

Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism

Volume II:
Lives

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Maudgalyāyana (Mulian)

Maudgalyāyana (also known as Mahāmaudgalyāyana; Pal. Mogallāna) was one of ten first (and principal) disciples of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and stories about him are well known in the Buddhist countries of East and Central Asia. In China Maudgalyāyana is known under the names of (Mohe) Muqianlian ([摩訶]目犍連), Muqianlian (目乾連), and in the abbreviated form of Mulian (目連). People in other countries of East Asia usually use the latter Chinese form of his name (Jpn. Mokuren; Kor. Mongryōn; Viet. Múc Liên; Mong. Molun Toyin).

Maudgalyāyana's career as the disciple of the Buddha is described in numerous Buddhist scriptures in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan, including the *Āgamas*; the *Buddhacarita* (Acts of the Buddha) by Aśvaghōṣa (馬鳴; Chn. trans. *Fo suoxing zan* [佛所行讚], T. 192 by Dharmakṣema [曇無讖; 385–433], based on the *Fo benxing jing* [佛本行經, Sūtra on the Past Deeds of the Buddha], T. 193, trans. Baoyun [寶雲; c. mid-5th cent.]); the commentary on the Larger Prajñāpāramitā known as the *Da zhidu lun* (大智度論, *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*; T. 1509), attributed to Nāgārjuna; and Chinese encyclopedias such as the *Shijia pu* (釋迦譜, T. 2040, Genealogy of the Śākyas) by Sengyou (僧祐; 445–518) and the *Fayuan zhulin* (法苑珠林, T. 2122, Grove of Pearls in the Garden of the Dharma) by Daoshi (道世; d. 683). These accounts generally state that Maudgalyāyana was born in a wealthy Brahmin family of Kolita (Chn. Juli [拘栗]) near Rājagṛha (Chn. Wangshecheng [王舍城]), the capital of Magadha (present-day Bihar). From childhood, he was close friends with Upatīṣya (→Śāriputra, Chn. Shelifo [舍利弗]), the youngest son of a rich Brahmin of Nālandagrāmaka, who later also became one of the great disciples of Śākyamuni. Together with Śāriputra, he left lay life and embarked on the path of spiritual cultivation, first studying with a Vedic teacher named Sañjaya. After spending some time studying together, the two decided to pursue their ideals separately, agreeing that the one who obtained the true teaching first would notify the other (T. 192 [IV] 33a18–c21; T. 193 [IV] 81a28–c29; T. 1509 [XXV] 136b3–c13; T. 2122 [LIII] 683a15–b8; see also Lamotte, 1949–1980, 623–633; Jones, 1949–1956, vol. III, 56–61).

Most scriptural sources say that Śāriputra first discovered the true way to liberation through an encounter with one of the disciples of the Buddha, and then informed Maudgalyāyana (T. 192 [IV] 33b2–c9; T. 193 [IV] 81b20–c4; T. 2040 [L] 47b22–48a13; T. 2122 [LIII] 683a15–b8; see also Lamotte, 1949–1980, 630–633; Teiser, 1988, 121–122). They decided to learn from the Buddha directly, and joined the community of the Buddha together with 200 disciples of their own. The Buddha predicted their arrival as well as their future abilities (according to Chapter 17 of the *Buddhacarita* “Great Disciples Join the Monastic Order”): “The two who are coming will be my chief disciples. The wisdom of the one will be peerless, and the supernatural power of the other will be the highest” (T. 192 [IV] 33c13–14; trans. Willemen, 2009, 125). The story of two great disciples' conversion also became the subject of a nine-act play in Sanskrit, titled the *Śāriputraprakaraṇa*, also ascribed to Aśvaghōṣa; it has survived only in fragments (Willemen, 2009, 13).

