The Works of Maitreya: English Translations

Eastern Tradition Research Institute
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INTRODUCTION

Maitreya is the coming Buddha. If he has not yet come, how can we have any of his works? According to traditional accounts, the Indian teacher Asaṅga was able to ascend to the Tuṣita Heaven where Maitreya dwells, and receive teachings from him. These teachings were then written down by Asaṅga. Here is this story as told in Geshe Wangyal’s book, The Door of Liberation (1973 ed., pp. 52-54; 1995 ed., pp. 31-33):

Nine hundred years after the parinirvāṇa of Gautama Buddha, Ārya Asaṅga was born. In his youth he completed intensive studies in a monastery and in middle life withdrew to a cave to meditate. He determined not to give up his meditation until Maitreya, the bodhisattva of love and compassion and buddha-to-come, manifested himself openly before him.

When, after three years, he had no results, Asaṅga became discouraged and left his cave. Nearby, he met a man who was making a needle from an iron spike by rubbing it with a piece of cotton. Seeing this, Asaṅga’s patience returned and he went back to his cave and meditated unceasingly for six more years. Still Maitreya did not manifest himself. Disheartened that he had meditated for nine years without even a sign of success, Asaṅga again left his cave. Outside he saw how a rock had been completely worn down by single drops of water and the beating wings of passing birds. Again his patience returned and he resumed his meditation; this time for another three years. But finally, Asaṅga despaired completely of realizing his aim and set out on the journey to return to his monastery.

On the outskirts of Acinta he saw an old she-dog whose hindquarters were raw and crawling with maggots. He felt great pity for her and wanted to relieve her suffering, but he could not bear to harm the maggots. Instead, he cut a piece of flesh from his own thigh and placed it near the dog. He then put out his tongue and prepared to transfer the larvae one by one, but the sight of the wound was so disgusting that he had to close his eyes. Suddenly, there was a great ringing in his ears, and he opened
his eyes. Standing before him, in a magnificent, radiant light, was Maitreya. Despite his joy, Ārya Asaṅga exclaimed without thinking, “Why did you never come to me during the twelve years I earnestly meditated?”

Maitreya answered, “I was with you all the time, but you could not see me, because you did not yet have great compassion. If you do not believe me, carry me through the town on your shoulders and try to show me to the people.”

Then Ārya Asaṅga raised Maitreya on his shoulder and carried him through the town, hoping to let everyone see the wonderful buddha. But no one in the town saw Maitreya, and only one old woman saw a dog on his shoulder.

After this, Maitreya magically transported Ārya Asaṅga to Tuṣita heaven, where he stayed for fifty earth-years studying the Dharma. When he returned to India, he brought with him the five treatises of Maitreya, the central teachings of the lineage of compassion, used in the Tibetan tradition as root texts for the study of abhidharma and the prajñāpāramitā.

The five treatises of Maitreya, written down by Asaṅga, are listed below. They are written in verse.

1. *Mahāyāṇa-sūtrālaṃkāra*  
   “Ornament to the Scriptures of the Great Vehicle”
2. *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*  
   “Ornament to the Realizations”
3. *Madhyānta-vibhāga*  
   “Analysis of the Middle and the Extremes”
4. *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga*  
   “Analysis of Phenomena and Their True Nature”
5. *Ratna-gotra-vibhāga* (or *Mahāyāna Uttara-tantra Śāstra*)  
   “Analysis of the Lineage of the [Three] Jewels”  
   (or “Treatise on the Later Doctrine of the Great Vehicle”)

Such is the Tibetan tradition. In Chinese tradition the works of Maitreya are, first and foremost, the great Yogācāra-bhūmi, and two of the five treatises listed above, the *Mahāyāṇa-sūtrālaṃkāra*, and the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*. Two more, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*
The Works of Maitreya

and the *Dharma-dharmatā-vihāga*, are not found in the Chinese Buddhist canon. The fifth of these, the *Ratna-gotra-vihāga*, has no author statement in the canon, but Fa-tsang reports that it is by Sāramati. The *Yogācāra-bhūmi*, a massive work in seventeen sections, is also found in the Tibetan Buddhist canon. It is said in Tibetan tradition to be by Asaṅga rather than Maitreya, even though acknowledged to be based on Maitreya’s teachings. The story of how Maitreya taught the *Yogācāra-bhūmi* at the request of Asaṅga is given in “The Life of Vasu-bandhu, by Paramārtha (A.D. 499-569),” translated from the Chinese by J. Takakusu, in *Tʻoung pao*, ser. 2, vol. 5, 1904, pp. 274-275:

