

Unearthing the Cosmos: Possible Scenarios Behind the Lost *Lokasthāna-sūtra*

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Abstract

Despite its historical relevance, comprehensive discourses of the Buddhist cosmos, or cosmologies, have received insufficient scholarly attention. In China, several Buddhist cosmologies were circulating by the fourth century—well before the appearance of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, commonly considered the *locus classicus* for Buddhist cosmology. The titles of these earliest Buddhist cosmologies used the term *lokasthāna* (loutan 樓炭), meaning “establishing the cosmos.” Today, only one of these *Lokasthāna-sūtras* is extant. However, manuscript witnesses from Dunhuang preserve a text called *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Loutan jing lüe* 樓炭經略), which purports to be a condensed extract of a *Lokasthāna-sūtra*. In this essay, I demonstrate that this text summarizes a lost cosmology by providing evidence that *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is not a digest of the extant *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經). I speculate about other possible scenarios behind the unknown root text and suggest that the most likely source for *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* may in fact be Dharmarakṣa’s lost cosmology of 303.

Keywords:

Lokasthāna-sūtra, cosmology, Dunhuang, medieval China, manuscripts

發掘三界 ——丟失的《樓炭經》可能的情境

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摘要

儘管有著歷史上的重要性，關於佛教宇宙觀或宇宙論的全面論述一直未受到足夠的學術關注。中國在 4 世紀時就已出現了好幾種的佛教宇宙論，其時間甚至比被視為佛教宇宙論權威性作品的《阿毘達磨俱舍論》更早。這些早期的佛教宇宙論使用「樓炭」作為標題，意思是「建立宇宙」。這些「樓炭」經典中至今僅有一部保存下來。然而，在敦煌文獻中卻保存了一份名為《樓炭經略》的文本，據信是《樓炭經》的精簡提要。本文藉由提供《樓炭經略》並不是現存《大樓炭經》提要的證據，來說明該文本所概述的是一種已經失傳的宇宙論。關於這部未知的的文本，我考量了一些可能的情形，認為《樓炭經略》的來源很可能是實際上竺法護於 303 年所翻譯而現已失傳的一部宇宙論。

關鍵詞：

敦煌、手稿、宇宙學、法華經、竺法護

Well into the twentieth century, Buddhist cosmology was a salient cultural domain across Asia.¹ From India to Thailand, Burma, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and the Himalayas, cosmology was a critical three-dimensional discourse establishing the ground and frame of Buddhist ontology by explaining the domains of universal time, space, and causality.² These three dimensions can

¹ See, for instance, the case of the Chinese scholar-monk Yinshun 印順, whose 1949 book, *Introduction to Buddhism (Fofa gailun 佛法概論)*, incorporated a map of Asia set within the framework of Buddhist cosmology. This map would cause uproar five years later in Taiwan, where the Guomindang 國民黨 (KMT) and other Buddhists on the island interpreted this map, which located the cosmic utopia of Uttarakuru (*beijuluo zhou 北拘羅州*) within the Tibetan plateau, to mean that Yinshun was a Communist sympathizer. After redacting and editing the book, Yinshun was ultimately cleared of all allegations, and the map would be reintroduced to subsequent editions. See Marcus Bingenheimer, *Der Mönchsgelehrte Yinshun (*1906) und seine Bedeutung für den Chinesisch-Taiwanischen Buddhismus im 20. Jahrhundert*. Heidelberg: Edition Forum (Würzburger Sinologische Schriften, 2004), 110–115.

² Despite its historical importance, relatively few extended studies have focused on Buddhist cosmology. For general overviews, see Randy Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology: Science and Theology in the Images of Motion and Light* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), 1989, and Sadakata Akira, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins* (Tokyo: Kōsei Pub), 1997. For Buddhist cosmology in India, see Rupert Gethin, “Cosmology and Meditation: From the Aggañña-Sutta to the Mahāyāna,” *History of Religions* Vol. 36 (1997): 183–217, and Richard Gombrich, “The Buddha’s Book of Genesis?,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35(2/3) (1992): 159–178; in Thailand, Frank E. Reynolds, and Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (Berkeley, Calif: The Group in Buddhist Studies, University of California), 1982; in Burma, see James E. Bogle, *Buddhist Cosmology: The Study of a Burmese Manuscript* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 2017; in China, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 1994; in Tibet and the Himalayas, see Siglinde Dietz, “Remarks on Four Cosmological Texts from Tun-huang,” *Tibetan Studies*, Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften (1988): 111–117; see also Dietz, “Remarks on an Hitherto Unknown Cosmological Text in the Kanjur,” in Helga Uebach, and Jampa Losang Panglung, *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies: Schloss Hohenkammer—München 1985* (München: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), 273–283; and Eric Huntington, *Creating the Universe: Depictions of the Cosmos in Himalayan Buddhism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 2019.

Teiser defines “cosmology” as “ideas about time and space, rebirth and causality.” See Stephen F. Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press) 2006,

be thought of as an x-, y-, and z-axis on a graph. On the x-axis, cosmological time includes both cosmogony, the origins of the cosmos and civilization, and eschatology, their destruction; on the y-axis is cosmological space, or cosmography, dealing with the physical structure of the cosmos; the intersecting z-axis plots cosmological causality, delineating the processes of karma and rebirth.

Buddhist cosmological discourses pay special attention to the dimension of space and its intersecting axis of karmic and soteriological causality. The structure of the early, roughly pre-Mahāyāna, Buddhist cosmos was generally understood to consist of a series of world-systems, each structurally identical to one another. Each world system is bounded by one or more iron mountain ranges called Cakravāḍa, located at the periphery of the world and encircling a vast ocean in which lie four island continents, each located in one of the cardinal directions. The four continents surround another series of concentric mountain ranges that encircle a central mountain, Sumeru (Pali, Sineru) or Meru. Above Sumeru, and on its slopes, are a series of increasingly blissful heavens; below, Sumeru descends into the ocean and is rooted into the earth at the seafloor. The earth is a flat disc, resting on a disc of water held up in empty space by a disc of wind whipping around below it. A series of hot and cold hells are variously located, sometimes below the southern continent, sometimes in the dark gaps between the Cakravāḍa mountain ranges at the world's periphery, and sometimes in the gaps between world systems. All this world system up to the sixth—or seventh heaven, depending on the text—atop Sumeru comprises the Realm of Desire. Located vertically above the Realm of Desire are heavens that constitute the Realm of Form, and finally the Realm of Formlessness. Together, these three segments constitute the Triple Realms (*sanjie* 三界) of a single world system.

With its cosmic mountains and seas, planes of heavens and hells, and utopic islands and underwater civilizations, one might think that Buddhist cosmology was but a fanciful, irrelevant footnote to a sophisticated philosophical and practical religious tradition. There is scriptural support for such a position. In

p. 35. With a more expansive definition, I.W. Mabbett writes, “A cosmology is not an adventitious assemblage of beliefs; it is an integrated whole. Its, at least, presumptive unity is a condition of thought about the world in which we live. It is not an alternative to religion but a vocabulary for the phenomenal, an ordering of the reality of what we see; it offers physics (modern science is a cosmology), while religion may offer metaphysics.” See I. W. Mabbett, “The Symbolism of Mount Meru,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 1 (1983): 64–83 at 83.

several of the earliest suttas, the Buddha admonishes cosmological concerns as distractions from the path out of *samsāra*.³

But despite the Buddha's admonitions, historically, the structure and nature of the cosmos did indeed matter to Buddhists. After all, the cosmos was the physical, if invisible, manifestation of Buddhist rebirth, giving unseen form to the processes of karma and soteriology. Actions in a given lifetime together with those from countless past lives were understood to produce karmic seeds that bore fruit in the form of future lives in various stations and their corresponding cosmographic locations. Future lives could take the form of various types of sentient beings bound to certain physical regions of the cosmos: *devas* in the heavens, hell-beings in the hells, humans and animals on the four terrestrial island continents located in each of the cardinal directions, *pretas* below or upon the southern continent of Jambudvīpa, and, in some cases, *asuras* beneath the ocean. Only the most spiritually advanced beings—buddhas, bodhisattvas, and certain *devas* such as Brahmā—were capable of traversing or escaping those karmic and cosmic boundaries. All other sentient beings, no matter how mundane or divine, were ensnared in the bonds of this cosmographic structure.