Maudgalyāyana achieved great supernatural powers, which allowed him to read minds, transform into various forms, travel through the universe in a mind-made body (**manomayakāya*), and communicate with all kinds of spiritual beings. For example, the *Ekottarikāgama* (Chn. *Zengyi Ahan jing* [增一阿含經]; T. 125) tells how Maudgalyāyana vanquished rebellious *nāga* kings, protected King Prasenajit from their attack (Maudgalyāyana sat in meditation atop the king's palace and transformed the rain of stones and knives sent down by the *nāgas* into flowers, food, fine clothing, and jewels), and went to see the Buddha in the Heaven of Thirty-Three (T. 125 [II] 703b13–708c3; summarized in Teiser, 1988, 136–139). Maudgalyāyana also preached, and had his own disciples.

Maudgalyāyana is often mentioned in texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra* (T. 262 [IX] 21c15–22a17), and is also featured in numerous *avadānas*. For example, stories collected in the *Liu du ji jing* (六度集經, T. 152, Collected Scriptures on the Six Perfections) and the *Jiu za piyu jing* (舊雜譬喻經, T. 206, Old Scripture of Various Parables), both traditionally if not reliably ascribed to Kang Senghui (康僧會; d. 280),

tell about his incarnations as a king, a cygnet, an otter, a serpent, a minister of state, and an ascetic (trans. Chavannes, 1910–1934, vol. I, 49, 72, 77, 93, 227, 304; vol. II, 412; see also Nattier, 2008, 152–155). Maudgalyāyana is also mentioned in *jātakas*, as in various incarnations he appeared in previous lives of Buddha Śākyamuni (see, e.g. Cowell, vol. I, 94; vol. II, 74, 107, 245–246).

According to the *Ekottarikāgama*, Maudgalyāyana left the earthly life even before the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha Śākyamuni. His departure is described as a violent death at the hands of representatives of hostile teachings. In spite of his spiritual powers, Maudgalyāyana succumbed to such a demise because of his karmic burden in previous incarnations (T. 125 [II] 639b11–640a28). Another Buddhist source, the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, specifies his karmic sin as a serious offense toward his mother in one of previous incarnations (T. 1451 [XXIV] 290b5–c4); it thus creates a link with the subject of filial piety, which became the major context in which Maudgalyāyana was known in China and other countries of East Asia.

Maudgalyāyana and Hungry Ghosts

Maudgalyāyana's spiritual powers allowed him to see and communicate with hungry ghosts (Skt. *preta*, Chn. *equi* [餓鬼]). There are numerous accounts of his encounters with hungry ghosts, for example, in the *Avadānaśataka* (*Zhuanji baiyuan jing* [撰集百緣經]; T. 200). These stories describe the miserable appearance of hungry ghosts and the evil deeds they committed in previous rebirths as humans, which led to their reincarnation in this form (T. 200 [IV] 222b1–224a5; trans. from Skt. Feer, 1891, 162–168; Teiser, 1988, 125–130). These tales obviously had a moralistic and proselytizing function, urging people to convert to Buddhism. The encounters of Maudgalyāyana with hungry ghosts are a common topic in the literature of Chinese Buddhism, for example, in the *Gui wen Mulian jing* (鬼問目連經, Sūtra on Ghosts Questioning Mulian; T. 734 [XVII] 535b10–536b11); the *Egui baoying jing* (餓鬼報應經, Sūtra on the Retribution of Hungry Ghosts; T. 746 [XVII] 560b8–562b5); and the *Jing li yixiang* (經律異相, Various Aspects of the Sūtras and Vinaya; T. 2121 [LIII] 75a3–9, 242c22–243a7, 243a24–244a15; see also Chen Fangying, 1983, 7–22), a Buddhist encyclopedia compiled by Baochang (寶唱) in the early 6th century.

