sde, kho 65b1-211b3. Cf. (rKts: https://www.isbt.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/verif/verif2.php?id=148, accessed on 7 June 2021). The Gnn is not included in Dunhuang collections, but in Tabo and Gondhla canonical collections, both of which are regarded as proto-Kanjurs. Tabo: 1:4.0.16. 20-21, 36-38, 40-41, 46-47 (RN307) and 1.4.9.2, kha 35, 43, 48, 55-57, 63-65, 68, 80-84, 87-89, 91-99; Ga 1-3, 5, 7-9 (RN265); Gondhla: ka-na 22a6-96a5. Cf. (Scherrer-Schaub and Harrison 2009; Tauscher 2008).

The title given at the beginning of juan 14 is the Xukongzang pin di ba zhi yi suouen pin diyi (虚空藏品之一所聞品第一), which is also regarded as one of the earliest catalogues. For more information about the three translators, their lives and works, see (Han 2021a, pp. 93a6); but the other juans have the Xukongzang pusa pin (虚空藏菩薩品) with their chapter numbers.

For the dating of Dharmakṣema’s arrival in Guzang where he translated the Gnn and other sūtras, see (Chen 2004, pp. 257–59). Yet, later catalogues, such as the Datang neidianlu (大唐內典錄) records that it was during the reign of Emperor An Di (安帝) of Jin dynasty, that is, between 396 and 418 (T 2149, 256a13). In this paper, I followed Chen’s argument.

For more details on Amoghavajra’s life and translational efforts, see (Orzech 2011a, 2011b), particularly on his activity during the An Lushan Rebellion, see (Lehnert 2011), pp. 352. It is also briefly treated in (Han 2021a, pp. 15–16).

Also known as Jiangong 謙公 or Fajian 法堅 (cf. T:2034, 83c13-14). For his floruit, see (Bingenheimer et al. 2017, p. 2).

Compiled by Sengyoun 僧俊 in 515 CE.

Compiled by Fajing 法經 et al. in 594 CE, and Yancong 彦琮 et al. in 602 CE, respectively.

Compiled by Fei Changping 費長房 in 597 CE.

Compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 in 664 CE.
In Tibetan, however, gaganagāṇja and ākāśagarbha are differently rendered as nam mkha’i mnzad “treasury of the sky” and nam mkha’i snying “essence of the sky,” respectively. Jñānagupta 難那崛多, a late sixth-century translator of the Sui dynasty, also used a different term xukong yun 虚空云 for ākāśagarbha, as seen in his work Xukong yun pusar jing 虚空孕菩薩經 (T.408).

The twelve texts are 大方等大集會巖藏菩薩品 (T.397(8)); 大衆大虛空藏菩薩所問經 (T.404); 虚空藏菩薩經 (T.405); 佛虛空藏菩薩所問經 (T.406); 虚空藏菩薩經 (T.407); 觀虚空藏菩薩經 (T.409); 虚空藏菩薩能滿諸願最勝心陀羅尼求聞持法 (T.1145); 大虛空藏菩薩所問經 (T.1146); 聖虛空藏菩薩陀羅尼經 (T.1147); 佛虛空藏陀羅尼 (T.1148); 五大虛空藏菩薩大神祕密語經 (T.1149); 虚空藏菩薩問七佛陀羅尼經 (T.1333). I do not go deeper into this subject at this point but hope to investigate it in detail in the future study.