He [Asaṅga] afterwards often went up to the Tuṣita heaven in order to ask Maitreya the doctrine of the Mahā-yāna sūtras. The Bodhi-sattva expounded it extensively for him. Whenever he acquired anything he used to come back to Jambu-dvīpa [India] to teach it to others. Most of those hearing him did not believe him. Asaṅga, Teacher of the Law, then prayed saying: “I now intend to make all beings fully believe in the doctrine of the Mahā-yāna. I only pray thee, Oh Great Master, to come down to Jambu-dvīpa and propound the Mahā-yāna in order that all beings may be fully convinced of it.” Maitreya, thereupon, in accordance with his prayer, came down to Jambu-dvīpa at night, flooding it with great rays of light, had a large assembly of those connected with (the law) called in a lecture hall, and began to recite the sūtra of the Saptā-daśā-bhūmis [“Seventeen Stages,” the *Yogācāra-bhūmi*]. After having recited a passage he would explain its purport. The seventeen Bhūmis were finished during the nights of four months. Although all were together in one and the same hall listening to the discourse, it was, nevertheless, only Asaṅga, Teacher of the Law, who had access to the Bodhisattva Maitreya, while the others could merely hear him from afar. At night, all together heard the religious discourse by Maitreya, while in the day time Asaṅga, Teacher of the Law, commented once again, for the sake of the others, upon what was taught by the Bodhisattva. In this way all the people could hear and believe in the doctrine of the Mahā-yāna.
Here is a brief listing of the English translations of the five books of Maitreya. More complete bibliographic listings follow for these five and also for the few portions of the Yogācāra-bhūmi that have so far been translated into English.


**FULL BIBLIOGRAPHIC LISTING**

The *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*, “Ornament to the Scriptures of the Great Vehicle,” was the first work of the Yogācāra school to be published in the West. Its original Sanskrit was edited by Sylvain Lévi and published in Paris in 1907, followed by his French translation of it in 1911. More recently, it was chosen as the founding cornerstone of the long-term project to translate the entire Tanjur, in which its Tibetan translation is found. The Tanjur is the portion of the Tibetan Buddhist canon containing exegetical works, while the Kanjur is the portion containing the words of the Buddha. It was chosen because it teaches the path of compassion, and may be regarded as the primary sourcebook of the Maitreya lineage of loving kindness, so valued in Tibet.
The Works of Maitreya

_Mahāyāna-sūtrālāṃkāra_

1. Limaye, Surekha Vijay. _Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra_. Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica Series no. 94. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992. (Includes the Sanskrit text; includes Asaṅga’s or Vasubandhu’s commentary.) [Not recommended, as the translator’s teachers who she relied on were wholly uninformed regarding Buddhism. To give just three of many examples: _saraṇa-gamana_, “going for refuge,” is translated as “recourse to surrender” (p. 24); _ātma-drṣṭi_, “[false] view of self,” is translated as “one’s own view point” (p. 69); and _pudgala_, “person” is translated as the Jaina “matter” (p. 441).]


The _Abhisamayālaṃkāra_, “Ornament to the Realizations,” is the most widely studied book in Tibet, since it systematically lays out the path to Buddhahood. This path layout was extracted by Maitreya from the profound but diffuse Perfection of Wisdom (_prajñā-pāramitā_) literature. But this book is only an outline, hardly more than a list of technical terms. Incomprehensible by itself, it requires extensive explanation. Many commentaries on it were written. So it was studied in Tibet with full commentaries to fill in the outline and explain the terms. Obermiller studied these texts with his Tibetan teachers, and prepared two books based on them. One is a valuable introduction and overview. The other is a detailed analysis, unfortunately never finished.

_Abhisamayālaṃkāra_


*see also:* Obermiller, E. *Analysis of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. 3 fascicles. Calcutta Oriental Series, no. 27. London: Luzac & Co., 1933, 1936, 1943; one-volume reprint, [Fremont, California:] Asian Humanities Press, [2001]. (This goes to chapter 4, verse 27, where it ends abruptly on p. 404 in the midst of a section, due to the death of the author.)

*see also:* Weishaar-Günter, Cornelia, final translation.