Put another way, in medieval China the Buddhist cosmos was understood to be a “prison” (*laoyu* 牢獄) trapping sentient beings in a *samsāric* labyrinth of endless existence marked by inevitable suffering. In 636, the Buddhist layman Li Shizheng 李師政 wrote in his encyclopedia, the *Famen mingyi ji* 法門名義集:

與色界等一切眾生在此四重鐵圍之中。流轉生死不能得出。名為牢獄。此等一段眾生善惡萬差苦樂雜穢。故名娑婆世界。釋迦如來於中緇化令得出世。

Together with the stations of the form realm, all sentient beings are within this four-fold Cakravāḍa, transmigrating through birth and death, and unable to escape. This [cosmos] is therefore called a prison. In this expanse of space, sentient beings both good and bad experience all manner of suffering, joy and defilement. For this reason, it is called the *Sahā* world [(lit. bearing, enduring, withstanding), a reference to the suffering sentient beings must endure]. It is here that the *tathāgata* Śākyamuni taught in order for others to escape the world.

³ For instance, in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (2.48, “The Cosmologist”; 5.41, “Reflection about the World”), the Buddha suggests that rather than reflecting on the world, one should instead reflect on the Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths.

As Li's passage demonstrates, Buddhists in China did not take heed of the Buddha's early admonitions against cosmology. Because of its foundational role at the very core of the Buddhist problem of *samsāra* and thus its practical solutions, cosmology was a ripe domain of cultural discourse. For centuries, early to medieval Chinese Buddhists spent extraordinary effort and resources to create texts, images, and spaces that map the unseen Buddhist cosmos and its invisible shackles that held Buddhists in karmic bondage.

A Brief History of Early Chinese Buddhist Cosmologies

Although cosmological elements appear throughout the earliest Buddhist *suttas*, comprehensive explications of the structure of the universe do not appear in the Pāli canon. While early Buddhists clearly understood that the cosmos existed, with the structure inherited from pre-existing Brahmanical traditions, the earliest Buddhist sources merely assume broad cultural cosmographic knowledge. Instead of comprehensive lessons explaining what the cosmos looks like, these sources instead use disparate cosmographic elements in the context of wider lessons on karma and rebirth. It was not until some centuries later that these cosmographic references would develop into full-fledged cosmologies. These early cosmologies were crafted through engaging narrative rather than the dry schematic approach of later abhidharmic cosmologies that arose in the sixth century. Although today the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* is held up as the standard Buddhist cosmology, it was a relatively late production, and at least six cosmologies already existed in China prior to its emergence.

Historical records indicate that Buddhist cosmologies were being produced in China as early as the first to third centuries, and certainly by the beginning of the fourth century. The titles of the first five recorded cosmologies share the Chinese binome *loutan* 樓炭, likely a transliteration or back-translation of the Sanskrit or Prakrit term *lokasthāna* meaning “establishing” or “forming the cosmos,” (*qishi* 起世, *lishi* 立世).⁴ Next to nothing is known of the first two of these cosmologies, which soon fell out of circulation. The third text is also lost, though more information can be gleaned from careful examination of the historical record. The fourth of these *Lokasthāna-sūtra* texts is the only one to survive today, while the fifth is also lost.

⁴ Charles Willemen, “Kumārajīva’s ‘Explanatory Discourse’ about Abhidharmic Literature,” *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* no. 12 (2008): 61.

First to Fourth Centuries: *Lokasthāna sūtras*

Daoxuan's 道宣 *Da Tang neidan lu* 大唐內典錄, written in 664, records a text called *The Sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Guan shi loutan jing* 觀世樓炭經) in three chapters, translated in the Later Han (25–220).⁵ Daoxuan considers this text to be apocryphal (*yiwei* 疑偽), as does the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Kaiyuan lu*) of 730 and the various versions of the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄.⁶ The monk Sengyou's 僧祐 (445–518) *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 notes that this text is extracted from a *Lokasthāna-sūtra*; however, it is unclear to which text this title refers, as this predates the earliest known *Lokasthāna-sūtra* of 303. Beyond this, no more is known about this lost text.

By the third century, a similarly titled cosmology appeared. The *Chu sanzang jiji* and *Kaiyuan lu* record a mainstream Buddhist cosmology, *The Smaller Sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Xiao guanshi loutan jing* 小觀世樓炭經), to which the *Kaiyuan lu* dates between the Wei 魏 (221–265) and Wu 吳 (222–280).⁷ This text was no longer extant by the time of the *Kaiyuan lu*'s compilation in 730, and the same is presumably true for the *Chu sanzang jiji* two centuries earlier. We might assume that this was a shorter version of *The Sūtra on Observing the Arising of the World*.

Both the aforementioned lost texts were produced by unknown translators. However, a third lost cosmology produced in the fourth century was translated by one of the most important translators in early Chinese Buddhism. On January 27, 303, a Yuezhi 月氏 (perhaps Tokharian) monk from Dunhuang, Dharmarakṣa, completed his translation of the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* in five fascicles. The original Indic text that Dharmarakṣa translated is no longer extant, and his own translation seems to have begun falling out of circulation between the sixth and seventh centuries. The earliest historical information about this text must be gleaned from a total of twelve Chinese characters in the *Chu sanzang jiji*, which records the claim by Dao'an in his lost *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 綜理眾經目錄 of 374 that a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* in five fascicles is a

⁵ The title perhaps contains a double translation, with both *shi* 世 (for *lishi* 立世) and *loutan* 樓炭 carrying the same meaning. For reconstructing the names of these foundational Chinese translations of Indic cosmologies, see Willemen.

⁶ T 2146, 55 and T 2147, 55.

⁷ The *Kaiyuan lu* includes the text under the section on “Lost texts by a single translator from the Lesser Vehicle” 小乘經單譯闕本 (T 2154, 55: 641c06).

Mahāyāna scripture.⁸ Although this record does not mention Dharmarakṣa by name, Sengyou records that Dharmarakṣa's *Lokasthāna-sūtra* consisted of five fascicles. It must then be the same text to which Dao'an refers. Unfortunately, Dao'an's catalogue is lost, and Sengyou's record does not provide any rationale for why his predecessor considered Dharmarakṣa's text to be a Mahāyāna scripture.

For unknown reasons, Dharmarakṣa's five-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra* did not remain in heavy circulation in the subsequent centuries following its translation. By 602, the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* was considered lost in Yancong's 彦琮 catalogue, the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄. However, Xuanying 玄應 (646–695) appears to have had access to the text, as he cites a five-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra* in his medieval glossary, *Sounds and Meanings of All the Scriptures* (*Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義).⁹ It thus appears that the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* may have survived in shifting pockets of influence, existing in some areas while perishing in others. The text may have circulated for several centuries before disappearing from the historical record.