At the same time, in East Asia, the most famous legend connecting Maudgalyāyana (Mulian) with hungry ghosts concerns the salvation of his mother's soul, narrated in the *Yulanpen jing* (盂蘭盆經, T. 685 [XVI] 779a22–c23; Sūtra of Boiled Rice, according to Karashima, 2013). A variant of this scripture is the *Bao'en fengpen jing* (報恩奉盆經, Sūtra on Offering Bowls to Repay Kindness; T. 686 [XVI] 780a1–24, trans. of both in Teiser, 1988, 49–54; see also T. 2121 [LIII] 73c21–74a5). A date of c. 400–500 has been suggested for the compilation of this work (Teiser, 1988, 48–49), and it has recently been maintained, on the basis of a single Indic word transcribed in the text, that it is a genuine translation, rather than a Chinese composition (Karashima, 2013, 302). The *Yulanpen jing* tells us that Mulian once saw with his “divine eye” that his mother had been reborn among the hungry ghosts, and tried to relieve her sufferings. However, his mother was not able to take food until Mulian, on the advice of the Buddha, performed offerings to the assembly of monks in a bowl called *yulanpen* on the day after they had ended the customary summer retreat. The scripture prescribes the performance of such offerings on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month. In this way, parents in the last seven lives, as well as “six kinds of relatives,” will be rescued from suffering “in the three evil paths of rebirth” and reborn in the heavens.

The *Yulanpen jing* played an important role in the history of Chinese Buddhism, as it served as the scriptural foundation for the popular Yulanpen Festival (also called Zhongyuanjie [中元節], and known as the “Ghost festival” in English), which was among the most important annual observances in China and other countries of East Asia in the pre-modern period. The Mulian story also became part of the discourse on filial piety, which especially emphasized a son's obligations toward his mother (Liu, 1997, 6–8; Cole, 1998, 41–80).

The search for the canonical foundations of this scripture and the origins of the word *yulanpen* has long caused considerable controversy among scholars (Teiser, 1988, 20–25). Recently, a persuasive new explanation of the etymology of the word as a “rice bowl” in Prakrit as **olana* has been proposed (Karashima, 2013). However, no Indian or Central Asian variant of this scripture has been discovered. A short reference to the story of Maudgalyāyana rescuing his mother is found in the Uighur version of the *Encounter with Maitreya* (*Maitreya-samiti*), originally an Indian play that was translated into

Central Asian languages (Yüsiip, 1988, 98); however, the dating of this Uighur version is not certain, which makes it possible that it was influenced by popular Chinese versions of the Mulian story of the Tang period (618–907).

The Story of Mulian and His Mother in China

The *Yulanpen jing* had a big influence on the further development of Buddhist literature in China, as eventually a whole category of “Yulanpen literature” developed. This basically neglected the hagiographies of Mulian as the disciple of the Buddha, and focused instead on the story of Mulian rescuing his mother (Teiser, 1988, 123–124).

In Chinese vernacular literature, there developed a story of the earthly life of Mulian as a pious boy called Turnip (Luobu [羅卜]). His mother Qingti (清提, with varying orthography) was punished by rebirth in hell for her avarice and disbelief in the teachings of the Buddha. The offering of *yulan* bowls was able to relieve her sufferings. Mair has suggested that the secular name of Mulian was the result of the misinterpretation of a Chinese abbreviated transcription “Mulian” for the Sanskrit for “turnip” (*mūram* or *mūlan*) (Mair, 1983, 225). The earliest version of this story is found in the *Jingtu Yulanpen jing* (淨土盂蘭盆經; c. 600–650), where it is presented as the story of Mulian’s and his mother’s past lives. This is an apocryphal Chinese scripture, a manuscript (P. 2185) of which was discovered at Dunhuang (Jaworski, 1936). This story became famous in China, and it was accepted even by eminent clerics such as the Chan patriarch Zongmi (宗密; 780–841), who mentioned it in his c. 830 *Yulanpen jing shu* (盂蘭盆經疏, T. 1792 [XXXIX] 509c16–51b28; see also Teiser, 1988, 93–95).

The most detailed version of the story of Mulian and his mother, dating back to the Tang dynasty, is the *Da Muqianlian minjian jiu mu bianwen* (大目乾連冥間救母變文, Transformation Text of Mahāmaudgalyāyana Rescuing His Mother from the Underworld; c. 800), a prosimetric text in semi-vernacular Chinese. It survived only in the form of manuscripts dating back to the 10th century in Dunhuang (for the modern transcription of the manuscript dated 921, see Huang & Zhang, 1997, 1024–1070; English trans. of two different variants in Eoyang, 1978; Mair, 1983, 123–166; also Kawaguchi,

1984, 53–55), but historical records testify to its popularity in central areas of the Tang state at the beginning of the 9th century (Mair, 1989, 11). This text is apparently related to popular storytelling practice, which combined prosaic passages with the singing of verses, and which also used visual devices (picture scrolls; *bianxiang* [變相]) to illustrate the narratives recited (Mair, 1989, 17–18). There also exists an abridged variant of the story in the form of a “tale of conditioned origin” (*yuanyi* [緣起]), which constituted part of Buddhist monks’ sermons for laity (Huang & Zhang, 1997, 1005–1023; trans. Schmid, 2002, 201–229).

In these Dunhuang versions of the tale, Mulian’s father Fuxiang (輔相) is portrayed as a pious layman, while his mother commits numerous sins, and after her death is imprisoned in the deepest of the hells, Avīci. In order to rescue his mother, Mulian becomes a disciple of the Buddha, and after gaining supernatural powers, travels to the hells to find his mother. The constant intervention of the Buddha helps Mulian to free his mother from Avīci, and subsequently, from unfortunate rebirths as a hungry ghost and a dog. Then she repents her sins and achieves rebirth in heaven. The *Da Muqianlian minjian jiu mu bianwen* describes in detail the life of Mulian’s parents, as well as the different realms of hell that Mulian passes through on his way to search for his mother’s soul. Noting the popular nature of this narrative, one can understand its great impact on the later prosaic and dramatic versions of this story, both in China and its neighboring countries (Mair, 1987), though the original version of transformation text quite soon fell out of circulation.

In later periods, the Mulian story continued to be transmitted in the form of apocryphal scriptures, as well as oral narratives. For example, in his description of the celebration of the Yulanpen festival in Bianliang (汴梁), the capital of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1125) (modern Kaifeng [開封]), Meng Yuanlao (孟元老; fl. 1103–1147?) mentions the *Mulian zunsheng jing* (目連尊勝經), which was sold in the markets (Meng, 1956, 49). This text did not survive, though later versions of apocryphal scriptures about Mulian, also lost in China, were preserved in Japanese and Korean collections. The *Mulian jiu mu jing* (目連救母經, Sūtra of Mulian Rescuing His Mother), originally printed in Yin (鄞) County of Zhedong (浙東, modern city of Ningbo in Zhejiang) in the year identified as 1251, was reprinted in Japan in 1346 and kept in the Konkōji (金光寺) in Kyoto (now in the Tokyo National Museum; photocopies

and a modern edition in, respectively, Miya, 1968; Yoshikawa, 2003, 116–122). The version of this text preserved in Korean monasteries has a different title, *Da Mulian jing* (大目連經), but the contents are very similar. Korean printed editions of this text date back to a somewhat later period, the earliest to 1537 (Sa, 1988, 224). However, Korean historical records make it possible to suppose that this text was known in Korea as early as in the beginning of the 12th century (Sa, 1988, 219–220). Though they bear in the title the word *jing*, these texts are obviously based on a popular narrative similar to the version found in the transformation texts from Dunhuang, but new details about the Mulian's travels in the underworld are added.