The Works of Maitreya

The Madhyānta-vibhāga, “Analysis of the Middle and the Extremes,” provides the classic description of the characteristic Yogācāra teaching of the three natures (svabhāva). These are the imagined, the dependent, and the completely perfected, defined in chapter one. Its chapter four is the source of one of the two main methods used in Tibet for non-tantric meditation, that of the five faults and the eight antidotes. The other, that of the nine meditative stages or “thought placings” (citta-sthiti), comes from the Śrāvaka-bhūmi section of the Yogācāra-bhūmi. The complete translations of the Madhyānta-vibhāga are here listed first, then the partial translations are listed by chapter. The listings are by date of publication.

Madhyānta-vibhāga


3. Levinson, Jules. The Treatise that Differentiates the Middle from the Extremes, by Asaṅga based on the inspiration of The Buddha Maitreya; A Commentary by The Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 1996 (bound photocopied form). [This is the only one of the four modern commentaries by Thrangu Rinpoche originally published by Namo Buddha Publications that was not revised and reprinted in India by Sri Satguru Publications, perhaps because the translation of the root text herein needs work.]

4. Dharmachakra Translation Committee. Middle Beyond Extremes. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2006. (Includes the commentaries of Khenpo Shenga and Ju Mipham.)
The Works of Maitreya

Madhyânta-vibhâga, partial translations
1. [partial, chapter 1 of 5] Stcherbatsky, Th. Madhyânta-vibhâga: Discourse on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes. Bibliotheca Buddhica, 30. Leningrad, 1936; several reprints. (Includes Vasubandhu’s commentary; includes Sthiramati’s sub-commentary.)

2. [partial, chapter 1 of 5] Friedmann, David Lasar. Madhyântavibhâga†îkå: Analysis of the Middle Path and the Extremes. Utrecht, 1937; reprint, Talent, Oregon: Canon Publications, 1984. (This is Sthiramati’s sub-commentary, including Maitreya’s text.) [This translation was made independently of Stcherbatsky’s.]


The Dharma-dharmatâ-vibhâga, “Analysis of Phenomena and Their True Nature,” is the only one of the five books of Maitreya whose original Sanskrit has not yet been published. We await access to the manuscript seen by Rahula Sankrityayana on his 1938 trip to Tibet. This text, along with the Ratna-gotra-vibhâga, was lost, or as some say, hidden, for centuries in India, before
being rediscovered by Maitripa in the eleventh century C.E. This may explain why it never went to China. While many Buddhist texts teach the impermanent and ever-changing *dharmas* that make up the phenomenal world, this text also teaches the true nature of *dharmas*. This nature is beyond dualistic conception, so is described as “suchness” (*tathatā*).

*Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga*

1. Levinson [sic, for Levinson], Jules. *The Differentiation of Dharma and Dharmata, by Asanga, With the Inspiration of Maitreya; With a Commentary by Khenchen Thrangu, Rinpoche*. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 1997 (bound photocopied form); revised reprint as: *Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, by Asanga and Maitreya; with a commentary by Thrangu Rinpoche*. Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica Series, no. 217. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2001. [“This root text was translated by the Marpa Translation Group under the direction of Khenpo Tsültrim.”—p. 4; i.e., it is the same translation as the one by Jim Scott listed below.]


The *Ratna-gotra-vibhāga*, “Analysis of the Lineage of the [Three] Jewels,” or *Uttara-tantra*, the “Later Doctrine,” differs from the other works of Maitreya in that it does not employ the characteristic Yogācāra vocabulary and concepts such as the three natures. Rather, it teaches the *tathāgata-garbha*, “matrix of the buddhas.” In fact, it is the basic textbook of this teaching. This teaching is that everyone has a buddha-nature within; that is, everyone has the potential to become a fully enlightened buddha. Unlike most Buddhist texts, this text uses terms such as permanent in its descriptions. So it has been used to support the teaching of Shentong (*gzhan stong*), that buddha qualities exist ultimately, being empty of everything other than themselves.


see also: Trangu Rinpoche. *The Peerless Continuum; A Commentary to the Uttaratantra of Maitreya/Asanga according to the tradition of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche*, trans. by Matthew Kapstien [sic, for Kapstein], & ed. by Brian Beresford. London: Mahasandhi Books, 1983. (This is a loose-leaf Tibetan pecha-style book.)


see also: Hookham, S. K. *The Buddha Within: Tathagatagarbha Doctrine According to the Shentong Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. (Section Three includes a paraphrase of the Ratnagotravibhāga and Vyākhya commentary according to the gzhan stong interpretation, and a translation of Kongtrul’s Introduction to his commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga.)