In 307, soon after Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Lokasthāna-sūtra*, there appeared another text by the same name in six, rather than five, fascicles. This *Lokasthāna-sūtra* (T 23) enjoyed wide circulation in China, and today it is the earliest extant comprehensive Buddhist cosmology in any language. There is some disagreement over authorship of this text. Some catalogues, including the Taishō, ascribe it to the two monks Fali 法立 and Faju 法炬, the latter of whom may have been Dharmarakṣa's own student.¹⁰ Other catalogues, such as the *Chu sanzang jiji*, name only Faju,¹¹ and others still, such as Daoxuan's *Neidian lu*, list Fali as the sole translator.¹² It is possible that these ambiguous

⁸ Sengyou records, “The *Lokasthāna-sūtra* in five fascicles (Lord [Dao']an says that it belongs to the *vaipulya* section) 樓炭經五卷 (安公云出方等部)” (T 2145, 55:8c20). The “*vaipulya* section” refers to the period when the Buddha was thought to teach what became the Mahāyāna scriptures.

⁹ T 2128, 54: 662a21–b08.

¹⁰ Fajing's 法經 *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 of 594 is the first to introduce Fali 法立 as a co-translator with Faju. On Faju, see Daniel Boucher, “Dharmarakṣa and the Transmission of Buddhism to China.” *Asia Major* 19, no. 1–2 (2006): 21.

¹¹ T 2145, 55: 14b08; see also the biography of Dharmarakṣa in the same text wherein Sengyou introduces a monk of unknown heritage named Faju 法炬 who, Sengyou says, translated the *Lokasthāna-sūtra*, and together with Fali 法立 translated other sūtras.

¹² In the entry on the six-fascicle version, Daoxuan includes no translator 樓炭經六卷 (第二出見別錄與法護出五卷者小異出長阿含安錄無) (T 2149, 55: 237c05).

records ascribe only one author to the work as a result of the use of shorthand. What is certain is that by the sixth century, the six-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra* came to be referred to as the *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經), perhaps as a way of distinguishing it from Dharmakṣa's text in only five fascicles.¹³ The *Neidian lu* explains that the *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* consisted of 130 sheets of paper,¹⁴ while Jingtai's 靜泰 *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 of ca. 663–665 gives 140 sheets.¹⁵ No account survives attesting to the number of sheets of Dharmakṣa's lost five fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra*, though we might reasonably assume that, if a six-fascicle scripture used 130 to 140 sheets of paper, then each fascicle must have consisted of roughly twenty-one to twenty-three sheets of paper. Therefore, a five-fascicle scripture would have contained roughly 105 to 117 sheets.

An eight-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra* appeared soon after Fali and Faju's translation. The earliest reference to this text is made in the sixth-century Chinese translation of the *Lokasthānābhidharma-śāstra* (*Lishi apitan lun* 立世阿毘曇論). This cosmological abhidharmic commentary explains that Faju produced the eight-fascicle text after having participated in Fali's translation, but because "its meaning was not made fully known, he then expanded it."¹⁶ This suggests that Faju was dissatisfied with Fali's work and retranslated the entire text, or perhaps he added these two additional chapters as appendices to their joint effort. Unfortunately, we cannot know, as this text is lost. The

However, in the eight-fascicle entry, he refers to Fali as the translator of the six-fascicle version 樓炭經八卷(第三出是長阿含世記一分與法護法立所出五卷六卷者大同略廣異先共法立出以意未悉故廣之見敏度及寶唱錄) (T 2149, 55: 237c21–22). The *Kaiyuan lu* again lists both Fali and Faju, 樓炭經六卷(或云大樓炭經或五卷或八卷) 西晉沙門釋法立共法炬譯(第二譯) (T 2154, 55: 611b10–11). And the *Zhenyuan lu* follows suit, 樓炭經六卷(或云大樓炭經或五卷或八卷) 西晉沙門釋法立共法炬譯 第二譯 (T 2157, 55: 944c15–16).

13 The *Kaiyuan lu* of 730 provides the first conclusive evidence that the six-fascicle version of the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* came to be called the *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經), as it is today in the Taishō canon. See T 2154, 55: 499a21. Although used in a comment in the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, as well as a citation in the *Fayuan zhulin*, this is the first conclusive evidence that it is indeed the six-fascicle version that is the *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*.

14 T 2149, 55: 297c25.

15 T 2148, 55: 194a28.

16 T 2034, 49: 66c10–11. Fei Changfang notes that he is drawing from the *Jing lun du lu* 經論都錄 by Zhi Mindu 支敏度 (ca. fourth century) and the *Baochang lu* 寶唱錄 of 518–519.

Neidian lu and *Kaiyuan lu* place the eight-fascicle text as the third and final of the three translations, also ascribing it to Faju.¹⁷ All accounts, aside from what is likely a scribal error in the *Lokasthāna-abhidharma-śāstra* (*Lishi apitan lun* 立世阿毘曇論),¹⁸ suggest that the six-fascicle version was the second translation, and the eight-fascicle version was the third.¹⁹

Rounding out the cosmologies using *lokasthāna* in the title is the *Smaller Lokasthāna-sūtra* in one fascicle (*Xiao loutan jing* 小樓炭經一卷). This does not appear to refer to *The Smaller Sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Xiao guanshi loutan jing* 小觀世樓炭經), as Daoxuan cites the two separately and considers both of these texts to be apocryphal.²⁰ Apart from this, we know nothing of the content of this lost text.

Following the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* trend, a group of āgamic and abhidharmic cosmologies were translated in China from the fifth to seventh centuries, though these texts are beyond the scope of this paper. Āgamic cosmologies, characterized by a narrative style, include *The Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos* (*Shiji jing* 世記經, T1) translated in 413, *The Sūtra on the Establishment of the Cosmos* (*Qishi jing* 起世經, T 24) and *The Sūtra on the Origins of the Establishment of the Cosmos* (*Qishi yinben jing* 起世因本經, T 25) both translated around 600. Abhidharmic cosmologies, employing a schematic approach, include chapters of the *Abidharmakośa-bhāṣya* translated in the sixth

¹⁷ For Daoxuan, see 樓炭經八卷(第三出是長阿含世記一分與法護法立所出五卷六卷者大同略廣異先共法立出以意未悉故廣之見敏度及寶唱錄 (T 2149, 55: 237c21–22); for *Kaiyuan*, see 樓炭經八卷 西晉沙門釋法炬譯(第三譯)(T 2154, 55: 638a15).

¹⁸ In the *Lokasthāna-abhidharma-śāstra*, both the six- and eight-fascicle texts are recorded as a second recension (*di er chu* 第二出) of the *Lokasthāna-sūtra*, suggesting that they may be contemporaneous. However, it is more likely that this is a scribal error. The *Lidao sanbao ji* records, 樓炭經六卷(第二出。見別錄與法護出五卷者小異。出長阿含。安錄無)(T 2034, 49: 66b22).

¹⁹ See Daoxuan's *Da Tang neidian lu* of 644 (T 2149, 55: 237c21–22); the *Kaiyuan* and *Zhenyuan* catalogues agree. *Kaiyuan lu*: 樓炭經六卷(第二出或云大樓炭經出長阿含與第四分記世經同本異出與法護所出五卷者少異或五卷或八卷見僧祐錄)(T 2154, 55: 499a22), 樓炭經八卷(第三出是長阿含第四分記世經異譯與法護法立所出者大同先共法立出以意未悉故廣之見敏度寶唱二錄)(T 2154, 55: 499c09); cf. *Zhenyuan lu*: 樓炭經六卷(第二出或云大樓炭經出長阿含與第四分記世經同本異出與法護所出五卷者少異或五卷或八卷見僧祐錄)(T 2157, 55: 796b09–10), 樓炭經八卷(第三出是長阿含第四分記世經異譯與法立所出者大同先共法立出以意未悉故廣見敏度寶唱二錄)(T 2157, 55: 796c19–20).

²⁰ T 2149, 55: 334c26.

and seventh centuries and *Prajñaptibhāṣya[pāda]śāstra* (*Shishe lun* 施設論, T 1538) translated in the eleventh century, and the complete cosmology of the *Lokasthāna-abhidharma-śāstra* (*Lishi apitan lun* 立世阿毘曇論, T 1644) translated in the sixth century.