The purpose of his arrival is emphasized several times in the sūtra. For example, see D247a5-7: shā rī i ku byang chub sens sens dpa’ sens dpa’ chen po nam mkha’i mnzad de (6) nga la bulta ba dang l phyag ’tshul ba dang l bsten bca’ byed pa dang ’dus pa chen po i le’u’i chos kyi rnam grangs ’di rab tu yongs su bzang ba dang l phyogs bcu’ i ’jig rten gyi kham las ’dus pa’i byang chub sens dpa’ ’di dag chos kyi dga’ ba dang l bde (7) ba dang l medog tu dga’ bskyed pa dang l tseg pa chen po ’di ’ang rab tu yongs su gzungs ba dang l byang chub sens dpa’ thams cad kyi byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos kyang yongs su gzungs ba’i phyir nga’i gan du’i ngo ngos! “O Śāriputra, the great being Gaganagāṇja is coming here to see, praise, and serve me, and uphold this exposition of the dharma (dharmaparipṛcchā), “Chapter of the Great Collection (mahāsannipātakaparipravarta).” He is coming with the assembly of bodhisattvas who have gathered from the worlds of the ten directions for the sake of the joy of the dharma, happiness, the source of great joy, the upholding of the great vehicle, and the wings of awakening of all bodhisattvas.” Its Chinese parallels are found in T 397(8), 94b12-20 and T 404, 614b20-25.

For more details on the genres of Mahāyāna texts, cf. (Skilling 2021, pp. 35–36).

This shared structure of Mahāyāna literature is universal, but the specific terms, such as nidāna, upodeśa, and parīndāna, are made by later commentators, as seen in the case of the Aṣṭasāntiniṛāda. The structure of Mahāyāna sūtras, as well as their styles and formats, may document how the Mahāyāna texts has been interpreted, changed, and developed over the time.

The description of such miracles is one of the characteristic features of Ggn. It is unlikely, however, that these miracles were included in the original, or more precisely, an earlier version in the textual development of Ggn. The reason for this is that the earliest extant witness, T. 397(8), briefly treats this section, whereas the later versions, T. 404 and the Tibetan, elaborate on this magical display as an emblematic event that opens the second half of the text. See the comparison of original texts in (Han 2021b, pp. 433–60).

According to Bhāvya, vidyāmantra (Tib. rig pa’i gsnang sngags), which can be translated as “knowledge-mantras,” is one of the three mantras (the rest of them are dhūrimantra and guhyamantra). It is concerned with the core teachings of the Buddha, such as pāramitā and catuḥārasaṁyati, by which klesās can be removed. This vidyāmantra is difficult to understand as it is spoken in a language beyond this world (lokkuttaravākya), or in the language of devas, nīgas, yaksas, and so forth. For more details, see (Braarvig 1997, pp. 34–37).

On the phrase triratnasāmāṇāntapaccheda in Mahāyāna literature, see (Skilling 2018b).

Cf. Johnston (1950), pp. 44–45; D4025, 98a3-b5; T.1611, 833a15-b9: on klesa (corresponding to Ggn 320b8-321a7).

Cf. La Vèlèe Poussin 1903–1915, p. 128 on ekadharmā (Ggn D281a2-3).

Cf. (a) Liland (2019), p. 89: on ksānti (Ggn D257a1-2); (b) Liland (2019), pp. 329–30: on imperishability (aksayatā) (Ggn D288b7-289a1).

Cf. (a) ŚiksāMS 118a3-118b1; D3940, 149a2-149b4; T.1636, 127a25-b10: on the eight purities of dāna (Ggn D253a5-b7); (b) ŚiksāMS118b6-119a2; D3940,150a2-7; T.1636, 127b20-c2: on the eight purities of śīla (Ggn D255a3; 255a5-7; 255b3; 256a6-7; 257a1-3); (c) ŚiksāMS 29b5-6; D3940, 33a3-4; T.1636, 85a11-12: on mārakaṁra (Ggn D277b6); (d) ŚiksāMS 22b3; D3940, 24b1; T.1636, 82b5-7; on kuśalamāla (Ggn D277b6); (e) ŚiksāMS 60b5-7; D3940, 67b1-3; T.1636, 97c27-98a1: on acchicidrakatīta (Ggn D316b4-5); (f) ŚiksāMS 28a3-29a1; D3940, 31a6-32a5; ŚiksāChi 84b12-c12: on upholding the true dharma (saddharma) in twenty-three verses, (Ggn D322b2-5; 323a3-5; 323a7-b3; 323b4-323a2); (g) ŚiksāMS 30b5-6; D3940, 34a4-5; T.1636, 85b12-13: on mārakaṁra (Ggn D277b3); (h) ŚiksāMS 64b5-6; D3940, 72b6-7; T.1636, 99c3-5: on pratibhāna (Ggn D276a2-3).

Cf. (a) Tučci (1971), p. 23: on mārakaṁra (Ggn 277a5-6); (b) Tučci (1971), p. 22: on mārakaṁra (Ggn 277a7).

Tibetan translation of the Sūtrasamuccaya. Cf. (a) D3961, 194a7-b4: on the four dharmas and eight purities concerning dāna (Ggn D253a2-6); (b) D3961, 195a3-5: on dāna (Ggn D254b4-6). The complete Sanskrit text of Sūtrasamuccaya  is not extant, but there is a manuscript fragment found in Central Asia (cf. Karashima 2009), and an incomplete stuck bundle consisting of approximately 35 leaves was recently discovered from Tibet (cf. Wang et al. 2020). The author is indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this reference.

Cf. D3910, 12b1-2: on mārakaṁ (no exact parallels found in the Ggn).

Cf. D3796, 62a4: on śrīyātā (no parallels in the Ggn).

Atiśa is the one who most frequently quoted the Ggn in his works. Cf. (a) D3930, 107b4: the title of the Ggn is briefly mentioned; (b) D3948, 244a6-244b1: on the array of offerings, including various sorts of jewels (Ggn D282a7-b4); (c) D3948, 246b4: on dharmātā (Ggn 264b2-3); (d) D3948, 246b7-247a1: on gaganasamābodhi (no parallels in the Ggn); (e) D3948, 256b-257a2: on adhyāśaya (Ggn 310b3-7).
In this story, the Buddha and the bodhisatva Gaganagañja appear as twin sons of the King Pūṇyālāma, Simha and "Ocean of Reasoning," a commentary on Nāgārjuna's "Steps of the Path to Enlightenment," a commentary on Tsongkhapa's. It is interesting that, in the most complex form by Wagner, especially in Der Ring des Nibelungen, where the subtle combinations of leitmotiv create symphonic textures. Wagner used the term Hauptmotiv in 1867 (Kennedy 1989, p. 579).

"Public Explication of Mind Training." Cf. Jinpa (2014), p. 346: on sarvasatrapajñāya (Ggn 278a5-6; Śiksās 22b3).

"Ocean of Reasoning," a commentary on Nāgārjuna’s Mālamadhyamakakārikā. Cf. Garfield and Samten (2006), p. 149: on ekdhārma (Ggn 281a2-3, La Vallée Poussin 1903–1913, p. 128).

"Steps of the Path to Enlightenment," a commentary on Tsong kha pa’s Lam r im chen mo. Cf. (a) Sopa (2007), p. 203: on prajñāpāramitā and upāyajñāna (Ggn 253b6; Śiksās 118b1); (b) Sopa (2007), p. 295: on mārakarnāna (Ggn 277b3; Śiksās 30b5-6).

In this story, the Buddha and the bodhisatva Gaganagañja appear as twin sons of the King Pūṇyālāma, Simha and Simhavikrāntagāmin, who leave the palace to become renunciants. They attain the anuttarasamyaksambodhi and lead their father, the King Pūṇyālāma, to abdicate his throne and to practice the true dharma as a monk. This story places a particular emphasis on the practice of dīnapāraniṇī, the renouncement of worldly desires (including kingship and kingdom), Gaganagañja’s magical display, and most importantly the necessity of becoming a monk. Its translation and original texts, see (Han 2021b, pp. 543–74).

For the content, structure, and literary characteristics of the Jinglu yixiang, see (Bai and Li 1995, 1996).

Its digital images are available from the Academy of Buddhist Studies at Dongguk University: http://abchome.dongguk.edu (accessed on 20 June 2021).

This citation is given at the very beginning of the text, describing the meaning of the term māhāyāna using an analogy of a vehicle. The importance of this analogy was first identified by (Braarvig 1993b, pp. xv–viii) in his study on the Aṣṭasāsaninirdeśa, the twelfth chapter of the Mahāsāṃnipūṭa. For the original text and its translation, see (Han 2021b, pp. 607–12).

For his life and translational activity as a Shingon monk, see (Kameyama 2017).

This is my tentative speculation, but the verse 6. 44 (Emmerick 1968, pp. 122–23) appears to be related to the verses 89, 90, and 91 in the Ggn (cf. Han 2021b, p. 410). Another point I wish to make is that the verse 6. 39, identified as a quotation from the Ajātashatrukakrtyavinodana by Chen and Loukota (2018, p. 138), appears to correspond to the verse 127 in the Ggn in their content and wording (cf. Han 2021b, p. 486).

"Leitmotif," which is usually translated as “leading theme,” or “representative theme,” refers to a particular idea, person, or place that recurs in the course of the text. It is often modified on sequential appearances, but it still holds its consistent identity and character. In the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music, the term leitmotif/leitmotiv is described as follows:

“A term (often misspelt leitmotif) invented (1871) by F. W. Jähns, the expert on Weber, to describe a short constantly recurring mus. phrase or theme used to denote a person, thing, or abstract idea. ‘Representative theme’ is a good Eng. alternative. Composers throughout history have used the device in one form or another, e.g., Gluck and Mozart, Weber in Der Freischütz, Mendelssohn, Berlioz (the idée fixe in the Symphonie Fantastique), but it was raised to its highest and most complex form by Wagner, especially in Der Ring des Nibelungen, where the subtle combinations of leitmotiv create symphonic textures. Wagner used the term Hauptmotiv in 1867 (Kennedy 1989, p. 579).”

“Blue Compendium.” Cf. Roesler et al. (2015), p. 37 and p. 112, fn. 207: on acchidracittatātā, (Ggn 316b4-6; Śiksās 60b5-7).

“Steps of the Path to Enlightenment,” a commentary on Tsong kha pa’s Lam r im chen mo. Cf. (a) Sopa (2007), p. 203: on prajñāpāramitā and upāyajñāna (Ggn 253b6; Śiksās 118b1); (b) Sopa (2007), p. 295: on mārakarnāna (Ggn 277b3; Śiksās 30b5-6).

For examples, the phrases gaganatalamagga, the renouncement of worldly desires (including kingship and kingdom), Gaganagañja’s magical display, and most importantly the necessity of becoming a monk. Its translation and original texts, see (Han 2021b, pp. 543–74).

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“What is it, after all, to understand a religion, or a religious movement? Religions do not succeed or flourish because their doctrines are intellectually compelling, or their ideals are morally noble, but because they-or rather their practitioners-capture people’s imaginations in a certain way, they arouse their faith and convince them that they provide an exclusive or unique access to whatever power is held to underlie or pervade the world, to the numinous, to the transcendent, call it what you will.” (Harrison 1995, p. 54).

For examples, the Brhadāranyakopanisad 1.2.1. on bhavati gaganakusumacchanno vandhyāputra iti; the Brhadāranyakopanisad 3.5.1. aviteka bhāstalamalamavadi vaygam gamyamānasem ya tala mame atyai pata paramāt thāthatāsthāthatāsthān aṣṭāsān sambodhi vat; and the Chāndogyp anisad 8.1.1. tathā yadyap jīta mārakarnāna ganevanagananagantavābhāvāvādhīvyāvāsī sahiśhāntā nītāsya gaganā vac̄yāvidyādhibhūtā ibī . . .

The term ākāsā, which also means the sky, or rather space, is more frequently related to the sun (sūrya). For examples, the phrases gaganatalamagga in the Vimānavatthu 3; gaganatalamagga in the Petavattthu Commentary 188; sūryo ākāsante alākkhe gaganapathe gacchati in the Sultanipāта 1997. For more examples, see (PTSD, s.v. ākāsā).

For examples, the term occurs in the Kathāsrītāgga, “Ocean of the Streams of Stories,” a collection of ancient Indian poetic stories, compiled by a Kashmiri Brahmin Somadeva in 11th century CE, and the Rājatarangini, “The River of Kings,” a legendary metrical chronicle of the kings of Kashmir, written by Kalhana in 12th century CE.

It is interesting that, in the Lalitavistara, Gaganagañja appears as a bodhisatva who came from a different universe and brings down a rain of various gifts (cf. Lefmann 1902, pp. 295–99; but no parallels found in its Tibetan version). It is reminiscent of the arrival and miracle of the bodhisatva Gaganagañja in the Ggn.
The rigs kyi bu de la ji ltar na byang chub sems dpa' nam mkha' mdo'zod la 'di skad ces smras so | rigs kyi bu khyed kyis gang mi skam mi zad (285b1) ma dengs pa'i nam mkha' le' mdo'zod bzhag3 nas ji srid lon lon na mkha' mdo'zod kyis smras pa' btsun pa shi ri bu 'di ji snyam du sens jis yi' nam mkha' skam pa'am3 zad pa god dam dengs pa' 'gyur ram smras pa' rigs kyi bu de lta ma yan no l smras pa' btsun pa shi ri bu de bzhin du5 byang chub de ni nam (2) mkha'i ngo bo nyid kyi mshan nyid de li6 bdrag gi dge ba'i risa ba rnam der bsgos pas10 de bas na nam mkha' la mdo'zod mi skam mi zad mi dengs so | (D285a7-285b2) (1) ldn DQ: ldn pa S (2) ldn DQ: ldn pa S (3) nam mkha' la lDK: nam mkha' Q (4) mdo'zod bzhag DQ: mdo'zod yag (7) Q (error) (5) ji DQ: ci S (6) pa' am DQ: pa'am IS (7) smras pa D: smras pa Q (6) de bzhin du DQ: de bzhin du S (9) de la DQ: de la S (10) pas DQ: pas l5. For its Chinese parallels, see T404, 629b4-11. No exact parallels found in Dharmakṣema's translation. (Cf. Han 2021b, pp. 467-68).

On the formation of the Mahāsāṃśānapātha corpus, one might argue that the editors imported the concept of Vedic threefold universe of heaven (gagara), earth (dhāraṇa) and the space in between (ākāśa as in Chapter 10 of the Mahāsāṃśānapātha collection: *Ākāśābhidhiṣṭaparivarta* as well as the notion (sagara) to give a semi-mythological garb to its lists of doctrinal concepts.

D148, 253a2-4: rigs kyi bu chos bzhis dang (3) ldn na1 byang chub sens dpa' sbyin pa nam mkha' dang mtsungas pa yin te l bzhis gang zhe na l di ita ste2 bdag rnam par dag pas sens can rnam par dag pa la l 'jug pa dang | sams can rnam par dag pas sbyin pa rnam par dag pa la l 'jug pa dang | sbyin pa rnam par (4) dag pas bzhongo ba rnam par dag pa la l 'jug pa dang | bzhongo ba rnam par dag pas 3 byang chub rnam par dag pa la l 'jug pa ste l rigs kyi bu chos bzhis po de dag dang ldn na4 byang chub sens dpa' sbyin pa nam mkha' dang mtsungas pa yin no l1 (D148, 253a2-4) (1) na DQ: na S (2) ste DQ: ste S (3) pas DQ: pas S (4) na DQ: na S (5)15. For its Chinese parallels, see T397(8), 96b15-21; T404, 616c3-8. (Cf. Han 2021b, pp. 133-34).
The Tibetan literally reads "a living being going in/to the sky (de nas bdud sdig can tshig 'di thos nas sems can nam mkhar 'gro)

The symbol of the sea has had a strong afterlife in Buddhism, not the least in the name Dalai.

