Who Is the One That Has to Make Confession under the Instruction of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsā*?

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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 hypothesis\(^1\) about the intentions of the compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsā* (*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 [Mahāyāna] Buddhists to survive in the Indian religious world by emphasizing its value, usefulness, and completeness under the circumstances wherein 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\(_{ci}\) to that of the *Suv\(_{cι}\) 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 [2011] 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 Kanishka 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.

They enlarged the *Suv* at various times 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*.
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throughout the stages of its formation.

The Deśanā-parivarta (Chapter on Confession; Chapter 3 of the Suv)\textsuperscript{3} has been regarded as the core chapter of the Suv.\textsuperscript{4} This paper continues to verify \textit{(the Hypothesis)} by examining this Deśanā-parivarta paying special attention to the importance of confession in this chapter, to the question who has to make confession, and to the reason for the enlargement of this chapter.\textsuperscript{5}

2. A Survey of the Deśanā-parivarta

The Deśanā-parivarta is composed of three parts:

Part 1: The Bodhisattva called Ruciraketu saw in the middle of his sleep a golden drum sounding verses on confession.

Part 2: Ruciraketu stated 102 verses on confession to the Lord. This is the chief part of Chapter 3.

Part 3: The Lord praised Ruciraketu, and the assemblies rejoiced. (only in the Suv\textsubscript{r2} and the Suv\textsubscript{c3})

Now let us take a closer look at this Chapter 3.\textsuperscript{6}

\textbf{Part 1:} Suv\textsubscript{c1} 336b11–22; Suv\textsubscript{s} 20.2–21.8; Suv\textsubscript{r} 19.1–20; Suv\textsubscript{c2} 365b20–c1; Suv\textsubscript{c3} 411a18–b3.

The Bodhisattva Ruciraketu,\textsuperscript{7} dwelling in the great city of Rājagrha, in the middle of his sleep saw a golden drum, made of gold, shining everywhere just like the orb of the sun. And in all the directions he saw innumerable, incalculable Buddhas. Then he saw a man with the form of brahmin beating that golden drum, from which there came forth confessional verses. Then indeed the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu, as soon as he awoke, recollected the verses of confession. Having recollected them, at the end of that night he departed for Mount Grdhra-kūṭa, where the Lord was. Having approached and worshipped the Lord, the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu uttered those confessional verses he had heard in the middle of his sleep from the sound of the golden drum.

\textbf{Part 2:} Suv\textsubscript{c1} 336b23–339a6; Suv\textsubscript{s} 21.9–44.18; Suv\textsubscript{r} 20.1–34.16; Suv\textsubscript{c2} 365c2–368a14; Suv\textsubscript{c3} 411b4–413b27.

\textbf{Verse 1–4:} The Bodhisattva Ruciraketu said to the Lord that in the middle of his sleep he saw a golden drum sounding verses on confession.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Verse 5–15:} Merits obtained by the hearing of these verses are enumerated.\textsuperscript{9} Those
merits are both mundane and supermundane:

- The woes in the triple thousand world are suppressed,
- All troubles in the world are suppressed, and all beings become free of fear.
- All beings become oceans of virtues endowed with the virtues of meditation and the members of enlightenment.
- They become Buddhas, and preach the Law.
- They remain living for inconceivable aeons.
- Those beings who even dwell in an evil state are saved.
- All beings become mindful of their former births, and of Buddhas.
- They always obtain a meeting with Buddhas, avoid evil action, and practice meritorious acts of good.
- All their desires and wishes become fulfilled.

Verse 16–33: All the evil acts done previously are confessed before the Buddhas.\(^{10}\)

The purpose of the confession (deśanā) is to become a Buddha as the deliverer, the refuge, the excellent protector for those who are without deliverance, rescue, or refuge. This attainment of buddhahood is accomplished only when a confessor is watched over by the Buddhas dwelling in the world in its ten directions.

Verse 34–42: Various kinds of vows are made:\(^{11}\)

- Having been established in the tenth stage, all the inconceivably many beings may become Tathāgatas.
- May I follow my religious career for millions of aeons for the sake of the deliverance of all sentient beings.
- May I expound for all beings this profound Confession, the excellent Suv by name, which causes the destruction of all evil acts.
- By expounding this Confession, the splendid, excellent Suv, which destroys obstructions due to past acts, may I become an excellent Buddha, and make beings cross over from the ocean of the cycle of existence.