In sum, from perhaps as early as the first century through the early fourth century, Buddhists in China were ignoring early admonitions against cosmology and producing texts that appear to have been focused on forming the cosmos, presumably from translations of Indic sources. Each of these five cosmologies used the term *lokasthāna* in their title, including three texts by the name of *Lokasthāna-sūtra* of varying lengths: Dharmarakṣa's in five fascicles, Fali and Faju's in six fascicles, and Faju's in eight fascicles. Today, all but one of these five texts are thought to be lost. However, in addition to these texts, I have found that there exist several witnesses of an additional *Lokasthāna-sūtra* from the extensive Dunhuang manuscript cache.

Cosmological Creativity at Dunhuang

Medieval Dunhuang possessed an active culture of cosmological creativity. One of the major monasteries in the region, the Triple Realm Monastery (*Sanjie si* 三界寺), was named after the tripartite structure of a world system consisting of the realms of Desire, Form, and Formlessness. The Triple Realm Monastery played a key role in the production and storage of many of the 40,000 Chinese manuscripts that found their way packed into the hidden library cave at the Mogao Grottoes in 1036.²¹ Of those manuscripts, which were unearthed in 1900, several are cosmologies. These range from canonical texts such as *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經 T 23) and *Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos* (*Shiji jing* 世記經, T 1) to extracanonical manuscripts like the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*.²² Also included in this collection of manuscripts is a cosmology that has gone unnoticed, again using the title of *Lokasthāna-sūtra*. As I will show here, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Loutan jing lüe* 樓炭經略), which exists in fourteen witnesses at Dunhuang, is unique from the canonical *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* and further reflects the attention

²¹ On the Triple Realm Monastery and its possible role in the Dunhuang region, see Rong Xinjiang, "Lecture 4. The nature of the Dunhuang library cave and the reasons for its sealing," in *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, trans. by Imre Galambos (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 109–136.

²² Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 1994.

paid to cosmological concerns in medieval Dunhuang. Moreover, this text may shed light on one of the four lost texts using *lokasthāna* in their titles.

The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra

Scattered across museums and archives around the world is a total of fourteen manuscript items which all contain minor variations on the same cosmological text. Some of these items preserve the complete discourse, though most are fragmentary. Two of these manuscripts are titled *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Loutan jing lüe* 樓炭經略), suggesting a digest (*lüe* 略) of a fuller, longer text called the *Lokasthāna-sūtra*.²³ However, I have uncovered that an additional four manuscripts containing the same content are titled, “*The Lotus Sūtra*, Chapter 30: The Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa” (*Miaofa lianhua jing*, *Maming pusa pin di sanshi* 妙法蓮華經，馬明菩薩品第三十).²⁴ The remaining eight items preserve no title at all, though their content is nearly identical to the other variously named manuscripts.²⁵ Despite some versions carrying the title of “The Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa,” the text’s content is in no way related either to the silk deity or the Daoist adept to whom this typically refers in China.²⁶ It is instead very firmly a cosmology, suggesting that *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is likely its original name. Why *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* was transmuted into an apocryphal cosmology appended to *The Lotus Sūtra* is beyond the scope of this paper, and I address it elsewhere in a forthcoming

²³ See manuscripts BD06702, *Ganbo* 甘博 GB038.

²⁴ See manuscripts S.2734, Φ47-2, BD01211, *Shangtu* 上圖 (ST) 006. For the title, most manuscripts use the character 明 *ming*, bright, rather than 鳴 *ming*, whinny, which is more commonly used for the name of Aśvaghōṣa. A variant witness (Φ47-2) uses the more common *ming* 鳴 for “whinny.” However, by the Song, the 明 *ming* variant was more widespread in the Taishō. The copy of the text contained in S.2734, titled “*The Lotus Sūtra*, Chapter 30: The Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa,” was incorporated into the Taishō canon in the twentieth century (T 2899, 85).

²⁵ See manuscripts Dx.03669, Dx.3907, BD14713, S.3051, S.4572, S.82D, P. Ch. 3008, P. Ch. 3055V.

²⁶ See Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press), 2015. Perhaps the title is an allusion to the second-century Aśvaghōṣa, the Indian poet and purported author of the *Lokasthānābhidharma-śāstra* (*Lishi apitan lun* 立世阿毘曇論), one of several early Indic cosmologies that were translated into Chinese during the Six Dynasties. The Aśvaghōṣa title is likely modeled on the latter chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra* which refer to various bodhisattvas.

publication. Instead, here I ask, what is *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, and what might its relationship be to the early *lokasthāna* cosmologies?

The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra varies slightly across the fourteen manuscript witnesses. Generally speaking, the text consists of approximately 9,000 characters in a single fascicle. Apart from the title, there are no headings indicating section or subdivisions. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text identifies nineteen to twenty discrete topics in eleven to twelve overarching sections. As a comprehensive cosmology, the text addresses all three dimensions of space, time, and action (including both karmic causation and soteriological interventions).

Unlike most Buddhist scriptures, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* opens with no expository scene establishing the time, place, setting, or speaker of the sermon, though it is clear throughout that the Buddha is the speaker due to frequent use of the phrase, “the Buddha said” (*Fo yan* 佛言). Instead, the text begins with an explanation of the discs that form the foundation of a world system.²⁷ Next, it turns to the second section, focused on cosmological time. Rather than starting at the beginning of time (cosmogony), this section opens with an explanation of how the world ends (eschatology).²⁸ This is followed by a discussion of the world’s cyclic regeneration²⁹ and the origins of humanity and society.³⁰ This narrative of arising is accompanied by discourse of the inevitable fall of sentient beings through the lower realms of rebirth,³¹ followed by an equally predictable rise from the hells.³²

The third section maps the four terrestrial continents, the sun and moon, and the *axis mundi* Mount Sumeru.³³ This is then followed by a celestial section discussing the heavenly bodies of the sun and moon (again), and planets and stars,³⁴ the abodes of the Four Heavenly Kings; and the remaining *devas* above Sumeru.³⁵ The next section serves as something of an interlude, with a verse on karma and rebirth.³⁶ The fifth section returns to the realm of the *devas* with

27 T 2899, 85: 1426a14–18.

28 Ibid., 1426a18–b01.

29 Ibid., 1426b01–26.

30 Ibid., 1426b26–c15.

31 Ibid., 1426c15–1427a07.

32 Ibid., 1427a08–15.

33 Ibid., 1427a15–c08.

34 Ibid., 1427c08–1428a12.

35 Ibid., 1428a12–c11.

36 Ibid., 1428c11–14.

focus on the heaven of Trāyastriṃśa atop Sumeru,³⁷ its city of Sudarśana,³⁸ and the higher heavens of the Desire Realm.³⁹ The following sixth section maps the heavens of the Form Realm,⁴⁰ and the seventh section ascends to the Formless Realm heavens.⁴¹

Having constructed the spatial dimension of the cosmos—the prison of *samsāra* within which all sentient beings are trapped—the text pivots to discuss liberation from that structure, reading:

若能覺苦斷苦知盡行道解空無相無願之法。得出三界。名之阿羅漢（也）。

One who is able to realize suffering cuts off suffering, and one who understands the annihilation [of suffering], who walks the path [of practice], who realizes emptiness and the markless and beginningless dharma, is able to escape the three realms and is called an *arhat*.⁴²

At this point in the text, nearly all witnesses abruptly turn to mapping the Cakravāḍa mountain range at the lateral bounds of the cosmos. However, one manuscript, GB038, continues its soteriological discourse, suggesting that this portion may have existed in the original text before being purged from the other thirteen recensions. Here, manuscript GB038 describes a unique nine-path system of rebirth, which includes a bodhisattva path, a Buddha Vehicle, cultivation of perfections (*pāramitā*), and various stages of attainment (*bhūmi*), all characteristic of what we would typically consider Mahāyāna.

