The Beginning: The First Chapter of the Suvarṇaprabhāsa

Suzuki Takayasu

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

The present author has proposed and verified the following hypothesis\(^1\) 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 already expounded in other treatises, 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\(_c^1\)* to that of the *Suv\(_c^3\)* 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 [2010] 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 Kaniska 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, 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”\(^3\) 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

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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 wel-
fare 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 com-
pliers 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.

This paper continues to verify *the Hypothesis* by examining the *Nidāna-parivarta*
(Introductory Chapter; Chapter 1 of the *Suv*)\(^4\) located at the beginning of the *Suv*. This
*Nidāna-parivarta* was enlarged through approximately two stages of formation:

$$\textit{Suv}^{c_1}, \textit{Suv}^s, \textit{Suv}^{r_1}, \textit{Suv}^{c_2} \text{ (the first stage)} \leq \textit{Suv}^{r_2}, \textit{Suv}^{c_3} \text{ (the second and last stage)}$$

In addition to the verifying of *the Hypothesis*, this paper also attempts to determine
the origin of the enlarged part and to investigate the reason for the enlargement.

2. A Survey of the *Nidāna-parivarta*

"Thus have I heard.\:" This is the opening of the *Suv*. While the account of the second
stage is prose ("I heard at one time (how) the Lord at the top of Mount Grāhrakūta situat-
ed in Rājagṛha dwelled [through meditation] in the very pure and profound sphere of the
Law in the excellent Tatāgata-region together with great assembly of ninety eight thou-
sand monks." *Suv*\(^{r_2} 185.1-5, Suv^{c_3} 403a7-9*), that of the first stage is verse ("I heard at
one time (how) the Tatāgata on Mount Grāhrakūta dwelled in the sphere of the Law in
the profound Buddha-region ... among purified, pure, and best Bodhisattvas.\(^6\) *Suv*\(^{c_1}
335b6-8, Suv^s 1.5-14, Suv^{r_1} 3.9-15, Suv^{c_2} 359c17-19*).

Monks (only in the second stage): Those ninety eight thousand monks headed by Ājñ-
ātakaunḍinya have a lot of virtue as great Arhats. They rose from meditation in the even-
ing, and came where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of the Lord with their
heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat down on one side.
(*Suv*\(^{r_2} 185.5-24, Suv^{c_3} 403a9-20*)

Bodhisattvas (only in the second stage): There were also a trillion Bodhisattvas head-
ed by Apratihatadharmaacakravartana. All of them have a lot of great virtue such as being
skillful in expounding the real meaning of the Buddha’s profound teaching. They rose from
meditation in the evening, and came where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of
the Lord with their heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat

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down on one side (Suva₀, 185.25–188.6, Suvc, 403a21–b28)

Licchavi princes (only in the second stage): There were also five hundred and eight thousand Licchavi princes headed by Simhaprabha. They gathered in the evening where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of the Lord with their heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat down on one side (Suva₀, 188.7–19, Suvc, 403b28–c6)

Divine sons (only in the second stage): There were also forty-two thousand Divine sons headed by Priyadarśana. They gathered in the evening where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of the Lord with their heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat down on one side (Suva₀, 188.20–30, Suvc, 403c7–12)

Nāga-kings (only in the second stage): There were also twenty-eight thousand Nāga-kings headed by Padma. They gathered in the evening where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of the Lord with their heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat down on one side (Suva₀, 188.31–189.7, Suvc, 403c13–18)

Yakṣa-kings (only in the second stage): There were also thirty-six thousand Yakṣa-kings headed by Vaiśravaṇa. They gathered in the evening where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of the Lord with their heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat down on one side (Suva₀, 189.8–18, Suvc, 403c19–25)

Various kinds of sentient beings (only in the second stage): There were also forty-nine thousand Garuḍa-kings headed by Gandhahastiprabhāvarāja. Moreover there were Gandharvas, Asuras, Kīmṇaras, Mahoragas, gods dwelling in mountains, forests, rivers, and oceans, kings, their families, noble sons and daughters of good families, and so on. All of them gathered in the evening where the Lord was. Having worshipped the feet of the Lord with their heads, they three times walked round the Lord towards right and sat down on one side (Suva₀, 189.19–31, Suvc, 403c26–404a3)

Entreaty for preaching (only in the second stage): The assemblies united their minds and made the respectful gesture with their hands towards the Lord. And they entreated the Lord to preach who was still in his meditation. (Suva₀, 189.32–190.3, Suvc, 404a3–5)

Approval of preaching (only in the second stage): Then the Lord rose from his meditation and started his preach composed of twenty-three verses. The contents of these verses have remain unchanged since the first stage. (Suva₀, 190.4–6, Suvc, 404a5–7)

Verse 1 and 2: "I will preach the Suv, emperor of sūtras (sūtrarājendra), very profound
on hearing and profound on examination, It has been blessed by the Buddhas in the four directions.” (Suv\textsubscript{C1} 335b9–13, Suv\textsubscript{S} 2.1–5, Suv\textsubscript{T} 3.16–4.8, Suv\textsubscript{C2} 359c19–23, Suv\textsubscript{C3} 404a8–13)

Verse 3 and 4: “In order to ruin all evils I will proclaim this blessing, the excellent, auspicious confession (de\={s}an\={a}) [named the Suv] which produces the destruction of all evils, confers every blessing, ruins every misfortune, becomes the basis of omniscience (sarva-j\={n}atattva), and is thoroughly adorned with every splendor.” (Suv\textsubscript{C1} 335b13–17, Suv\textsubscript{S} 2.6–9, Suv\textsubscript{T} 4.9–16, Suv\textsubscript{C2} 359c24–27, Suv\textsubscript{C3} 404a14–17)

Verse 5–10: “Those beings whose senses are defective, whose life is expended, beset by misfortune, neglected by the gods, hated by dear, beloved people, tormented by the destruction of their property, in the violent grip of demons, and tortured by evil dreams full of grief and trouble, should listen to this excellent s\=utra (s\=utra uttamam), the profound Buddha-region (buddhagocara) after having purified their bodies and minds. Such most severe misfortunes are forever extinguished by the splendor of the Suv,” (Suv\textsubscript{C1} 335b17–25, Suv\textsubscript{S} 2.10–3.8, Suv\textsubscript{T} 4.17–5.12, Suv\textsubscript{C2} 359c28–360a6, Suv\textsubscript{C3} 404a18–29)

Verse 11–14: “Such gods, goddesses, and deities as Lokap\={a}la, Sarasvat\={i}, Naira\={n}janav\={a}-

Verse 15: “I will make known the Suv, the profound Buddha-region, the secret (ra-

Verse 16–19: “Those who hear the Suv, those who cause others to hear the Suv and rejoicing in it, and those who honor the Suv, will be honored throughout numerous millions of aeons by various kinds of deities. Inconceivable heap of merit will arise for those beings who have performed merits such as hearing the Suv, causing others to hear the Suv and rejoicing in it, and honoring the Suv. They will be gladly accepted by the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas in the ten directions.” (Suv\textsubscript{C1} 335c5–10, Suv\textsubscript{S} 4.5–12, Suv\textsubscript{T} 6.5–20, Suv\textsubscript{C2} 360a13–15, Suv\textsubscript{C3} 404b9–10)

Verse 20–22: “Having purified [your] mind and body, do honor and hear this excellent s\=utra (s\=utra uttamam). Those who hear the Suv will be able to be reborn as human beings and live a good life.” (Suv\textsubscript{C1} 335c10–14, Suv\textsubscript{S} 4.13–5.3, Suv\textsubscript{T} 6.21–7.6, Suv\textsubscript{C2} 404b11–18)
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360a21–24, *Suv*$_{C3}$ 404b19–24)

**Verse 23:** "Those into whose ear this confession [named the *Suv*] enters will have their merit-roots ripened and be praised by numerous Buddhas." (*Suv*$_{C1}$ 335c14–15, *Suv*$_{S}$ 5.4–5, *Suv*$_{T}$ 7.7–10, *Suv*$_{C2}$ 360a25–26, *Suv*$_{C3}$ 404b25–26)

3. An Examination of the *Nīdāna-parivarta*

3.1. The Intention of the compilers of the *Suv* described in the *Nīdāna-parivarta*

Let us now look at the accounts common both in the first stage and in the second stage, that is, those of the twenty-three verses, in detail to investigate the intention of the compilers of the *Suv*. The examination of the accounts peculiar to the second stage will be taken up in the next section (3.2).

The first point to notice is that these six verses (Verse 1, 3, 8, 9, 15, and 21), which are more than a quarter of all the twenty-three verses, repeat that the *Suv* is excellent, profound, and difficult to obtain. These accounts must serve to emphasize the value, the usefulness, and the preciousness of the *Suv*.

This “precious” *Suv* is said in this Chapter 1 to produce various kinds of merits. The ways to obtain these merits are to hear the *Suv* (Verse 8, 9, 16, 21, 22, and 23), to honor the *Suv* (Verse 16 and 20), and to cause others to hear the *Suv* and rejoice in it (Verse 16), and such severe practices peculiar to monks as performing Six Perfections throughout numerous millions of aeons are never referred to in this Chapter 1.

Moreover, the merits obtained through the hearing of the *Suv*, the honoring of the *Suv*, and so on, are the destruction of all evils and the acquisition of every blessing (Verse 3), the extinguishment of a lot of kinds of severe misfortunes (Verse 5–10), the protection by the various kinds of gods, goddesses, and deities (Verse 11–14), to be honored throughout numerous millions of aeons by the various kinds of deities (Verse 17), the acquisition of inconceivable heap of merit (Verse 18), to be gladly accepted by the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas in the ten directions (Verse 19), to be reborn as human beings and live a good life (Verse 22), and the ripeness of merit-roots and the praise by numerous Buddhas (Verse 23). It is obvious that almost all these merits are not supermundane but mundane ones. Taking "the ways of obtaining these merits" and "the characteristics of these merits" into consideration, we can say that hearers expected in the *Nīdāna-parivarta* are not monks.
but lay people.

If lay people want to obtain various kinds of mundane merits by hearing, honoring, and causing others to hear the precious *Suv*, they must approach places where the *Suv* is and where the monks reside who hold and preach the *Suv*, and ask the monks to preach the *Suv* or to exhibit the copies of the *Suv*. Naturally enough, there can take place the exchange of preaching the *Suv* or the exhibition of the *Suv* (from the monks to the lay people) for offerings (from the lay people to the monks), and these offerings will support as financial aid the religious practices and the lives of the monks.

To sum up,

1. The compilers of the *Suv* attempt to emphasize the value of the *Suv* by repeating that the *Suv* is excellent, profound, and difficult to obtain.
2. The chief ways to obtain various kinds of merits are the hearing of the *Suv*, and so on. No severe practice peculiar to monks is required.
3. Almost all the merits to be obtained are not supermundane but mundane ones.
4. From (2) and (3), the hearers of the *Suv* are supposed to be lay people.
5. If lay people want to hear the precious *Suv*, they must ask those monks who hold the *Suv* to preach it. In that case there will naturally take place the exchange of preaching the *Suv* (from the monks to the lay people) for offerings (from the lay people to the monks).

These five points have been made clear. As has been shown in the previous studies, these characteristics are also shared by other chapters in the *Suv*. Therefore it follows what has been said that the intention of the compilers of the *Suv* that “under circumstances where Buddhism had already lost its dominant position to Hinduism, the compilers of the *Suv*, by obtaining various kinds of aid from lay people, must have attempted to survive in the religious world for the sake of accomplishing the duties of the Buddhist clergy” is also expressed in the *Nidāna-parivarta* which has been located at the beginning of the *Suv* throughout the stages of its formation. We can say that this fact also justifies the proposed *Hypothesis*.

### 3.2. The Origin of the Enlarged Part and the Reason for the Enlargement

#### 3.2.1. The Reason for the Enlargement

Based on the examination in 3.1 which made clear that the accounts in the *Nidāna-parivarta* are well accordant with *the Hypothesis*, let us examine in this 3.2.1 the reason for the enlargement paying special attention to the point shown in *the Hypothesis* that “the
compilers of the *Suv* attempted to emphasize its completeness."

Comparing the differences between the accounts in the first stage and those in the second stage, we can notice that the chief aim of the enlargement of the *Nidāna-parivarta* lies in forming the *Suv* more properly as sūtra literature, rather than in enriching its content. This supports the idea above mentioned that "the compilers of the *Suv* attempted to emphasize its completeness."

3.2.2. The Origin of the Enlarged Part

As far as I know, there exists only one Buddhist scripture that has a similar structure and content to the enlarged part in Chapter 1 of the *Suv*. It is the *Mahāmeghasūtra (MMS)*. The enlarged part in the *Nidāna-parivarta* of the *Suv* (*Suv* 185.31, *Suv* 189.31, *Suv* 403a7–404a3), though partly simplified, well corresponds to a series of descriptions in Chapter 1 (*lHa thams cad 'dus pa žes bya ste phun po dañ po'i le'u*，大雲初分大衆健度第一（Dà yún chū fèn dà zhòng jiàn dù di yī）) of the *MMS* (*MMS*, 121a5–133a2, *MMS* 1077c17–1080c26).

As has been already proved in the previous studies, the *MMS* was a single source from which Chapter 2 of the *Suv* (*Tathāgatāyuhpramāṇairdeśa-parivarta*) quotes long series of passages. In other words, the compilers of the *Suv* had referred to the *MMS* in enlarging Chapter 2 of the *Suv*. In the light of these two factors, that is, the high similarity of structure and content, and the circumstance under which Chapter 2 of the *Suv* was enlarged, it is reasonable to consider that the origin of the enlarged part in the *Nidāna-parivarta* is also the *MMS*. This consideration also serves to strengthen the validity of *the Hypothesis* which insists that in order to emphasize the completeness of the *Suv* its compilers have consistently collected the various kinds of doctrines already expounded in other treatises.

4. Conclusion

Under circumstances where Buddhism was declining, the compilers of the *Suv*, by obtaining various kinds of aid from lay people, must have attempted to survive in the religious world for the sake of accomplishing the duties of the Buddhist clergy. They enlarged various times the *Suv* in order to emphasize its value, usefulness, and completeness, with their intention expressed in Chapter 1 which has been located at the beginning of the *Suv*.
throughout the stages of its formation.

In the enlargement of Chapter 1, their chief object was likely to form it more properly as sūtra literature. The origin of the enlarged part is thought to be the Mahāmeghasūtra which was also referred to in the enlargement of Chapter 2.

Notes:
2) <Texts and Abbreviations>

Suṣ Symposium Suvarṇaprabhāśa or Suvarṇa[-pra-]bhāsottamasūttrendrarāja.
Suṣ1  金光明經 四卷 (Jin guāng ming jīng si juān), tr. 暮無識 (Tán-wú Chén). T. No. 663.
Suṣ7  ‘phags pa gSer ’od dam pa mdo sde ’i dbar po ’i rgyal po žes bya ba theg pa chen po ’i mdo, ārya-Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūttrendrarāja-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra, tr. unknown. P No. 176.
Suṣ12 合部金光明経 八卷 (Hé bù jīng guāng míng jīng bā juān), combined by 寶貴 (Bāo-gui). T. No. 664.
Suṣ12  ‘phags pa gSer ’od dam pa mdo sde ’i dbar po ’i rgyal po žes bya ba theg pa chen po ’i
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*Suv* ① 金光明最勝王經 十卷 (Jīn guāng míng zuì shèng wáng jìng shí juàn), tr. 義淨 (Yi-jing). T. No. 665.


(T. Taisho Tripitaka; P Peking Kaiju.)

3) The present author calls the set of the five successive chapters consisting of the *Caturmahāra-jā-parivarta* (see Suzuki [2005]), the *Sarasvatī-parivarta* (see Suzuki [2004]), the *Śrī-parivarta* (see Suzuki [2006]), the *Drḍhā-parivarta* (see Suzuki [2007]), and the *Śamjñāva-parivarta* (see Suzuki [2008]), “the Five Chapters on the Various Gods and Goddesses” or for short “the Five Chapters,” which tells of the various merits granted to the proponents of the *Suv* by the various gods and goddesses.

4) *Suv* 335b3–c15 (序品第一 (Xù pǐn dì yì)); *Suv* ⑤ 1.1–5.6 (Nidāṇa-parivarta); *Suv* ⑦ 3.0–7.12 (Glen gzi’i le’u); *Suv* ① 359c14–360a26 (≈ *Suv* ①, Xù pǐn dì yì); *Suv* ⑦ 185.0–190.7, 3.17–7.12 (Glen gzi’i le’u); *Suv* ① 403a4–404b26 (Xù pǐn dì yì).

5) Only the *Suv* ⑦ has short sentences which were inserted later (*Suv* ⑤ 1.7–13).

6) Translations from the *Suv* ⑦ (either full or summarized) are mainly based on Emmerick [1996] (*The Sūtra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the Suvarṇabhāṣottamāsūtra*, PTS).

7) The previous studies listed in n.1 illustrate that the *Suv* was held and preached by monks or preachers who belonged to Buddhist monasteries.

8) See the previous studies listed in n.1.


*MMS* ① 大方等無想經 六卷 (Dà fāng déng wú xiǎng jìng liù juàn), tr. 普無識 (Tán-wù Chén). T. No. 387.

It must be noted that both the *MMS* ① and the *Suv* ① were rendered by the same translator, Dharmakṣema (Tán-wù Chén).


(Key words) 金光明最勝王經・金光明經 (*Suvarṇa*-pra-)bhāṣottamasūtrendrarāja), 序品 (Nidāṇa-parivarta), The intention of the compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*.

(Professor, Yamaguchi Prefectural University, D,Litt.)