We can notice here that the idea that “the Suv is the Confession” is shown just as in Chapter 1 (Nidāna-parivarta). (See Suzuki [2011].)

Verse 43–55: Prayer is offered to the Buddhas, “May the Buddhas watch over me confessing all my evil acts, May they forgive my sins. May they take away from me the defilement of impurities and acts, and bathe me with the waters of compassion. I practice the ten
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good acts, and also rejoice in any good act done by others. May I become an excellent Buddha.\(^{12}\)

**Verse 56–59:** All the evil acts done previously are confessed before the Buddhas again.\(^{13}\)

**Verse 69–69:** Various kinds of the Buddhas’ virtues are praised.\(^{14}\)
- They are shining with the color of gold (*suvarṇa-bhāsita*).
- Each one is gold-colored, shining like pure gold (*suvarṇa-varṇam kanakāmalakān-canābham*). He is a Buddha-sun removing the obscurity of darkness with his rays of compassion.
- His limbs are as prominent as pure gold (*kanakāmalanirūṭānagam*).
- His sense organs and members are gleaming.

“May I worship the Buddha, whose members shine like gold, whose members gleam with the color of gold, a mine of the higher knowledge, chief in all three worlds, beautiful, whose members are adorned with very brilliant marks.”
- The Buddhas’ virtues are immeasurable, and it is impossible to know their end.

We can see here that the compilers of the *Suv* recognize that not only the golden drum resounding in the middle of the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu’s sleep, but also the Buddhas are gold-colored, shining with the color of gold.

**Verse 70–100:** Various kinds of prayers, either for mundane or supramundane merits, are made:\(^{15}\)
- May all beings be with body adorned with the beautiful major marks in the same way as the Buddhas.
- May I soon become a Buddha in the world for the welfare of all beings. May I remain for inconceivable aeons, preach the Law, and satisfy them.
- May I fulfill the Six Perfections, smite the impurities, and destroy woes, May I extinguish passion, hatred, and folly.
- May I be mindful of former births. May I constantly recollect the Buddhas, and listen to their speech. May I always find a meeting with the Buddhas, avoid evil action, and practice good acts.
- May all the woes of all beings be extinguished. May those beings whose senses are defective become complete in senses.
- Those who are diseased, and whose bodies are injured, may obtain health, strength,
and senses,

- May those beings who are in danger of being executed or of being killed by thieves or scoundrels be delivered.
- May those beings who are oppressed by hunger and thirst obtain a variety of food and drink, May the blind see the various forms. May the deaf hear delightful sounds.
- May all beings be blessed with abundant wealth, grain, and various jewels.
- May all beings be good-looking. May they have beautiful, gracious, and auspicious forms.
- As soon as they think of them, may there be for them food, drink, great abundance, merits, and various kinds of treasures as they desire.
- May any success in the world of men arise for them at their thought. As soon as they think of them, may all their desires be fulfilled.
- May there rain down three times a day from the trees various kinds of perfume and ornaments.
- May all beings do honor to the Three Treasures (to all the Tathāgatas, to the pure Law, and to the Bodhisattvas and the Śrāvakas).
- May all beings avoid the low states of existence and the eight non-opportunities. May they always obtain a meeting with Buddhas.
- May all beings always be highborn (uccaihkuśina hi bhavantu nityam).
- May all women constantly be reborn as men (sarvā striyo nitya narā bhavantu). May they constantly be active in the Six Perfections and proceed to enlightenment.
- May they see the Buddhas in the six directions, and hear them expounding the Law.
- May all the evil acts obtained by me be destroyed without remainder.
- May all beings be delivered from their bondage of the cycle of existence by the hand of wisdom. May they be delivered from their woes. May all soon become Buddhas.
- By the religious merits I obtained, and by my congratulation on the profound merits performed by others, may there be fruitful success for my vows. May I attain supreme enlightenment.
- Whoever worships and praises the Buddhas continually by means of the Confession entitled the Suv may recollect his births in all existences, may have his body adorned with all members and with all senses, may be endowed with various merits and with virtues, May he be continually worshipped as a king among men. Such may he be in

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Each place of birth.

**Verse 101 and 102:** "Not under one Buddha have they performed good, nor even under two, nor four, nor five, nor ten, but they in whose ear this Confession enters have performed good under thousands of Buddhas."\(^{16}\)

**Part 3:** *Suv*\(_{T}\) 215.2–16; *Suv*\(_{C}\) 413b27–c5.

Having heard these verses, the Lord thus spoke to the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu:

"Bravo, bravo, a son of a noble family. It must be known that they are endowed with great abundance of good merits, satisfy all beings with benefit and welfare, and purify every evil those who hear the true values of the Tathāgata and the confession coming forth from the golden drum in the middle of your sleep. The beings, those who perform such distinguished practice, are able to hear these verses by reason of both having praised previously the Tathāgatas and having made the great vow, and by the aid of the Tathāgatas."

Then all the assemblies praised the Lord’s instruction.

3. An Examination of the *Deśanā-parivarta*

3.1. **Who Has to Become a Confessor under the Instruction of the *Deśanā-parivarta*?**

When we say, “This is the main theme of the sūtra, the core doctrine of the sūtra,” it may be generally accepted that the compilers of the sūtra expect those who hear or read the sūtra to perform religious practice according to the main theme or the core doctrine of the sūtra. Thus if the confession of evil acts is really the main theme or the core doctrine of the *Deśanā-parivarta*, namely, of the *Suv*, we can reasonably suppose that the *Suv* expounds the importance of the confession and encourages us to become confessors. However having examined the *Deśanā-parivarta*, we find this chapter insists as follows:

- He, especially a king, who hears this Confession, the splendid, excellent *Suv*, can destroy all the evil acts, avoid misfortune, and be blessed with good fortune. He can even attain supreme enlightenment. The attainment of these merits is accomplished only when he is watched over by the Buddhas.
- So the *Suv* must be heard. He who is able to hear the *Suv* is a great person having performed good under thousands of Buddhas.

What the compilers of the *Suv* emphasize most in this *Deśanā-parivarta*, namely, the theme or the core doctrine of the *Suv*, is not the importance of confession nor to encourage us to perform confession, but entirely the importance of the hearing of the *Suv*, and to en-
courage us to hear the Sūv.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover the hearing of the Sūv is described not as an opportunity that leads to religious practice aiming after supreme enlightenment, but as the fruits of having performed religious practice for inconceivable aeons, as the great merit that connects directly to supreme enlightenment. That is to say,

\textbf{FALSE}: First one hears the Sūv. Second he performs religious practice for inconceivable aeons under the instruction of the Sūv. Finally he attains supreme enlightenment.

\textbf{TRUE}: First one performs religious practice for inconceivable aeons. Second he hears the Sūv as the fruits of his practice. Finally he attains supreme enlightenment soon after he heard the Sūv.

To formulate this,

- If you want to obtain merits, either mundane or supermundane, you should hear the Sūv. You must realize that you have performed religious practice for inconceivable aeons under thousands of Buddhas in order to hear the Sūv. So do not miss this great opportunity.
- You approach places where the Sūv is, namely, where the monks reside who hold and preach the Sūv,\textsuperscript{18} and ask the monks to preach the Sūv.

From this formula, we can naturally suppose, the same as in other chapters,\textsuperscript{19} that there takes place the exchange of preaching the Sūv or the exhibition of the Sūv (from the monks to the lay people) for offerings (from the lay people to the monks), and that these offerings will support as financial aid the religious practices and the lives of the monks. Thus we may say that this assumption also justifies the proposed \textit{Hypothesis} that “the compilers of the Sūv attempted to survive in the Indian religious world by emphasizing its value and the usefulness.”

In addition, in the introduction to his edition of the Sanskrit text of the Sūv (Nobel [1937]) J. Nobel has demonstrated in detail that the Sūv was built up around this Deśanā-parivarta. Considering together both his demonstration and the examination in this paper, it may follow that the Sūv has been compiled under the unchanged intention for the sake of the survival of [Mahāyāna] Buddhism. This also supports the validity of \textit{the Hypothesis}.

\textbf{3.2. The Reason for the Enlargement of the Deśanā-parivarta}

Part 1 is a narration telling that the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu saw in the middle of his sleep a golden drum sounding verses on confession. In Part 2 Ruciraketu stated 102 verses on
confession to the Lord. Since the Lord uttered no word all through Part 1 and Part 2, the account of Part 1 and Part 2 is not "the word of the Buddha (buddhavacana)" in its strict sense.

As to the condition under which the word of someone other than the Buddha can be regarded as the word of the Buddha himself, it has been said that there are three criteria:20)

(1) After someone gives a discourse, the Buddha gives his approval of it.
(2) The Buddha invites someone to give a discourse on behalf of him.
(3) Creative, spontaneous, and inspired utterances.

