

# BUDDHA'S SUPERNATURAL POWERS IN THE LOTUS SUTRA

Takao MARUYAMA

## I. Many kinds of supernatural powers in the Buddhist canons.

Many kinds of supernatural powers (神通, *abhijñā*, *abhiññā*) of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and other sages are expounded in the Buddhist canons. These are classified into six or three as follows :

The six kinds of supernatural powers (六通, *ṣaḍ abhijñāḥ*), including the three transcendental knowledges (三明, *trai-vidyāḥ*, *tisro-vidyāḥ*).

- (1) *Jinsokutsū* (神足通, *ṛddhi*), the ability to go anywhere at will and to transform oneself or objects at will.
- (2) *Tengentsū* (天眼通, *divya-cakṣus*), "the divine eyes" capable of seeing anything at any distance and the future destiny of oneself and others.  
[*Tengemmyō* (天眼明), the second of the three transcendental knowledges, *Sammyō* (三明)]
- (3) *Tennitsū* (天耳通, *divya-śrotra*), "the divine ears" capable of hearing any sound at any distance.
- (4) *Tashintsū* (他心通, *para-citta-jñāna*), the ability to know others' mind and thoughts.
- (5) *Shukumyōtsū* (宿命通, *pūrva-nivāsānusmṛti-jñāna*), the ability to know former lives of oneself and others.  
[*Shukumyōmyō* (宿命明), the first of the three transcendental knowledges.]
- (6) *Rojintsū* (漏尽通, *āsrava-kṣaya-jñāna*), the ability to destroy all evil passions.  
[*Rojimmyō* (漏尽明), the third of the three transcendental knowledges.]

We find a list of the six kinds of supernatural powers (*Cha abhiññā*) in the *Dasuttara-suttanta* (十上經), one of the early Buddhist canons [*The Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. III, p.281]. In this *suttanta* a monk obtains these powers.

In the Lotus Sutra, one of the most famous sutras in the Mahāyāna Buddhist canons, we find the words "*traividyaḥ ṣaḍ-abhijñā*" (三明六通) [Kern 179-180], "*ṣaḍabhijñā-traividya*" (六通三明) [K. 90.7, etc.], and "*pañcābhijñā ṛṣayo*" (五通仙人, a sage who obtains five kinds of supernatural powers except the sixth) [K. 134, 11, Here we find a

list of the five.].

In the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (大智度論), a commentary on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* attributed to *Nāgārjuna* (龍樹), he commented on the six kinds of supernatural powers as follows :

The Buddha obtains the six kinds, but Bodhisattvas can do only five kinds of them except the sixth. The sixth (*Rojintsū*, 漏尽通) is the most excellent supernatural power of the six kinds.

Bodhisattvas and other sentient beings will be able to attain supreme enlightenment when they would obtain the sixth, by which they could destroy all evil passions.

Many kinds of supernatural powers of the Buddha are expounded in the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha leads sentient beings to supreme enlightenment by his supernatural powers in the sutra. I would like to make a comparative study between Sanskrit texts and Chinese versions, and elucidate the significance of supernatural powers in the sutra.

## II. The supernatural power of emitting rays of light.

### (1) Emitting a ray of light in chapter I. Introductory.

As soon as the Buddha had entered upon the meditation, there fell a great rain of divine flowers and whole Buddha field shook in six ways. The great multitude of the congregaton, which included monks, nuns, male and female lay devotees, and so on, gazed on the Buddha in astonishment, in amazement, in ecstasy.

Thereupon the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows (眉間白毫相), and illuminated all the corners of eighteen thousand Buddha-fields in the east. [K. 7, 4-8, 1 : T. 9, 4 a-b]

This emission of a ray of light is called "*mahānimitta-prātihāryāvabhāsa*", or a magnificent auspicious sign of miraculous light, and so on.

The reason why the Buddha showed such a miracle and a foretoken is that he wished to cause all living beings to hear and understand the most difficult teaching in the world to believe, i.e., the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha can only emit the ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows. Bodhisattvas and other saints have not such a supernatural power.

### (2) A great miraculous light (*mahā avabhāsa*) in chapter VII.

When *Mahābhijñāñānābhībhū* Tathagata (大通智勝如来) attained supreme enlightenment in the past, innumerable fields in each of the ten directions were shaken in six ways and became illumined radiantly with a great miraculous light (*mahā avabhāsa*),

which was superior to the sun and moon possessed with great miraculous powers (*maharddhi*). When he expounded the law, the audience obtained “*trividya*” and “*ṣaḍ-abhijñā*” (三明六通). This great miraculous light called attention of the audience to hear the law.

(3) Buddha's miraculous power with dignity (*anubhāva*) in chapter XI.

There arose a Stupa, or a tower, of treasures (宝塔), where the proper body of *Prabhūtaratna* Tathagata (多宝如来) was contained. Then *Mahāpratibhāna* Bodhisattva (大樂說菩薩) wished to see the body of the Tathagata in the Stupa by Śākyamuni Buddha's help of a miraculous power with dignity (*anubhāva*) [K. 242, 2]. In order to open the door of the Stupa, it was needed to call together all the Buddhas who were emanations of Śākyamuni Buddha (*Tathāgata-vigrahā nirmitā, or ātmabhāva-nirmitās tathāgata-vigrahā*, 分身諸仏) and expounded teachings in the Buddha-fields of the ten directions.

Then the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows (眉間白毫相), and illuminated all the Buddha-fields of the ten directions, where all the bodily emanations of the Buddha were seen in the ray of light.

When the whole bodily emanations of the Buddha were called together unto him in Sahā world, The door of the Stupa was opened by a finger of his right hand. It was the Buddha's help of a miraculous power with dignity that the Bodhisattva was granted his wish.

(4) Miraculous powers by means of the Buddhas' tongues in chapter XX (Kumārajīva's Chinese Version, chapter XXI).

Śākyamuni Buddha and *Prabhūtaratna* Tathagata both seated on the throne in the centre of the Stupa, and stretched out their tongues, so that with their tongues they reached the Brahma-world, and issued innumerable rays from their tongues. Buddhas who were called together from other Buddha-fields also performed such a miracle. This miracle was performed with “*jihvendriyeṇa rddhi-prātihārya*” [K. 388, 1-2], a miraculous power by means of the Buddha's tongue.

It was performed for the purpose of praising Bodhisattvas and sons of the Buddha who might hold and teach the Lotus Sutra after the extinction of the Buddha, and of calling sentient beings' attention to Śākyamuni Buddha who was expounding the Lotus Sutra in Sahā world.

In short, the purpose of emitting rays of light by means of the supernatural powers of Buddhas in the Lotus Sutra is to call sentient beings' attention to Śākyamuni Buddha and other Buddhas who expound this Sutra. The emission of a ray of light is based on the expedient of the Buddha to lead sentient beings to supreme enlightenment according

to chapter I.

### III. The supernatural power and the expedient of the Buddha.

(1) Priority of the expedient to the supernatural power in chapter III.

The Buddha reflected that though he was endowed with the power of wisdom (*jñāna-bala*, 智慧力), the supernatural power (*ṛddhi-bala*, 神力), and so on [K. 77, 7-8; 78, 10], he could not rescue sentient beings from the burning house of the triple world without the expedient (*upāya*, 方便). Then he showed three vehicles (*trīṇi yānāni*, 三乘) and attracted them from the burning house by the skillful expedient (*upāya-kauśalya* [K. 79, 4], 善巧方便), without using the supernatural power [K. 79, 3-5].

After they ran out of the burning house, he gave the one great vehicle (*mahāyānena* [K. 82, 7], 但以大乘; *ekam eva mahāyānam* [K. 82, 10], 一大乘, [Kumārajīva's Version, 一仏乘, T. 9, 13 c]) with which he led them to complete Nirvāṇa [K. 82, 7].

It is a very rare case that the expedient is prior to the supernatural power.

(2) The supernatural power (*ṛddhi-bala*) and the expedient (*upāya*) in chapter VII.

The Buddha expounds the parable of a magic city (化城譬喩) as follows [K. 187, 4 f.] :

There is a guide, clever and wise, to lead a great company of men on their journey through a vast, dangerous wilderness to the place of jewels. Meanwhile they get tired and wish to return back halfway. Therefore he makes use of skillful expedient (*upāya-kauśalya*) to lead them to the goal. In the middle of the wilderness he produces a magic city with his supernatural power (*ṛddhi-bala*), and makes them stay in it. Knowing they have rested, he makes the magic city disappear and leads them up to the goal, i.e., the place of jewels. In this parable, the leader is likened to the Buddha and the company of men are likened to sentient beings. Thus, the expedient is the means with which he considers how to lead them to the goal, i.e., the supreme enlightenment. And the supernatural power is the power with which he produces the magic city.

In chapter III, though the Buddha was endowed with the supernatural power, he did not use it, because he supposed that he could not rescue them with it for they were attached to the pleasures of five senses. So he rescued them out of the burning house, i.e., the triple worlds by his expedient.

In chapter VII, the Buddha uses the supernatural power in order to realize the

expedient by which he considers how to lead the sentient beings to the place of jewels, i.e., the supreme enlightenment.

**IV. The force of the supernatural control (*adhiṣṭhāna-bala*) of the Tathagata in chapter XV [Kumārajīva's Version XVI].**

In the prose portion of chapter XV the Buddha expounds the force of the supernatural control of the Tathagata (如来秘密神通之力, "the secret supernatural power of the Tathagata" in Kumārajīva's Version, chapter XVI [T. 9, 42 b]), as follows in Sanskrit Text [K. 316, 1 f.].

Listen then, good men. The employment of the force of my supernatural control (*mamādhiṣṭhāna-bal'ādhāna*) is such, good men, that this world, including gods, men, and demons, consider falsely: Now has Śākyamuni Buddha, after going out from the home of the Śākyas, attained supreme, perfect enlightenment, on the summit of the terrace of enlightenment in the great city of Gayā. But, good men, the truth is that many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of aeons ago I have attained supreme, perfect enlightenment. From the moment I have been preaching the law to sentient beings in this Sahā world and in hundred thousands of myriads of kotis of other worlds.

H. Kern translates "*mamādhiṣṭhāna-bal'ādhāna*" by the words "The force of a strong resolve which I assumed", and in his footnote "Or, the power of supremacy which forms my attribute, *mamādhiṣṭhānabalādhānam*". [H. Kern, transl., p. 298]

Franklin Edgerton comments on this phrase in his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (BHSD, p. 16 a) as follows: *mamādhiṣṭhānabalādhānam* SP 316.1, *my assumption of the force of supernatural (magic) power* (here causes people to believe that the earthly life of Śākyamuni, which was unreal, is real); . . . and possibly *adhiṣṭhāna* may be concrete here..., *exhibition of supernatural (magic) power=magical appearance or transformation*".

I translate this phrase by the words "the employment (*ādhāna*) of the force (*bala*) of my supernatural control (*mamādhiṣṭhāna*). Because the Buddha controls over people (this world) and causes them to believe with the employment of the force of his supernatural control that Śākyamuni Buddha has now attained supreme enlightenment in the great city of Gayā. But in fact, the earthly life of Śākyamuni was unreal. The truth is that he has attained supreme, perfect enlightenment aeons ago, and ever since has been preaching the law to sentient beings in this Sahā world and in other innumerable worlds. Thus he is eternal and omnipresent.

The Buddha is unlimited in the duration of his life, but he announces final extinction, though himself he does not become finally extinct in reality. Because, by too often seeing him sentient beings should take to thinking that he is staying near them everlasting, and should become indolent, eager of sensual pleasures and fail to exert themselves in order to escape the triple world, and not conceive how precious the Buddha is. Hence, he tells them by his skillful expedient that the apparition of the Buddha is precious and rare. Then they will feel surprised and sorry, and being unable to see him, they will get a longing to see him, and develop the root of goodness, which tends to their benefit and happiness. It is for sentient beings to be educated and led to supreme enlightenment that the Buddha announces final extinction, though he himself does not become finally extinct in reality.

The Buddha expounds the parable of a good and wise physician (良医譬喻) as follows [K. 320, 6 f.] :

There is a good and wise physician. The physician once being abroad, all his children incur a disease from poison. The father, the physician, comes home from his journey, and seeing his sons befallen with disease, overcome with pain and rolling on the ground, prepares a great remedy. Some of his children who have right notions take it and are soon totally delivered from their disease. But others who have perverted notions do not take the remedy offered. Therefore he desires to induce these sons to take this remedy by his skillful expedient (*upāya-kauśalya*). He speaks to them as follows : I am old, my term of life is near at hand ; here have I prepared a great remedy for you ; if you want it, you may take it. Then he goes abroad and let them know that he has departed life, though he really alive. Hearing of his death they are plunged into sorrow, recover their right notions and take the remedy.

It is the expedient of the good and wise physician that he causes his sons to believe that he is dead, though he is really alive.

In the verse portion the Buddha expounds his supernatural control as follows [K. 323, 7 f.] :

*tatrāpi c' ātmānam adhiṣṭhahāmi*  
*sarvāṃś ca sattvāna<sup>2)</sup> tathāiva cāham |*  
*viparīta-buddhī ca narā vimūḍhāḥ*  
*tatrāiva tiṣṭhantu na paśyiṣū mām ||4 ||*

There I exercise my supernatural control over myself as well as all sentient beings.

So, men of perverted minds, in confusion, do not see me standing there.

Thinking that the Buddha's body is completely extinct, they are eager for seeing the Buddha, and become upright and gentle. Then the Buddha shows himself on Mt. *Gṛdhrakūṭa*, and speaks to them: I was not completely extinct at that time; it was but my skillful expedient (*upāya-kauśalya*), I repeatedly appear in the world of the living. ( || 5 || - || 7 || )

*sadā 'dhiṣṭhānaṃ mama etad īdṛśaṃ*  
*acintiyā kalpa-sahasra-koṭyaḥ |*  
*na ca cyavāmi itu Gṛdhrakūṭāt*  
*anyāsu śayy'āsana-koṭibhiś ca || 10 ||*

Such has always been my supernatural control during an inconceivable number of thousands of koṭis of aeons, and I have not left this *Gṛdhrakūṭa*, with many koṭis of seats in other places.

In the verse portion, the words “*adhiṣṭhahāmi*” ( || 4 || ) and “*adhiṣṭhāna*” ( || 10 || ) are considered to express the supernatural control with which the Buddha causes sentient beings not to see him, though he is standing there in reality. It is the skillful expedient of the Buddha to lead them to supreme enlightenment that he causes them not to see him.

In short, the supernatural control of the Buddha (*mamādhiṣṭhāna*) in the prose portion is the power of magic control with which the Buddha causes the world to believe that he has attained supreme, perfect enlightenment in the great city of Gayā. In other words, it is the power of magic control with which he causes them not to see the real body of the Buddha who has attained supreme, perfect enlightenment aeons ago, and is unlimited in the duration of his life. It is also equal to the supernatural control of the Buddha expressed by the words “*adhiṣṭhahāmi*” and “*adhiṣṭhāna*” in the verse portion. And it is the skillful expedient of the Buddha to lead sentient beings to supreme enlightenment that he causes them not to see him.

## V. Conclusion.

In the Lotus Sutra, the supernatural powers in early Buddhism are developed, and the profound doctrines are expounded attracting the audience by the performances of

miracles with the supernatural power of the Buddha.

These performances of miracles are based on the skillful expedient of the Buddha to lead sentient beings to supreme enlightenment.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

- BHSD=Franklin Edgerton, ed., *BUDDHIST HYBRID SANSKRIT GRAMMAR AND DICTIONARY, VOLUME II : DICTIONARY*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
- K.=H. Kern and Bunyiu Nanjio, ed., *SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA*. BIBLIOTHECA BUDDHICA. X. Neudruck der Ausgabe 1908-1912. BIBLIO VERLAG · OSNABRÜCK · 1970.
- K. Transl.=H. Kern, transl., *THE SADDHARMA-PUṆḌARĪKA OR THE LOTUS OF THE TRUE LAW*. First published by the Oxford University Press, 1884, Reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, 1965.
- T.=J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe, ed., *THE TAISHO SHINSHU DAIZOKYO (THE TRIPITAKA IN CHINESE)*. The Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo Kanko Kai (*Society for the Publication of the Taisho Tripitaka*), Tokyo, first published in 1925, reprinted in 1960.
- W.=U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchida, ed., *SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA-SŪTRAM ROMANIZED AND REVISED TEXT OF THE BIBLIOTHECA BUDDHICA PUBLICATION* by consulting A Skt. MS. & Tibetan and Chinese translations (改訂 梵文法華經), The Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, Tokyo, 1958.

### NOTES

- 1) 丸山孝雄 『法華教学研究序説—吉蔵における受容と展開』 京都・平楽寺書店, 1978. (MARUYAMA Takao, *Introduction to a study of the doctrine of the Lotus Sutra based on Chi-tsang's commentaries*, Heirakuji-shoten, Kyoto, 1978.), pp. 378-403.
- 2) W. 275, 19: *Sattvān 'pi*: footnote (3...3) 版本は °*ttvāna*に作る。意義を考えて暫く今の如く訂正す。

[34<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ASIAN AND NORTH AFRICAN STUDIES (ICANAS), HONG KONG, AUGUST 1993]