In its turn, the *Mulian jiu mu jing* became the basis of another prosimetric text, used as a script for oral performance, the *Mujianlian zunzhe jiu mu chuli diyu sheng tian baojuan* (目犍連尊者救母出離地獄生天寶卷, Precious Scroll of Reverend Maudgalyāyana Rescuing His Mother so that she Escapes Hell and Is Reborn in Heaven), which survived in two illustrated manuscripts dated 1372 and 1440 (Berezkin, 2013). Both manuscripts are related to sponsors at the imperial courts of the Northern Yuan (1369–1404) and Ming dynasty, respectively, a fact testified to by the high quality of their color illustrations. These pictures continue the tradition of pictorial representation of the Mulian story, which can be traced to the picture scrolls accompanying performances of transformation texts, and continued in the later period (Berezkin, 2016). Numerous versions of *baojuan* (寶卷, “precious scroll”) texts about Mulian appeared in the 16th to 19th centuries. Several precious scrolls of the 16th and 17th centuries were related to popular sectarian movements (known as “secret religions” in Chinese terminology), and thus present special treatment of the Mulian story in the context of these religious traditions (Berezkin, 2010, 111–202). Precious scrolls of the late period (late 19th to early 20th cents.) contain mainstream versions of this Buddhist legend, and are still performed in several areas in China, mainly in conjunction with funerary rites for women (Johnson, 1995; Berezkin, 2010, 253–295; Grant & Idema, 2011, 35–145).

The story of Mulian was also performed in the form of ritual dramas. These performances can be traced to the beginning of the 12th century, as they were mentioned by Meng Yuanlao, though scripts from that time do not survive (Meng, 1956, 49). Dramas about Mulian existed in the 13th to 15th

centuries, but scripts do not survive from them either (Liu, 1997, 36–48). The earliest complete version of the Mulian drama available now is the *Xinbian Mulian jiu mu quanshan xiwen* (新編目連救母勸善戲文, Newly Compiled Edificatory Play of Mulian Rescuing His Mother) by Zheng Zhizhen (鄭之珍; 1518–1595), based on a local version performed in his native place in modern Anhui province (dated to 1582). This is an abbreviated recension of a drama in 100 acts, designed for performance over a period of three days (Zheng, 1954, vol. VIII, 2–3). Zheng Zhizhen's drama represents a significant sinification of the Mulian story, with many additional elements added to the Mulian's hagiography derived from the popular Chinese versions, starting with the transformation texts of the Tang period (Guo, 2005, 114–125). Some of the scenes even have an anti-clerical and anti-Buddhist orientation.

Even more voluminous recensions of the Mulian drama were performed at the court of the Qing dynasty in the 17th to 18th centuries. The largest among them was the *Quanshan jinke* (勸善金科, Golden Rules Exhorting Goodness) compiled by the court functionary Zhang Zhao (張照; d.u.) and printed in the middle of the 18th century. Zhang Zhao's script was intended for performance over ten days. It has even more additional episodes than Zheng Zhizhen's version, and consists of 240 acts. Just like Zheng Zhizhen's version, Zhang Zhao's script has a pronounced didactic orientation, which can be explained by its context in spectacular court performances (Dai, 2006).

Besides the written versions, compiled and circulated at the higher levels of traditional society, there were also folk versions of the Mulian drama, which often presented much more complex amplification of the Mulian's hagiography, compared with Zheng Zhizhen's version. Most folk dramas were originally transmitted primarily in the oral mode; many of the scripts were collected and put down in writing by Chinese scholars only in the 20th century (overview in Hou, 2002, 23–48; Berezkin, 2011). Significantly, in the modern situation of ritual theater, dramas enacting episodes of the Mulian story have been used not only as a part of rituals for the Yulanpen festival, which is still commonly celebrated in Taiwan and Chinese communities in South-East Asia, but also as a part of funerary services in Taiwan and many areas of south-east China. Funerary performances usually include only several selected episodes of the Mulian story (e.g. Johnson, 1989, 47–85, 155–190; Wang, 2010; Yang, 2011, 196–203).

An important ritual related to the Mulian story, especially in the performances of *baojuan*, ritual dramas, and other Buddhist and Daoist ritual literature, is the “Destruction of the Pool of Blood” (*po xuehu* [破血湖]). This ritual, representing popular beliefs about the physiological impurity of women, arose in China around the 11th–12th centuries, but became widespread by the 16th–17th centuries, and is still performed in many rural areas of China (including Taiwan) (Soymié, 1965; Johnson, 1989, 174–175; Nomura, 2007, 353–407; Wang, 2010, 261–263; Grant & Idema, 2011, 23–34; Song & Li, 2011). This ritual emulates liberation of the mother’s soul performed by Mulian and purifies the sin of pollution caused by blood lost during menstruations and childbirth.