Taking this into consideration, we can say in the enlargement of Part 3 the compilers of the Suv attempt to form the account of the Deśanā-parivarta more properly as śūtra literature in accordance with the first criterion. Enlarged parts which seem to be based on this intention also exist in the Sarasvatī-parivarta, the Śrī-parivarta, the Drḍhā-parivarta, and the Saṃjñāya-parivarta, in all of which the chief speaker is not the Buddha.21) Thus also in this Deśanā-parivarta it seems reasonable to consider that Part 3 was enlarged in order to form the account of the Deśanā-parivarta more properly as śūtra literature, namely, as "the word of the Buddha." This consideration also serves to strengthen the validity of (the Hypothesis) that "the compilers of the Suv attempted to emphasize its completeness," and that "their intention remained unchanged all through the stages of the formation of the Suv."

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 the Suv at various times in order to emphasize its value and usefulness with their intention clearly expressed in the Deśanā-parivarta (before its enlargement, i.e., in Part 1 and Part 2) after which the Suv was titled and which has been regarded as the core chapter of the Suv.

In the enlargement of the Deśanā-parivarta (Part 3), their chief object was likely to form it more properly as śūtra literature for the sake of emphasizing the completeness of the Suv.
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Notes:
3) Suvc3 336b10–339a6 (懺悔品第三 (Chân hui piân di sâm)); Suvc2 20.1–44.19 (Deṣanā-parivarta);
Suvc7 19.0–34.18 (rMi lam mthoṅ ba'i le'u, bŠags pa'i le'u); Suvc3 365b19–368a14 (≈ Suvc3, Chân hui piân di sâm); Suvc7 19.0–34.18, 215.2–18 (rMi lam na bŠags pa'i le'u); Suvc3 411a17–413c5 (夢見金鼓懺悔品第四 (Mêng jiàn jīn gǔ chán hui piân di sâm)).
5) This Deṣanā-parivarta was enlarged through two stages of formation:
   Suvc1, Suvc5, Suvc7, Suvc2 (the first stage) < Suvc2, Suvc3 (the second and last stage)
6) Translations from the Suvs (either full or summarized) are mainly based on Emmerick [1996].
8) Suvc3 336b23–28; Suvc3 21.9–22.2; Suvc1 20.1–17; Suvc3 365c2–7; Suvc3 411b4–11.
9) Suvc7 336b29–c29; Suvc3 22.3–24.16; Suvc7 20.18–22.8; Suvc3 365c8–366a8; Suvc3 411b12–c4.
10) Suvc3 336c29–337a25; Suvc3 24.17–28.3; Suvc7 22.9–24.22; Suvc3 366a8–b4; Suvc3 411c5–412a7.
11) Suvc3 337a25–b15; Suvc3 28.5–30.6; Suvc7 24.23–25.28; Suvc3 366b4–23; Suvc3 412a8–25.
12) Suvc7 337b16–c6; Suvc3 30.7–32.11; Suvc7 26.1–27.22; Suvc3 366b24–c14; Suvc3 412a26–b22.
13) Suvc3 337c7–14; Suvc7 32.12–34.4; Suvc7 27.23–28.10; Suvc3 366c15–22; Suvc3 412b23–c1.
14) Suvc3 337c14–338a11; Suvc7 34.5–36.16; Suvc7 28.11–29.24; Suvc3 366c2–367a19; Suvc3 412c2–21.
15) Suvc3 338a12–339a3; Suvc3 37.1–44.14; Suvc7 29.25–34.12; Suvc3 367a20–368a11; Suvc3 412c22–
413b25.
16) Suvc3 339a3–6; Suvc7 44.15–18; Suvc7 34.13–16; Suvc3 368a11–14; Suvc3 413b26–27.
17) Of all the 102 verses, confession is practiced in only 22 verses. This number amounts to less than a quarter of all.
18) The previous studies listed in n.1 of Suzuki [2011] illustrate that the Suvs was held and preached
by monks or preachers who belonged to Buddhist monasteries.
19) See the previous studies listed in n.1 of Suzuki [2011].

(Key words) 金光明最勝王經( Suvarṇa[-pra-]bhāṣottamasūtrarāja), 懺悔品
(Deṣanā-parivarta), The intention of the compilers of the Suvarṇaprabhāṣa
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