The Yogācāra-bhūmi, “The Stages of Yoga Practice,” consists of seventeen sections, each called a bhūmi, “ground,” a level or stage. Their Sanskrit titles are listed below, along with English translations by Alex Wayman from his, “Nescience and Insight According to Asaṅga’s Yogācārabhūmi,” Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula, London: Gordon Fraser, 1980, pp. 251-252:

1. pañca-vijñāna-kāya-samprayuktā bhūmi, “stage associated with the set of five perceptions [or consciousnesses]”
2. mano-bhūmi, “stage of mind”
3. savitarika savicārā bhūmi, “stage with inquiry and with conclusions”
4. avitarika vicāra-mātrā bhūmi, “stage without inquiry and with only conclusions”
5. avitarikāvicārā bhūmi, “stage without inquiry or conclusions”
6. samāhitā bhūmi, “stabilized stage”
7. asamāhitā bhūmi, “unstabilized stage”
8. sacittikā bhūmi, “stage with thought”
9. acittikā bhūmi, “stage without thought”
10. śrutamayī bhūmi, “stage consisting of hearing”
11. cintāmayī bhūmi, “stage consisting of pondering”
12. bhāvanāmayī bhūmi, “stage consisting of contemplation”
13. śrāvakabhūmi, “stage of the disciple”
14. pratyeka-buddha-bhūmi, “stage of the self-enlightened person”
15. bodhisattva-bhūmi, “stage of the bodhisattva”
16. sopadhikā bhūmi, “stage of nirvāṇa with remainder”
17. nirupadhikā bhūmi, “stage of nirvāṇa without remainder”

Besides these seventeen sections of the main text, there are five more parts, in the nature of extensive supplements. They are:

1. Viniscaya-saṃgrahaṇī, “collection of ascertainmentst”
2. Vastu-saṃgrahaṇī, “collection of topics”
3. Vinaya-saṃgrahaṇī, [included by Bu-ston in the above part]
4. Paryāya-saṃgrahaṇī, “collection of synonyms”
5. Vivaraṇa-saṃgrahaṇī, “collection of explanations”
Yogācāra-bhūmi

(2) mano-bhūmi, “stage of mind”

Yogācāra-bhūmi

(3-5) savitarkā savicārā bhūmi, “stage with inquiry and with conclusions”; avitarkā vicāra-mātrā bhūmi, “stage without inquiry and with only conclusions”; avitarkāvicārā bhūmi, “stage without inquiry or conclusions”

Yogācāra-bhūmi

(8) sacittikā bhūmi, “stage with thought”
(9) acittikā bhūmi, “stage without thought”

Yogācāra-bhūmi

(11) cintāmayi bhūmi, “stage consisting of pondering”
(The cintāmayi bhūmi has three parts.)


Yogācāra-bhūmi

(13) śrāvaka-bhūmi, “stage of the disciple”
(The Śrāvaka-bhūmi has 4 parts, or yogasthāna.)


Prateyaka-buddha-bhūmi

(14) prateyaka-buddha-bhūmi, “stage of the self-enlightened person”

1. Kloppenborg, Ria. “Appendix.” In The Paceyabuddha: A Buddhist Ascetic, pp. 126-129. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974. [*It is certainly needless to continue this enumeration of elementary mistakes, but it is necessary to point out that the translation of the Prateyakabuddhabhūmi is, if possible, even...*]


**Yogācāra-bhūmi**

(15) *bodhisattva-bhūmi*, “stage of the bodhisattva”

(The *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* has three parts, having 18 chapters, 4 chapters, and 6 chapters, respectively.)


2. [partial, part 1, chapter 4, *tattvārtha paṭala*] (“The *tattva* chapter of the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* teaches doctrine, while the remaining chapters teach practice.”—Mkhas-grub-rje, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, p. 99)


*see also:* Bendall, Cecil, and Louis de la Vallée Poussin. “Bodhisattva-bhūmi: A Textbook of the Yogācāra School. An English Summary with notes and illustrative extracts from other Buddhistic works.” *Le Musée*, n.s., vol. 6,
The Works of Maitreya

1905, pp. 38-52; vol. 7, 1906, pp. 213-230 (covers part 1, chapters 1-4). This was continued in French as: