Linking the Buddha's Attainment of Supreme Enlightenment to the Welfare of Beings in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*

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1. The Aim of This Paper: A Continuous Verification of the Hypothesis

The present author has proposed and verified the following hypothesis¹⁾ about the intentions of the compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* (*Sūtra of Golden Light*; *Suv*)²⁾:

〈**The Hypothesis**〉 Owing to the account of the *Suv* which has, through the several stages of its formation, collected and demonstrated the various kinds of doctrines and rites of both mundane and supermundane levels, the compilers and the proponents of the *Suv* became more able to lead their daily religious lives in accordance with “the teaching of [Mahāyāna] Buddhism.” We can therefore interpret the features appearing in the *Suv* not as a token of “the assimilation of Buddhism into Hinduism” or “the depravity of Buddhism,” but as an attempt of Buddhists to survive in the Indian religious world by emphasizing the value, the usefulness, and the completeness of [Mahāyāna] Buddhism under the circumstances where Hinduism had become more and more dominant over Buddhism (during and after the Gupta period). Moreover, if one of the intentions of the compilers of the *Suv* lay in this attempt by collecting as many doctrines and rites as possible from the stage of the formation of the *Suv*_{C1} to that of the *Suv*_{C3} consistently, we can suppose that the intention of the compilers remained unchanged all through the stages of the formation of the *Suv*. Furthermore, it may turn out that the *Suv* is not “a mere miscellaneous medley of doctrines and rites,” but a collection of them which is intrinsic to the value of the *Suv*.

Suzuki [2009] has provided the most recent study on this subject, and the following tentative conclusion has been reached:

Buddhism had once stood foremost in the religious world of India under the patronage of the great kings such as King Aśoka of the Maurya Empire and King Kaniṣka of the Kushan Empire. However during and after the Gupta period when the *Suv* was compiled, Buddhism had already lost its dominant position to Hinduism. Under such circumstances the compilers of the *Suv*, by obtaining various kinds of aid of the kings as well as of their people, must have attempted to survive in the religious world for the sake of accomplishing the duties of the Buddhist clergy.

Whereas the religious merits aimed at in “the Five Chapters on the Various Gods and Goddesses”³⁾ and the *Devendrasamaya-parivarta*, which are successive six chapters and located just before the *Susambhava-parivarta*, are mainly mundane ones, those aimed at in the *Susambhava-parivarta* are

supermundane ones. Therefore by teaching those discourses of these successive seven chapters (“the Five Chapters,” the *Devendrasamaya-parivarta*, and the *Susambhava-parivarta*), the compilers of the *Suv* became able to expect the offerings not only from the people who wanted to attain mundane merits, but also from those who wanted supermundane merits.

This paper continues to verify **the Hypothesis** and the tentative conclusion by examining the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta* (Chapter on the Refuge of the Yakṣas; Chapter 22 of the *Suv*),⁴⁾ which directly follows the *Susambhava-parivarta*, and attempts to connect supermundane merits with mundane ones.

2. A Survey of the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta* (Chapter on the Refuge of the Yakṣas; Chapter 22)

In the preceding *Susambhava-parivarta* the Buddha Śākyamuni tells the story of his former lives in which he obtained his enlightenment and attained *dharmakāya* (the body composed of the Law) through the offerings originated in the hearing of the *Suv*. Then the Lord spoke to the goddess Śrī and preached this Chapter 22 with 77⁵⁾ verses. We will begin by making a survey with translations,⁶⁾ and notes put in bold brackets.

The Address of the Lord to Śrī, and Verse 1 and 2 [The Lord spoke,] “Whoever should desire to do inconceivable honor to all the Buddhas and to know the profound sphere of all the Buddhas, he must approach the place where this *Suv* is expounded and listen to the *Suv* carefully.”⁷⁾ (Summarized translation) **【Though to come to know the Buddha-sphere can be regarded as a supermundane merit, we will find everywhere in the discourse of this Chapter 22 accounts on the attainment of mundane merits.】**

Verse 3-5 “This *Suv* is full of inconceivable virtues and is the king of sūtras that rescues all beings from numerous oceans of woes.”⁸⁾ (Summarized translation) **【This account becomes a background that assures the attainment of merits through the hearing and honoring of the *Suv*.】**

Verse 6-9 “He who [wants to] enter the sphere of the Law (*dharmadhātu*) must enter where there is the stūpa whose nature is the Law (*dharmātmaka*), profound, well-established. And in the midst of this stūpa he will see the Buddha Śākyamuni expounding this sūtra in a pleasant voice. However many millions of aeons, inconceivable, incalculable periods, he experiences divine and human pleasures, one who hears this sūtra will know that an inconceivable mass of merit has been thus acquired by him.”⁹⁾ **【We can here present**

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following two formulae: one is “the *Suv* = the sphere of the Law = the stūpa whose nature is the Law,” and the other is “to enter the sphere of the Law = to enter the stūpa whose nature is the Law = to hear the *Suv*.” From the account that “in the midst of this stūpa he will see the Buddha Śākyamuni expounding this sūtra,” we are also able to see that the *Suv* is regarded as the stūpa which encloses the whole body of the Buddha Śākyamuni. At the beginning of this Chapter 22, as we have seen, the merit granted through the hearing of the *Suv* is supermundane, but the merit referred to here is mundane such as experiencing divine and human pleasures.]

[Verse 10-12] “One who hears this *Suv* (i.e. one who enters the stūpa whose nature is the Law) can escape various misfortunes.”¹⁰⁾ (Summarized translation) [The merit of hearing the *Suv* referred to here is also mundane.]

[Verse 13-18] “The preacher of the *Suv* should sit on a seat resembling a lotus and expound this sūtra. After he had left the seat, miracles will be seen on that seat. At times the form of the preacher of the Law (*dharmabhāṇakarūpa*) will be seen there, at times the form of the Buddha (*buddharūpa*) and at times the forms of Bodhisattvas. Sometimes merely a glow, sometimes the appearance of gods is glimpsed. These miracles are seen for a moment and then disappear.”¹¹⁾ (Summarized translation) [The seat on which the *Suv* is expounded turns into a special place where various miracles will be seen. And meeting with Buddhas becomes available not only when one is hearing the *Suv* (Verse 8) but also after one has heard the *Suv*. In addition to the identification of the *Suv* with the stūpa (Verse 8), we can see here that the place where the *Suv* is expounded is regarded as an especially sacred place (Verse 16).]

[Verse 19] “The Buddha’s teaching [called the *Suv*] is renowned (*praśastam buddhaśāsanam*), producing success in every case (*sarvatra saṃsiddhikaram*), and grants grain and blessing. These are the signs [of the merits] endowed by the Buddha [including those referred to below].”¹²⁾ [Directly these merits are brought about through the hearing of the *Suv*, but all the teachings of the Buddha including the *Suv* stem from the attainment of supreme enlightenment by the Buddha. This understanding leads to such expressions as “the signs endowed by the Buddha.”]

[Verse 20-23] “The Buddha’s teaching [called the *Suv*], causing victory, fortune and fame, defeats all enemies in battles.”¹³⁾ (Summarized translation) [Similar accounts on the victory in battles brought by the *Suv* are repeated four times from Verse 20 to Verse 23.

This emphasis on victory in battles corresponds well to **the Hypothesis** that the compilers of the *Suv* must have attempted to obtain various kinds of aid, especially financial aid of the kings.]

Verse 24-26 “King Brahmā, Tridaśendra, likewise Lokapālās, Vajrapāṇi, the lord of the Yakṣas, Saṃjñāya, the chief Conqueror, Anavatapta, lord of the Nāgas, likewise Sāgara, the lords of the Kīṃnaras and the lords of the Asuras, likewise the lords of the Garuḍas — with these placed at the head, all the gods continually honor the inconceivable stūpa of the Law (*dharmastūpa*; i.e. the *Suv*).”¹⁴ [From Verse 24 to the last verse (Verse 77), protection to those who have heard the *Suv* given by the various gods is explained. We must notice that those who are protected by the gods are not the preachers or the holders of the *Suv* but those who have heard the *Suv*. In addition we should be reminded here that Lokapālās are the chief characters in Chapter 11-12 (*Caturmahārāja-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2005]) and Saṃjñāya is in Chapter 19 (*Saṃjñāya-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2008]), and both Chapter 11-12 and Chapter 19 belong to “the Five Chapters.”]

Verse 27-32 “All the excellent lords of the gods will become joyful and speak to one another: ‘Look at all those beings endowed with brilliance, glory, and merits! Because of a purified merit-root they have come here. Those who have come here in order to hear the *Suv* and honor the stūpa of the Law (*dharmastūpa*) with inconceivable devotion are working for the welfare of beings. They are a vessel for the juice of this Good Law (*saddharma-rasabhājana*). Those who hear the *Suv* are those who enter [this stūpa of the Law (i.e. the *Suv*)] by entry into the sphere of the Law. They have worshipped hundreds of thousands of former Buddhas and because of this merit-root they hear the *Suv*.”¹⁵ (Summarized translation) [By repeating the same kinds of accounts as those in the 6th verse to the 9th verse, the formula is emphasized that “to hear the *Suv* = to enter the stūpa whose nature is the Law = to enter the sphere of the Law.”]

Verse 33 and 34 “All these kings of the gods, likewise Sarasvatī, Śrī, likewise the four kings including Vaiśravaṇa, together with hundreds of thousands of Yakṣas, will everywhere in the four directions give protection to those who have heard the *Suv*.”¹⁶ (Summarized translation) [The four kings are the chief characters in Chapter 11-12 (*Caturmahārāja-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2005]), Sarasvatī is in Chapter 15 (*Sarasvatī-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2004]), and Śrī is in Chapter 16-17 (*Śrī-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2006]) respectively. All these chapters belong to “the Five Chapters.”]

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Verse 35 and 36 “Indra, Soma, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Skanda, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, Prajāpati, and Hutaśana, all these gods will always give protection to those who have heard the *Suv*.”¹⁷⁾ (Summarized translation)

Verse 37-41 “And the Yakṣa-lords, Nārāyaṇa and Maheśvara and the twenty-eight others headed by Saṃjñāya will give them protection. And Vajrapāṇi, lord of the Yakṣas, with five hundred Yakṣas and all the Bodhisattvas will give them protection. Māṇibhadra, lord of the Yakṣas, likewise Pūrṇabhadra, Kumbhīra, Āṭavaka, Piṅgala, and Kapila, each Yakṣa-lord with five hundred Yakṣas, will give protection to those who have heard this sūtra (*teṣāṃ rakṣāṃ kariṣyanti yebhiḥ sūtram idaṃ śrutam*).”¹⁸⁾ (Summarized translation) **【From Verse 37 onward the protection to those who have heard the *Suv* given by the Yakṣas is explained, and this series of descriptions can account for the title of this Chapter 22. We should notice here again that Saṃjñāya is the chief character in Chapter 19 (*Saṃjñāya-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2008]) which belongs to “the Five Chapters.”】**

Verse 42-46 “Citrasena, Jinarṣabha, Maṇikaṇṭha, Nikaṇṭha, Varṣādhipati, Mahāgrāsa, Mahākāla, likewise Suvarṇakeśa, Pāṇcika, Chagalapāda, likewise Mahābhāga, Praṇālin, Dharmapāla, Markaṭa, Vāli, Sūciroma, Sūryamitra, likewise Ratnakeśa, Mahāpraṇālin, Nakula, Kāmaśreṣṭha, Candana, Nāgayana, Haimavata, likewise Satāgiri — all these will give protection to those to whom this sūtra is dear (*teṣāṃ rakṣāṃ kariṣyanti yeṣāṃ sūtram idaṃ priyam*).”¹⁹⁾ (Summarized translation) **【It must be noted here again that those who are given protection are those to whom the *Suv* is dear, not the preachers or the holders of the *Suv*.】**

Verse 47 and 48 “Anavatapta, lord of the Nāgas, likewise Sāgara, Mucilinda, Elapatra, Nanda and Upanandaka, with hundreds of thousand of Nāgas, will give them protection from every fear and terror.”²⁰⁾ (Summarized translation) **【The protection by Nāga-lords to those to whom the *Suv* is dear is explained.】**

Verse 49 and 50 “Balin, Rāhu, Namuci, Vemacitra, Saṃvara, Prahlāda, Kharaskandha, and likewise other lords of the Asuras, with hundreds of thousand of Asuras, will give them protection from every fear and terror.”²¹⁾ (Summarized translation) **【The protection by Asura-lords to those to whom the *Suv* is dear is explained.】**

Verse 51-53 “Hārītī, mother of the Bhūtas, with her five hundred sons will always give them protection. Caṇḍā, Caṇḍālikā, likewise the Yakṣiṇī Caṇḍikā, Kuntī, and Kūṭa-dantī — all these will give them protection everywhere in the four directions.”²²⁾ (Summarized translation) **【The protection by Bhūta-mother and Yakṣiṇīs to those to whom the *Suv***

is dear is explained.】

Verse 54-58 “All the goddesses with Sarasvatī and Śrī at their heads, the Earth-goddess, the deities of fruit, crop, and forest, river-deities and those inhabiting parks, trees, and sacred trees (*caitya*) — all these deities, with minds greatly rejoicing, will give protection to those to whom the *Suv* is dear, and will provide them with old age, good complexion, strength, glory, virtue, brilliance, and fortune. They will destroy every misfortune, wickedness, and bad dream.”²³⁾ (Summarized translation) 【The protection by goddesses and deities to those to whom the *Suv* is dear is explained. And we can notice here again that the merits granted to them are mundane ones such as the providing of fortune and the avoidance of misfortune.】

Verse 59-77 “The Earth-goddess (*pṛthivīdevatā*), satisfied with the nectar juice (*rasa*) of the *Suv*, will cause the essence of the earth to increase. Through the hearing of the *Suv*, the earth will become moist and produce various crops, fruits, and plants. Everywhere in this Jambudvīpa inconceivable Nāga-girls (*nāgakanyā*) will be joyful in mind, and plant in all the lotus-pools various kinds of lotuses. The lordly sun, offspring of the gods (*Sūryendra-devaputra*), satisfied with the *Suv*, will shine everywhere with his endless mass of rays, and awaken the lotuses that fill the pools. Everywhere he will fully and properly ripen the various crops, fruits, and plants. The constellations, likewise wind and rain, will come at the proper time. There will be plenty everywhere, especially in that realm (*rāṣṭra*) where the *Suv* may be.”²⁴⁾ (Summarized translation) 【The Earth-goddess is the chief character in Chapter 18 (*Dṛḍhā-parivarta*; see Suzuki [2007]) which belongs to “the Five Chapters.” The fertile earth, water supply, the sunshine, and proper rain and wind are indispensable to crops, fruits, and plants. And all these are brought properly by the Earth-goddess, Nāga-girls, and the lordly sun satisfied with the *Suv*. We notice once again that the granted merit mentioned here through the hearing of the *Suv* is plenty, that is, mundane merit.】

3. An Examination of the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta*

The preceding Chapter 21 (*Susāmbhava-parivarta*) is the story of the former lives of the Buddha Śākyamuni. The story tells that the Buddha Śākyamuni was once born a Cakravartin-king called Susāmbhava, and obtained supermundane merit such as the attainment of the body composed of the Law (i.e. the attainment of supreme enlightenment) by the mass of merits accumulated through having heard and rejoiced in the *Suv*, and through the offer-

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ings to the Three Jewels originated in the hearing of the *Suv*. Also at the beginning of this Chapter 22 (*Yakṣāśraya-parivarta*) the Lord tells that the merit which can be obtained through the hearing of the *Suv* is a supermundane one such as to come to comprehend the profound Buddha-sphere. In this respect it may seem fair to say that these two chapters share their context.

However, most of the merits of the hearing of the *Suv* we find actually in the discourse of this Chapter 22 are mundane ones as follows:

- divine and human pleasures (Verse 8)
- refuge from various misfortunes (Verse 10-12)
- grain and blessing (Verse 19)
- victory in battles (Verse 20-23)
- protection by the various gods (Verse 33-53)
- providing of fortune and avoidance of misfortune by goddesses and deities (Verse 54-58)
- plenty brought by the Earth-goddess, Nāga-girls, and the lordly sun (Verse 59-77)

These characteristics of the merits accumulated through the hearing of the *Suv* are common to those in “the Five Chapters” and the *Devendrasamaya-parivarta* rather than those in the preceding *Susambhava-parivarta*, and we find also the same gods and goddesses are listed both in “the Five Chapters” and in this Chapter 22. Reconsidering the context among the successive eight chapters (from “the Five Chapters” to the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta*) according to what has been made clear by this examination, we can say “Whereas the chief merits aimed at in “the Five Chapters” and the *Devendrasamaya-parivarta* are mundane in order to obtain financial aid of kings as well as their people who want mundane merits, those aimed at in the *Susambhava-parivarta* are supermundane in order to obtain financial aid also of those who want supermundane merits. However, in the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta* the chief merits aimed at are once again returned to mundane ones.”

In that case what kinds of hearers or proponents are expected in the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta* who through the hearing of the *Suv* aim at obtaining mundane merits? Let us examine this question from three points. First, in the discourse of the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta* they are consistently called “those who have heard the *Suv*” or “those to whom the *Suv* is dear,” and they are not regarded as monks or nuns holding or preaching the *Suv*.²⁵⁾ Second, common characteristics have been found between “the Five Chapters” and the *Yak-*

śāśraya-parivarta. Third, victory in battles is listed (Verse 20-23) among the expected merits, and plenty can be especially brought to that “realm (*rāṣṭra*)” where the *Suv* may be. All these factors considered, it seems reasonable to suppose that they are, the same as in “the Five Chapters,” such lay people in India as kings or rulers and various kinds of people who are governed by them. Viewed in this light we can say that “the transition or the recurrence of the merits aimed at from supermundane to mundane” in the *Yakṣāśraya-parivarta* gives us some suggestion of what lay people in India expected of or wanted from Buddhism.

What draws our attention more is that the *Suv* links the Buddha's attainment of the body composed of the Law to the welfare of beings. The preceding Chapter 21 (*Susambhava-parivarta*) is, as has been mentioned above, the story of the former lives of the Buddha Śākyamuni, which tells that the Buddha Śākyamuni had obtained his supreme enlightenment and attained the body composed of the Law by the merits originating in the hearing of the *Suv*. In this Chapter 22, however, the body composed of the Law attained through the hearing of the *Suv* is enshrined in the stūpa whose nature is the Law, that is, in the *Suv* itself. In other words, the *Suv* is regarded not only the origin of supreme enlightenment, but also that which encloses the result or the outcome finally attained through the merits of the hearing of the *Suv*. Therefore in the transition from Chapter 21 to Chapter 22, we can notice following two kinds of shift:

- from the attainment of the body composed of the Law to the immanence of that body in the *Suv*
- from supermundane merits to mundane merits

These two shifts illustrate well that mundane merits of the hearing of the *Suv* originate in the supermundane merit of the Buddha's attainment of supreme enlightenment.

As has been already discussed elaborately in the previous studies,²⁶⁾ the attainment of supreme enlightenment by the Buddha Śākyamuni has been inseparably linked in the history of Buddhism to the welfare of all sentient beings, and this linkage has long influenced the formation of the various ideas in Buddhism. Shifting our eyes to the *Suv*, we see that the compilers of the *Suv* maintained in the context of Chapter 21 and Chapter 22 mundane merits of beings originate in the Buddha's attainment of supreme enlightenment, the ultimate supermundane merit in Buddhism. Thus it follows that the compilers of the *Suv*, while paying attention to the wishes of lay people in India, did not indiscriminately propagate the abundance of the merits of those who had heard the *Suv*. But by considering the

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attainment of supreme enlightenment by the Buddha Śākyamuni to be the origin of the welfare of beings they succeeded in placing the *Suv* properly in the orthodox formula of Buddhism concerning the linkage between the Buddha's attainment of supreme enlightenment and the welfare of beings.

4. Conclusion

In order to survive in the Indian religious world by obtaining various kinds of aid from the kings as well as their people, the compilers of the *Suv* edited such chapters as "the Five Chapters" whose subject is to attain mundane merits. In editing them they introduced a lot of features which had been rather unusual for the Buddhist scriptures before. But the compilers of the *Suv* succeeded in introducing those features without having disturbed the traditional idea or deviated from the orthodox formula of Buddhism since the attainment of supreme enlightenment by the Buddha Śākyamuni is, in accordance with the Buddhist tradition, inseparably linked to the welfare of all sentient beings in the *Suv*. Here may lie one of the reasons why the *Suv* has remained a Buddhist scripture through all the stages of its formation and transmission, however much the compilers of the *Suv* emphasized the attainment of mundane merits, and however many features they introduced into the *Suv* which had been rather unusual for the Buddhist scriptures at that time.

Notes

- 5) The *Suv*_{C3} has 78 verses. In the *Suv*_{C1} and the *Suv*_{C2} a pause between Verse 77 and 78 is indistinct.
- 6) These translations (either full or summarized) are mainly based on Emmerick [1996] (*The Sūtra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, PTS).
- 25) The previous studies listed in n.1 illustrate that the *Suv* was held and preached by monks or preachers who belonged to Buddhist monasteries.
- 26) See Nishio [1944], Takasaki [1958, 1974, and 1975], and Suzuki [2007] (in Japanese).

The other notes had to be omitted for lack of space.

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〈Key words〉 金光明最勝王經・金光明經 (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtreन्द्रarāja*), 諸天藥叉護持品・鬼神品 (*Yakṣāśraya-parivarta*), The intention of the compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*.

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