After the soteriological interlude of GB038, the witnesses reconvene. Having reached the highest vertical plane of the cosmos, the eighth section (or ninth, in the case of GB038) returns to the lateral bounds of the various *Cakravāḍa* mountain ranges that encircle and demarcate one billion world systems, or a trichiliocosm, until the entire cosmos is bounded by one single, universal *Cakravāḍa* mountain range.⁴³ The ninth/tenth section of the text

³⁷ Ibid., 1428c15–28.

³⁸ Ibid., 1428c28–1429a29.

³⁹ Ibid., 1429a29–b28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1429b28–1430a24.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1430a24–b06.

⁴² *Gansu cang Dunhuang wen xian* (Lanzhou Shi: Gansu ren min chu ban she, 1999), p. 279, pl. 17–12.

⁴³ T 2899, 85: 1430b06–b22. Although this appears to be unique compared to standard descriptions of the Buddhist cosmos, the same concept is found in the ca. seventh-century *Famen mingyi ji*, which also circulated at Dunhuang.

returns to the mundane realm, describing hells⁴⁴ and lowly destinies of animals, ghosts, and unfortunate human births.⁴⁵ Across all variants, the tenth/eleventh section again returns to time, explaining the cosmic eons (*kalpas*) and, again, the destruction of the world.⁴⁶ The text then seems to end with a postscript briefly, and confusingly, commenting on the text itself. However, despite this postscript, the text again continues with a discussion of an ethnography and geo-cosmography of Jambudvīpa and its five kings who each rule over 500 fiefdoms,⁴⁷ and in the case of GB038, a six-line passage about the hell of Avīci, at which point the text ends and the title is inscribed.

In sum, despite the Mahāyāna-inflected soteriological discourse of a bodhisattva path, Buddha Vehicle, *paramita*, and *bhūmi* found in GB038, the map of the cosmos constructed in *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is consistent with extant early canonical cosmologies such as *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* and *Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos* which map similar trichiliocosm structures. Why is this text titled *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, and what is the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* that the text summarizes? The postscript both illuminates and obscures the answers to these questions.

Postscript

The postscript of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* reads:

曰大樓炭經百廿卷（紙）廣明世界中事。大經難見。是故此中略舉其要。

Comment: The larger *Lokasthāna-sūtra* of 120 fascicles extensively clarifies cosmological matters. The larger scripture is difficult to access.

Therefore, its essentials are extracted and collected herein.

This raises three critical questions. First, what exactly does *da loutan jing* 大樓炭經 refer to in this context? On the surface, this seems to clearly state that *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is a condensed extraction (*lüeju* 略舉) of *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經, T 23), the extant cosmology in six fascicles and attributed to Fali and Faju. This is the position taken by the Gansu Provincial Museum catalogue in its brief overview of the

44 T 2899, 85: 1430b22–c25.

45 Ibid., 1430c25–1431a05.

46 Ibid., 1431a05–1431b01.

47 Ibid., 1431b03–24.

GB038 manuscript. However, while the general structure of the cosmos is similar to early Buddhist cosmologies like *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*, these Dunhuang manuscripts simply do not conform to that canonical text.

To demonstrate this, one example should suffice. *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*'s discourse on the hells deviates from that of *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. The abridged text maps the overall structure and location of the hells in two separate sections. In the first, shorter section, it explains that the hells are located “in the space between the two Iron Encircling mountain ranges” 鐵圍兩山間. This location does comport to *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*, which is consistent with the *Āgama* model as also provided in the *Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos*. However, it stands in contrast to the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, which finds the hells below Jambudvīpa. Providing more detail than those other texts, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* explains further:

於鐵圍山四面外。兩山中間沃焦山下。各安十八地獄。於大海底復安十八阿鼻地獄。

Beyond the four sides of the Cakravāḍa, in the space between two mountain ranges, below the Fertile Scorched (Pātāla) Mountain, are located each of the [sets of] eighteen [sub-]hells. Below the depths of the ocean are located the eighteen hells of Avīci.⁴⁸

The presence of an underwater Pātāla Mountain is not found in *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. However, it is attested in other sources, such as a citation attributed to a *Jin'gang sanmei buhuai bu mie jing* 金剛三昧不壞不滅經 in the *Fayuan zhulin*, and as part of an epithet of the Buddha, “Savior from the Pātāla” (*du wujiao* 度沃焦), listed in Fayun's *法雲 Compilation of Translated Buddhist Terms (Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集) of 1143.⁴⁹ While it is uncertain whether *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is drawing on either indigenous Chinese terminology, the concept which the Chinese term was used to translate certainly exists in translations of Indic *sūtras* and does not appear to be an apocryphal interpolation.

Where *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* enumerates eighteen sub-hells, *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*, as well as *The Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos*, contains only sixteen. Moreover, of the eighteen sub-hells enumerated by *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, only one corresponds to *The Larger Lokasthāna-*

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1430b22–1430b25

⁴⁹ *Jin'gang sanmei benxing qingjing buhuai bumie jing* 金剛三昧本性清淨不壞不滅經, T 644, 15: 697a–699b; *Fayuan zhulin* T 2122, 53: 763b01–05; *Fanyi mingyi ji* T 2131, 54: 1059b13. This term is also found in pre-Buddhist Chinese texts.

sūtra.⁵⁰ However, we do find several early references to eighteen hells or sub-hells, the earliest from works attributed to Zhi Qian and Dharmarakṣa.⁵¹

Finally, although it provides slightly more detail about the location of the hells, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* does not delineate clearly how many primary hells exist. It does, however, clarify that there exist a total of 90 hells in one world system, and 90 billion in a billion-fold universe (trichiliocosm), noting: “One set of four continents [that is, one world system] altogether has 90 hells; this makes up the Cakravāḍa. One billion sets of four continents together have 90 billion hells” 一四天下并有九十地獄⁵²。以為圍遶。百億四天下合九百億地獄。This stands in contrast, again, to *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* as well as *The Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos*, which each list eight hells of roughly identical names, with only translation approaches separating them. The table comparison below illustrates this most clearly.

<i>Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra</i>	<i>Sūtra Explaining the Cosmos</i>	<i>Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra</i>
於鐵圍山四面外。兩山中間 ⁵³ 沃焦山下。各安十八地獄。於大海底復安十八阿鼻地獄。一四天下并有九十地獄。以	第一大地獄名想。第二名黑繩。第三名堆壓。第四名叫喚。第五名大叫喚。第六名	第一大泥犁名想、第二大泥犁名黑耳(繩)、第三大泥犁名僧乾、第四大泥犁名樓獵、第五大泥犁名噉嚙、第六大泥犁名

⁵⁰ T 2899, 85: 1426c28–1427a07.

⁵¹ For Zhi Qian, see *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 (T 185); for Dharmarakṣa, see *Xianjie jing* 賢劫經 (T 425), *Fenbie jing* 分別經 (T 738); *Yueguang tongzi jing* 月光童子經 (T 391); and *Ban niepan hou guan la jing* 般泥洹後灌臘經 (T 391).

⁵² Parallel in *Guan fo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經: eighteen hells T 643, 15: 668b17–26; this phrasing: T 643, 15: 668c28–a01: 火其焰大熾。赤光火焰照八萬四千由旬。從阿鼻地獄上衝大海沃焦山下。大海水滴如車軸許。成大鐵尖滿阿鼻城。

⁵³ See *The Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos* and *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Note that *Fayuan Zhulin* cites the 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論, saying that hungry ghosts live there: 如婆沙論[阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論]說。餓鬼有二住。一正。二邊。第一正住者。說之不定。彼論說云。此閻浮提五百由旬之下有餓鬼界。被閻羅王領。是其正處。又善生優婆塞經。亦同此說。五百由旬之下有閻羅鬼王城。周匝四面七萬五百千由旬。王領鬼衆於中止住。又如五道苦經說。此之餓鬼。正住彼鐵圍兩山中間。故說偈言：鐵圍兩山間，不覩日月光，餓鬼聚其中。償其宿罪故 (T 2122, 53: 311b18–26).

為圍遶百億。四天下合九百億地獄。 ⁵⁴	燒炙。第七名大燒炙。第八名無間。 ⁵⁵	燒炙、第七大泥犁名釜煮、第八大泥犁名阿鼻摩訶。 ⁵⁶
Beyond the four sides of the Cakravāḍa, in the space between two mountain ranges, below the Fertile Scorched (Pātāla) Mountain, are located each of the [sets of] eighteen [sub-]hells. Below the depths of the ocean are located the eighteen hells of Avīci. One set of four continents [that is, one world system] altogether has 90 hells. This makes up the Cakravāḍa. One billion sets of four continents together have 90 billion hells. ⁵⁷	The first great hell is called Samjīva . The second is called Black Rope . The third is called Crushing . The fourth is called Moaning . The fifth is called Great Moaning . The sixth is called Burning . The seventh is called Great Burning . The eighth is called Unremitting (Avīci) .	The first great hell is called Samjīva . ⁵⁸ The second great hell called Black [Rope] . ⁵⁹ The third is Crushing . The fourth is Raurava (Screaming). The fifth is Great Screaming . The sixth is Burning . The seventh is Roasting . The eighth is Avīci . ⁶⁰

It is thus evident that *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* draws on another source distinct from *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Either the abridged text is a compilation of cosmological content from several pre-existing texts, it is an apocryphal creation, or it draws from a lost root text. What then could the postscript be referring to?

⁵⁴ T 2899, 85: 1430b22–1430b25.

⁵⁵ T 1, 1: 121c05–0121c08.

⁵⁶ T 23, 1: 283b15–0283b18.

⁵⁷ We can assume that 90 total hells, with eighteen sub-hells in each primary hell, totals five primary hells.

⁵⁸ Perhaps a transliteration, *xiang* for *saṃjñaka*, *saṃjñāna*, *saṃjñita*, or *saṃjñitva*.

⁵⁹ This literally reads “black ear,” but it is likely a confusion for the Indic *sūtra* with Skt. *śrotra*, Gdh. *ṣotra/soda*. Thanks to Sangyop Lee for assistance with Sanskrit and Gandhāran.

⁶⁰ Transliteration, Skt. *Avīcimahāniraya*, Gdh. *Aviyamahaniraya*.

Although today the canonical text preserved in the Taishō is called *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經), it is possible that the *da* 大 in the postscript of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is not a part of the root text's title, but simply an adjective—large or larger—describing the source. It is possible then that the postscript means not “*The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*,” but “the larger *Lokasthāna-sūtra*,” or perhaps “the complete *Lokasthāna-sūtra*,” in contrast to the summarized digest provided in the single fascicle of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. As we have seen, the term *lokasthāna* (*loutan* 樓炭), is used in the titles of at least six different texts that circulated in medieval China. Having ruled out the only extant text with that title (T 23), any of the remaining five texts could be the source of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Unfortunately, as the remaining texts are all lost, it is impossible to say for certain which *Lokasthāna-sūtra* (*Loutan jing* 樓炭經) was used as the root text of the Dunhuang digest.

The second question raised by the postscript concerns the stated size of the root text. The postscript states, across all manuscript witnesses, that the original *Lokasthāna-sūtra* it summarizes consisted of 120 fascicles. There is no historical record of a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* in 120 fascicles, which would be on the scale of the most voluminous sūtras. Even the immense *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (*Dazhidu lun* 大智度論) is but 100 fascicles and the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經) only eighty. It is possible that the postscript's reference to 120 fascicles is simply a way of inflating the size and thus the status of the root text. Evidence of this sort of aggrandizement is found in other texts, such as the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, noted above, which claims that its Indic source would have consisted of more than one-thousand scrolls.⁶¹ However, the figure of 120 used in the postscript would be a modest inflation; it certainly does not command the sense of awe that one thousand or five thousand fascicles might.

However, it is possible that the use of fascicle (*juan* 卷) in the postscript is simply a mistaken character. In particular, it is possible or even likely that the original character was intended to read *zhi* 紙 for “sheets” of paper. Recall that Falī and Faju's *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* in six fascicles is traditionally recorded as consisting of 130 to 140 sheets of paper. Rather than a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* in 120 fascicles, it is more likely that the lost *Lokasthāna-sūtra* summarized by *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* may have been comprised of 120 sheets of paper. Again, if the six-fascicle *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* used 130–140 sheets of paper, then each fascicle would have consisted of roughly

⁶¹ T 1509, 25: 57b23.

twenty-one to twenty-three sheets of paper. Therefore, a sūtra in 120 sheets of paper would have been nearer to five fascicles (105 to 117 sheets of paper), a reasonable size for a cosmology and indeed the recorded size of Dharmarakṣa's lost *Lokasthāna-sūtra*.

Indeed, this would not be the only case of one of the witnesses of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* mistakenly using the character *juan* 卷. ST006, one of the manuscripts containing the same content as *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* but retitled as Chapter Thirty of *The Lotus Sūtra*, mistakenly uses the character for “fascicle” (*juan* 卷) in the place of “chapter” (*pin* 品), reading “*Sūtra on the Lotus Flower of Marvelous Dharma, fascicle number thirty*” (*Miaofa lianhua jing juan di sanshi* 妙法蓮華經卷第三十). This suggests that it was not an uncommon scribal error to confuse measure-words when enumerating and numbering texts in medieval Dunhuang.

Finally, the third question raised by the postscript concerns why the root text was so difficult to see or access. It may have been the case that the monastic libraries in Dunhuang no longer had a copy, but we can look to the historical record to find whether others in medieval China had difficulty consulting *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Although no texts in the Taishō cite *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, several contain passages attributed to a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* which do not correspond to the extant *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* but do in fact correspond to the digest.

For instance, the seventh-century anthologist Daoshi 道世 (d. 683) appears to have had access to the very same root text condensed in *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*.⁶² In his encyclopedic compendium, *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, Daoshi cites a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* when quoting two passages which are not found in the extant *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*.⁶³ They do, however, correspond to *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. In a section explaining the six realms of rebirth, an interlocutor asks whether there are only six paths or more. Daoshi's answer reads in part:

且據一家不增減說。若依樓炭經中。亦說。九道眾生共居。一菩薩道。二緣覺道。三聲聞道。帖前六道。

Although according to one school the number does not increase or

⁶² Recall that Yancong's catalogue of 602 explicitly identifies the text as lost.

⁶³ On the *Fayuan zhulin*, see Alexander Ong Hsu, “Practices of Scriptural Economy: Compiling and Copying a Seventh-century Chinese Buddhist Anthology,” PhD diss. (University of Chicago, 2018), and Stephen F. Teiser, “T'ang Buddhist Encyclopedias: An Introduction to Fa-yüan chu-lin and Chu-ching yao-chi,” *T'ang Studies* 3 (1985): 109–28.

decrease, if we rely on what is contained in *The Lokasthāna-sūtra*, it also explains that there are nine paths of sentient beings which coexist. [They are] 1) the path of bodhisattvas; 2) the path of pratyekabuddhas; 3) the path of *śrāvakas*; plus, the aforementioned six paths [of *deva*, humans, animals, *asura*, hungry ghosts, and hell beings].⁶⁴

This unusual passage provides a unique soteriological system in which a three-vehicle model, reminiscent of the three vehicles (*sansheng* 三乘, *triyāna*; consisting of *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, bodhisattva) of the *Lotus Sūtra*, is superimposed on the six paths (Skt. *gati*) of rebirth (*deva*, humans, animals, *asura*, *preta*, hell beings). While this is not a feature of the extant *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*, it is indeed recorded in *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*.

