

The discovery of two almost identical early Maitreya-sūtra translations in the Chinese Canon: Wrong attributions and text-historical entanglements

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We have in the present Chinese Canon of the *Taishō edition* five consecutive sūtras with titles, as well as contents, referring to Maitreya's future buddhahood (T14, no. 453–457). Yet the oldest one of these, the sūtra on “Maitreya's descent and birth” (*Mile xia sheng jing* 彌勒下生經, T14, no. 453) attributed to Dharmarakṣa, and a nameless sūtra of the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* (T2, no. 125) attributed to Saṃghadeva are in reality one and the same translation. Comparative textual researches revealed that both attributions are wrong and that Buddhasmṛti (Zhu Fonian 竺佛念) translated the scripture. The ancient Chinese catalogues eliminate any possibility of an ancient Dharmarakṣa translation on Maitreya's buddhahood surviving among the extant Chinese versions. These ancient sources further indicate that the oldest still extant individual Maitreya-sūtra was extracted from the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*. Among other implications, these findings support my previous hypothesis, that Zhu Fonian's first *Ekottarika-āgama* translation is still extant and was not replaced with a later one by Saṃghadeva. In this paper I will also attempt to place the Chinese narrations on Maitreya's future buddhahood within the greater context of the *Āgamas*, *Nikāyas*, and early para-canonical scriptures.