The Story of Mulian and His Mother Across East Asia

In the countries around China – Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet, and Mongolia – Maudgalyāyana remains an important figure in the Buddhist pantheon, but he is especially well known because of the “Yulanpen literature” that developed in these countries under the influence of Chinese narratives. The transmission of the story of Mulian and his mother was related to the celebrations of the Yulanpen festival, which became popular in several countries of East Asia in the medieval period. For example, in Korea, the story must have become known by c. the 6th century and in Japan by the early 7th century (Nomura, 2007, 73, 77). However, the earliest mentions of the Mulian (Mokuren) story in native Japanese literature appear only in the 8th century (Iwamoto, 1968, 31–32). Since the medieval period this story has also often been depicted in Japanese Buddhist paintings showing unfortunate rebirths (Gutiérrez, 1967, 287–288).

While the earliest accounts of the Mokuren story in Japan are obviously based on the *Yulanpen jing*, from around the 13th century we can see the influence of vernacular Chinese narratives, originating in the transformation texts (Carey, 2000, 35). In a form close to the Dunhuang narratives, the story was included in the *Shishu hyaku innen shū* (私聚百因緣集, Privately Gathered Collection of One Hundred Karmic Links, 1275); *Kakai shō* (河海抄, Records of Rivers and Seas, 1364–1368); and *Sanguoku denki* (三國傳記, Tales of the Three Countries,

c. 1394) (Iwamoto, 1968, 60–70). Japanese pictorial versions of the Mokuren story from the 14th to 16th centuries also show the influence of these amplified narratives (Takasu, 1992, 53–57). There are also later versions of the story in colloquial Japanese that contain new local detail; for example, the *Mokuren no sōshi* (目連の草紙, Scroll of Mokuren, 1531) recasts Mokuren as a Japanese prince (Glassman, 1999). In Japan, stories were also transmitted in the form of oral performative literature (e.g. Yoshikawa, 1994; Huang, 1998, 197–221; Nomura, 2007, 148–166, 447–467). Several variants of the *Mokuren ki* (目蓮記, Record of Mokuren), printed in the 17th century, are considered to be related to religious storytelling known as *sekkyōbushi* (説經節) (Yokoyama & Fujiwara, 1936–1937, vol. II, 141–156, 157–173, 392–398). They represent the elaboration of the image of Mokuren’s mother, which involved conflicting concepts of female sinful nature and motherly care (Nomura, 2007, 148–150). Chinese beliefs in the Blood Pond Hell in association with the Mulian story were also transmitted to Japan (and to Korea and Vietnam), and found expression in indigenous Japanese texts and works of art in the early modern period (Nomura, 2007, 152, 472–473).

Though the story of Mulian (Mongryōn) was known in Korea from early times, the extant Korean versions (in the Korean language) date from a later period than the Japanese equivalents (Sa, 1988, 226–228; Nomura, 2007, 409–414). For example, the Mongryōn story was included in the collection *Wōrin sōkpo* (月印釋譜, The Reflection of the Moon [in a Thousand Rivers] and the Genealogy of the Śākyas, 1459), one of the earliest compendia transcribed in the Korean alphabet (*hangul*) (Min, 1963, 1–18). In the early modern period, the Mongryōn story also appeared in Korea in the forms of performance literature and religious images (Nomura, 2007, 74–76; 409–414).