This is not the only instance in which Daoshi cites a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* that conforms to *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. In another short passage cited as coming from a *Lokasthāna-sūtra*, the text again does not correspond to *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* preserved in the Taishō canon, but to the *Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* from Dunhuang. The *Fayuan zhulin* records:

依樓炭經說。畜生不同。大約有其三種。一魚。二鳥。三獸。於此三中。一一無量。魚有六千四百種。鳥有四千五百種。獸有二千四百種。

According to *The Lokasthāna-sūtra*, animals are not all the same. Most are in three types: fish, birds, and beasts. Among these three, each and every type is immeasurable. There are 6,400 types of fish; 4,500 types of birds; and 2,400 types of beasts.⁶⁵

No parallels to this passage are found in the six-fascicle *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. However, a corresponding passage does appear in *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, which reads:

此閻浮提內有十六萬億丘聚。有八萬四千地（城⁶⁶）中有六千四百種人。萬億[音]（響）⁶⁷。魚有六千四百種。鳥有四千五百種。狩

⁶⁴ T 2122, 53: 301b16–22.

⁶⁵ T 2122, 53: 317c03–05.

⁶⁶ See BD06702 and GB038; most likely an alternate character rather than addition. ST006 has 地, which may be either informing or copying from S. 2734.

⁶⁷ Manuscript reads *xiang* 響, almost certainly a scribal corruption. See Kālodaka's *Ershi you jing* 二十遊經, whose ending contains the same section, and reads 八萬四千城中, 六千四百種人, 萬種音響, 五十六萬億丘聚。魚有六千四百種。(T 195, 4: 147b14–16). Citing that same text, the *Fayuan zhulin* has 八萬四

(獸) 有二千四百種⁶⁸。

Within this [continent of] Jambudvīpa are sixteen tens-of-thousands-of-millions of villages. In its 4,000 cities are 6,400 types of people and tens-of-thousands-of-millions of types of sounds. There are 6,400 types of fish; 4,500 types of birds; and 2,400 types of beasts.

Similar language is also found in Kālodaka's 迦留陀伽 (d. 392) *Dvādaśaviharaṇa-sūtra* (*Shi'er you jing* 十二遊經) from around 392. However, all three versions of *The Lokasthāna-sūtra* in five, six, and eight-fascicles predate Kālodaka's text, and there is no reason to doubt Daoshi's attribution of this passage to a *Lokasthāna-sūtra*.

Finally, three medieval Japanese commentaries also cite a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* when referring to a discourse on celestial bodies which is not found in the extant *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* but is contained within *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. For instance, in the mid-tenth century, the Japanese monk Kanjō's 觀靜 (fl. 10th c.) *Kujaku kyō ongi* 孔雀經音義, a commentary on Amoghavajra's (Bukong 不空) (705–774) translation of the *Fomu da kongqiao mingwang jing* 佛母大孔雀明王經, quotes a lengthy passage attributed to a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* which preserves a discourse mapping the sun, moon, and asterisms that is not found in the extant *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*.⁶⁹ This extended discourse is found nearly verbatim in most manuscript witnesses of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Moreover, Kanjō's text continues, still citing a *Lokasthāna-sūtra* for a passage which is preserved in only one witness of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*: GB038.⁷⁰

These citations indicate that Daoshi's *Fayuan zhulin*, Kanjō's commentary, and *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* all draw on the same root *Lokasthāna-sūtra*.⁷¹ In all cases, these quotations are clearly cited as coming from a

千城中有六千四百種人。萬物音響各別。有五十六萬億丘聚。魚有六千四百種。(T 2122, 53: 627a09–11). *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 reads, 八萬四千城中。六千四百種人。萬種音響。五十六萬億丘聚。魚有六千四百種。(T 2121, 53: 10a25–29).

⁶⁸ See *Fayuan Zhulin* T 2122, 53: 317c05, which allows this to be re-punctuated more clearly, as I have done here.

⁶⁹ T 2244, 61: 800a27. Monks in Japan would continue to quote these passages, but it is uncertain if they were referring to the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* directly, or the quotations by Kanjō.

⁷⁰ This second passage is found only, and in its entirety, in GB038.

⁷¹ In another case, Gōhō's 梟寶 (1306–1362) *Dainichi kyō shoen'ō shō* 大日經疏演奧鈔 appears to draw on Kanjō, quoting only a small fraction of the

Lokasthāna-sūtra (*Loutan jing* 樓炭經), lacking the character for large or larger, 大, and not corresponding to *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. This suggests that another *Lokasthāna-sūtra* circulated in medieval China and Japan apart from the received *Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* that was incorporated into the Taishō canon.

In sum, this root *Lokasthāna-sūtra* was certainly not *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. A handful of scenarios exist which may explain the source, which I discuss below. The root text may be Dharmarakṣa's five-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra* or Faju's eight-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Alternatively, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* may be a compilation of various cosmological sūtras. It is also possible, though less likely, that citations of the *Lokasthāna-sūtra* use shorthand to refer to longer titles, including *The Sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Guan shi loutan jing* 觀世樓炭經) in three chapters, *The Smaller Lokasthāna-sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Xiao guanshi loutan jing* 小觀世樓炭經), or *The Smaller Lokasthāna-sūtra* in one fascicle (*Xiao loutan jing* 小樓炭經一卷). It is also possible, but again unlikely, that yet another *Lokasthāna-sūtra* circulated in early medieval China, but was never recorded in any catalogues.

Possible Scenarios

Stepping back, what can be said for certain and what are the possible scenarios behind the production of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*? First, it can be safely assumed that the text was not originally part of *The Lotus Sūtra* and then extracted as its own text and renamed, but vice versa. The postscript, across all extant manuscripts, regardless of the title of the text, clearly states that the text

Lokasthāna-sūtra passage that Kanjō cites (T 2216, 59: 51a25–29). The *Dainichi kyō shoen'ō shō* relays only the portion describing the sun's three paths which is implied to be the cause of the seasons' climatic variations: “*The Lokasthāna-sūtra* says, ‘The revolutions of the sun [around Mount Sumeru] take three paths. In the winter, the sun takes the southern path, just above the icy mountains. This is why the continent is very cold. In spring and autumn, the sun takes the middle path. This is why the temperature is temperate and even. In the summer, the sun takes the northern path, just above the people.’ 樓炭經云。日行有三道。冬行南道。當冰山之上。是以故天下大寒。春秋行中道。故寒温適等。夏行北道。當人上。The identical passage from is also quoted and cited in a thirteenth century summary of the Abhidharmakośa, the *Abidatsuma kusha ron kiyō shō* 阿毘達磨俱舍論指要鈔, composed by Tan'e 湛慧, a disciple of the Rinzai monk Enni 圓爾.

is a digest of another text called *The Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Therefore, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is almost certainly a distillation of a pre-existing text called *The Lokasthāna-sūtra*. What then was this root *Lokasthāna-sūtra*?

The first scenario is that *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is a digest of *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*, the canonical cosmology in six fascicles attributed to Fali and Faju in 307. After all, the postscript appears to say precisely this. But, as demonstrated above, the content is simply too different from Fali and Faju's text. This scenario can therefore be ruled out.