In other Mahayana sutras, the frame stories are sometimes more developed, and usually taken from the then classical collection, the frame stories are quite minimal, but the bodhisatva, carrying the symbolic name, come from a distant universe, and they have, as in many Mahayana sutras, a quite confrontational Madhyamaka style dialogue with a Mahasam. nipata (13)

For its Chinese parallels, see T.397(8), 110a26-c11, T.404, 640c26-641b2 (Cf. Han 2021b, pp. 735–40).

Cf. Dhammapada 93: yassasavā pariprakītāhālae anissito suññatīt aniñittam as eva vimokkha yassa gocaro ñakkhe 'va sakuntakānam padam tassasa durakāyam.

In Dasabhūmaprastāra (Radher 1926, p. 10): yathātantraske śakuneh pañadhāra vaktum na śakuneh na ca darśanapagam | tathāvāt satva jinaputra bhūmāv convo kāṃ sāvy u gandrām kuta eva srotum || "Just as the track of a bird in the air can neither be spoken nor seen by learned ones, all the stages of the conqueror cannot be expressed, how much less to hear." On the term jinaputra (Tib. rgyal ba'i sras bu) used in the Buddhistvatsamsaka texts, see (Skilling and Saerji 2012).

In Vimalakirtinirdesha (Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature (SGBSL) 2004: 6.1): tadathā mañjūśrī akāle śakunipadam evum bodhisatvena sarvasatvāt pratyavakṣayethī || Just like the track of a bird in the sky, the bodhisattva should consider all living beings.

The Tibetan literally reads "a living being going in/to the sky (samsa can nam mukha 'gro)," but the earliest version (T.397(8)) contains "a bird (nīva 鳥)." See the underlined portions in the following footnote.

samsa can nam mukha 'gro mod kyi || de la 'gro bai rjes kyang med || samsa can byang chub phyir spyod kyang || (4) de ni spyod pa'i mtshan ma min || (288a3-4) (5) ryes DS: rien Q. For its Chinese parallels, see T.397, 110a26-27: 如鳥行空 無有跡行 菩行寂静 行不可見; T.404, 630b12: 僅空難成 菩提行無 (Cf. Han 2021b, pp. 493–94).

'di lta ste dper na || nam mukha 'la bya rjes kyi gnas med kyang sgras gnas nu brjod pa de lzinu dnges phyang rgyas kyung ba 'ang kyung ba med pa ste l'on kyung skye bai' sgras brjod do || (D305a5) (1) 'di lta ste dper na || 'di lta ste dper na QS (2) de dper na || DS: rien Q. For its Chinese parallels, see T.404, 637a22-32 (Cf. Han 2021b, pp. 631–32).

stong gsum dag gi rgya mthos'i chu ni gzhald bar nur kyung srid || (3) phyogs bci dag gi nam mukha 'la bya rjes brjod par nur kyung srid || mi 'ga' zhig gis sems can kuns sems gcig tu byed srid kyi || thub pa'i sras kyi yon tan chen po zad par mi nur so || (D134b2-3). For its Chinese parallels, see T.397, 121c22-23; T.404, 640c24-25 (Cf. Han 2021b, pp. 729–30).

The Mahāyāna dharmaparāyāgas are made up by such textual elements as stanzas of praise (stotra), vows and aspirations (prāṇidhāna), stories of past deeds (pārṇayoga), predictions of future Buddhahood (trāyākaraṇa), lists and inventories of dharmas and their relations (mātrikā), incantations (dhāranī), and transmission or enthrustment (parināmā). Cf. (Skilling 2014–2015, pp. 46–47.

In the Mahāsannipāta collection, the frame stories are quite minimal, but the bodhisattva, carrying the symbolic name, come from a distant universe, and they have, as in many Mahāyāna sūtras, a quite confrontationad Mahāyama style dialogue with a śrāvakā. In other Mahāyāna sūtras, the frame stories are sometimes more developed, and usually taken from the then classical Buddhist lore and changed to suit the Mahāyāna ideology.

The symbol of the sea has had a strong afterlife in Buddhism, not the least in the name Dalai, rgya mthos in Tibetan, both meaning "Sea (of Wisdom)."

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