The Mulian (Mục Liên) story spread to Vietnam from China, apparently also in the medieval period. As testified in old Vietnamese historical chronicles, such as the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* (大越史記全書, Complete Annals of Đại Việt), the Yulanpen festival was celebrated in that country in the 13th–15th centuries. It primarily appeared in the Buddhist monastic environment, where it survived to the present and, as in China, had the function of explaining filial piety to lay believers from the Buddhist perspective. The early indigenous Vietnamese texts about Mục Liên apparently did not survive, but developed narratives in classical Chinese, such

as the *Từ bi Đạo tràng huyết bồn sám pháp* (慈悲道場血盆懺法, Penitence Book of the Blood Bowl on the Altar of Mercy), based on ritual texts transmitted from China, were circulated in Vietnamese Buddhist monasteries in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a later period, this story was reworked into the form of *luc-bat* verse, musical drama (*tuồng*), prosaic narratives, and funerary singing, known under the titles *Mục Liên báo ân* (目連報恩, Mulian Repays his Mother's Kindness), *Mục liên tìm mẹ* (目連尋母, Mulian Looks for His Mother), *Mục Liên Thanh Đề* (目連青提, Mulian and Qingti), and *Huyết hồ sự tích* (血湖事跡, Story of the Blood Pond) (e.g. Hai Trung, 1952; Lý Khắc Cung, 1997; Đặng Văn Lung, Trần Xuân Cung & Trần Việt Ngữ, 2003). The story is still widely known in Vietnam, as the Yulanpen festival is commonly celebrated there by laypeople.

The Maudgalyāyana (Mo'u/Me'u 'gal gyi bu) story became known in Tibet in its amplified version from Chinese narratives from the very early period of transmission of Buddhism in this region. The *Yulanpen jing* is believed to have been translated into Tibetan by the Dunhuang-based master 'Gos Chos grub (Chn. Wu Facheng [吳法成]) in the early 9th century (Kapstein, 2007b, 219–242). A Tibetan summary of a developed narrative about Mulian (also c. 9th cent. and ascribed to 'Gos Chos grub), which is strikingly similar to the version of the transformation texts, was discovered among the Dunhuang manuscripts in the Stein collection (IOL J Tib. 686) (Kapstein, 2007a, 351–354; 2007b, 243–245). In addition, adaptations of the amplified Chinese versions (probably also based on the transformation texts) were circulated in Tibet, usually known under the name *Me'u 'gal gyi bu ma dnyal khams nas drangs pa'i mdo* (Sūtra of Maudgalyāyana's Salvation of His Mother from Hell; trans. of a 15th-cent. version, Kapstein, 2007a, 364–367). These amplified narratives had significant influence on the development of Tibetan literature, and not only religious literature (Kapstein, 2007a, 355–362), and were later transmitted to Mongolia, when Tibetan forms of Buddhism spread there.

The earliest extant Mongolian versions of the Mulian (Molon-toyin) story date back to c. 17th century, and they have been quite popular in subsequent centuries (Heissig, 1954, 23–27; 1962, 174–177; Lőrincz, 1982; →BEB I, Local Literatures: Mongolia, 889–890). All of them demonstrate striking similarity with the Chinese transformation texts; apparently, this influence was possible via the intermediary of Tibetan translations of vernacular

Chinese versions. For example, the Oirat version of the Molon-toyin story, an acclaimed translation of the Tibetan scripture by a disciple of the eminent Oirat Buddhist monk and scholar Zaya pandita (Nam mkha'i rgya mtsho, 1599–1662), contains details of Maudgalyāyana's secular biography as Lapug, derived from his name Luobu (“Turnip”, as above) in the medieval Chinese pronunciation (Iakhontova, 1999, 20–31). At the same time, it is also possible that later Chinese versions exerted a direct influence (Chen, 2001, 120–121). Still, early Mongolian recensions of the 17th and 18th centuries are labeled as “sūtras” and supplement the story of Molon-toyin's travel through hells with the episodes of his life derived from canonical Buddhist scriptures (Iakhontova, 1999, 21–25).

Most extant national versions of the Maudgalyāyana story in East Asia can be traced to the vernacular narratives of the 8th and 9th centuries that survived in the Dunhuang caves. In Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Mongolia, numerous recensions of this story demonstrate affinity with the popular Chinese hagiography of Maudgalyāyana (Mulian), and the story continued to circulate primarily in Buddhist contexts.

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