A second scenario is that *Lokasthāna-sūtra* is not a specific title, but a reference to "cosmological sūtras," and *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is better translated as "Digest of Cosmological Sūtras." Perhaps because so many cosmologies were circulating in Dunhuang, Buddhists wanted a neat summary in a single fascicle. If so, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* would have been produced by someone exceptionally well versed in Buddhist cosmologies as there is a great deal of internal consistency, with the text entirely narrative in form rather than schematic like the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*. However, we can see what it looks like when Buddhists compile cosmologies, and it does not look quite like this text. In such works, the author is clear about his intentions and process, and does not try to pass off a collage of other texts as his own. Moreover, with the exception of GB038, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* adds little to the existing cosmologies that circulated in China. Surely it would have been possible to simply distill one of those existing cosmologies, such as *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* or *The Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos*, into a single fascicle. Moreover, in this scenario, what would we make of the several historical references to a text cited as *The Lokasthāna-sūtra*, which correspond perfectly with *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*? Therefore, I think that this second scenario can likely be ruled out.

A third scenario is that the postscript refers to an entirely different text, now lost, called *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra*. This is unlikely, given the robustness of the Chinese Buddhist historical record and the fact that no other text with the same title was recorded in historical catalogues. A fourth scenario is that the title refers to Faju's eight-fascicle *Lokasthāna-sūtra*. Indeed, this would be the largest of the three identically titled early cosmologies. This can neither be verified nor discredited. A fifth scenario is that *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*'s root text is either *The Sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Guan shi loutan jing* 觀世樓炭經) or *The Smaller Lokasthāna-sūtra on Observing the Formation of the Cosmos* (*Xiao guanshi loutan jing* 小觀世樓炭經). However, the former was only three chapters in length while the title of the other likely indicates a short text. It would be illogical to need, or indeed be

impossible, to condense such short texts into a digest the length of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*.

This leads us to a sixth and final scenario. Perhaps *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* draws on the lost *Lokasthāna-sūtra* of 303 translated by Dharmarakṣa, a prolific translator from Dunhuang. Although we cannot say conclusively, there is speculative evidence to suggest that this may be the most likely scenario.

Again, it is more probable that the original *Lokasthāna-sūtra* cited in the postscript of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* consisted of 120 pages, rather than fascicles, and Dharmarakṣa's *Lokasthāna-sūtra* was said to have been five fascicles in length, which—as shown above—would have consisted of roughly 105 to 117, and perhaps as many as 120, sheets of paper. Second, Dharmarakṣa's translation is recorded as having been a Mahāyāna scripture. One manuscript witness of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, GB038, extols a rigorous path of bodhisattvas, the cultivation of perfections (*pāramitā*) progression through stages of practice (*bhūmi*), and the supremacy of a Buddha Vehicle (*buddhayāna*) over other vehicles—all, arguably, elements characteristic of Mahāyāna practice and soteriology.

Speculating further, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* appears to contain faint evidence of Dharmarakṣa's translation style. According to the extant texts preserved in the Taishō, Dharmarakṣa is the first Chinese translator to use the compound *fosheng* 佛乘 for the term *buddhayāna*. He uses these characters eleven times across three extant texts: three times in the *Avaiartika-sūtra* (*Aweiyuezhezhe jing* 阿惟越致遮經, T 266), six times in his *Lotus Sūtra* (*Zhengfa hua jing* 正法華經, T 263), and twice in his *Sutra on the Universally Supreme Samādhi of Mañjuśrī* (*Wenshuzhili puchao sanmei jing* 文殊支利普超三昧經, Skt. *Ajātaśatru-kaukrtyavinodana-sūtra*, T 627). Karashima Seishi's *Glossary of Dharmarakṣa's Translation of the Lotus Sūtra* identifies the use of *fosheng* 佛乘 in Dharmarakṣa's *Lotus Sūtra* to be a unique neologism indicative of his idiosyncratic translation style.⁷² Moreover, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* contains three more terms which Karashima identifies as characteristic of Dharmarakṣa's idiom: the use of *yingzhi* 應真 for *arhat*; the bodhisattva path (*pusadao* 菩薩道); and a variation on the term for the *bhūmi* of non-retrogression (*The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* uses *butui di* 不退地, where Karashima identifies *butuizhuan di* 不退轉地 as particular to

⁷² Karashima Seishi, *A Glossary of Dharmarakṣa's Translation of the Lotus Sūtra*, Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica, I. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University (1998), 149–150.

Dharmarakṣa). While these terms do not provide certain evidence that Dharmarakṣa produced the root text of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra*, it does suggest that the text happens to use some of Dharmarakṣa's preferred terms, and that it is unlikely to predate Dharmarakṣa's translation efforts.

Finally, *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* may also contain internal evidence that its root text is of a first- to third-century provenance, which would include the time that Dharmarakṣa lived. This is demonstrated by references to political territories in Asia: the Jin empire and the Yuezhi kingdoms, likely a reference to the Kushan empire. Towards the end of the text, in the ethno-geography on Jambudvīpa, the *Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* reads:

宣數平壤之地。廣長二十八萬里。其中凡有十六大國。統八萬四千城。有八大國王四大天（天）子。東方有晉國天子。人民熾盛。南方有天竺國天子。土地多饒象。西方有大秦國天子。土地多金銀璧玉。北方有月氏國天子。土地多好馬。

As for [Jambudvīpa's] measurements: its planes are 280,000 *li* in area. Together in its center are sixteen great kingdoms, altogether with 84,000 cities. There are eight great kings and four great princes. In the east is the prince of the Jin empire, and the people are prosperous. In the south is the prince of the Indian states, where the land appears very fertile. In the west is the prince of the Roman Empire [present-day Syria], where the land has much gold, silver, and jade. In the north is the prince of the Yuezhi kingdom, where the land has many good horses.⁷³

It can be ruled out that the Jin empire here refers to the Later Jin Dynasty (936–946), which is simply too late given the circulation of the text at Dunhuang prior to the sealing of the Library Cave around 1036. Given the reference to the Yuezhi kingdoms, which likely refers to the Kushan Empire that existed from the first to third centuries, the particular Jin empire in question likely refers to the Western Jin (Xi Jin 西晉) of 265–316. (It should also be noted that Dharmarakṣa was of Yuezhi descent.) More specifically, the source of this information must predate the Sasanian invasions which brought about the collapse of the Kushan Empire in the mid-third century. While this does not necessarily mean that the text was translated prior to the mid-third century, it does provide a *terminus ante quem* for the root Indic text which would allow for the possibility of Dharmarakṣa's involvement in its translation.

⁷³ S.2734, BD06702, GB038, and ST006. Cf. T. vol. 85, no. 2899.

Conclusion

The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra, later titled “*The Lotus Sūtra*, Chapter Thirty: The Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa,” was likely produced in the Dunhuang region. The fourteen extant manuscript witnesses from the Mogao Grottoes reveal that a pre-existing cosmology called *The Lokasthāna-sūtra*, likely originally consisting of 120 sheets of paper, roughly five fascicles, was condensed into a single fascicle at Dunhuang. It is not certain which *Lokasthāna-sūtra* was the source for this local Dunhuang digest, though it is clearly not the version extant in the Taishō today. However, the presumed length of the original in 120 sheets of paper, the existing references to what appear to reflect a Mahāyāna soteriology in manuscript GB038, and circumstantial internal evidence in the translation lend support to the hypothesis that the original may have been Dharmarakṣa’s lost cosmology translated in 303.

But whatever the source, unearthing the cosmos in a single-fascicle manuscript from Dunhuang further demonstrates the culture of creativity in medieval China. Rather than an extraneous distraction from the Buddhist project, Chinese Buddhists were patently concerned with the structure of the cosmos and its relation to religious practice and soteriology. As Stephen Teiser has shown, by the ninth century, Buddhists at Dunhuang had created an entirely new cosmological system with the court of the ten kings. But cosmological creativity at Dunhuang was not only focused on new, apocryphal cosmologies. The content of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* is largely in line with early āgamic cosmologies like *The Larger Lokasthāna-sūtra* and *Sūtra of the Record of the Cosmos*. It is likely that, had historical whims been slightly different, the source of *The Abridged Lokasthāna-sūtra* would have been included in the Chinese Buddhist canon today.

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