Similarities between the Two *Avalokita Sūtras* in the *Mahāvastu*

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1. Introduction

In the *Mahāvastu* (*Mv*), a composite Buddhist work of the Lokottara-vādins, contains two texts known as the *Avalokita Sūtra*. The first *Avalokita Sūtra* (*FAS*) focuses on the story of the Buddha's Defeat of Māra; the second *Avalokita Sūtra* (*SAS*), however, has two themes: the Defeat of Māra and stūpa worship. Furthermore, there are two partial texts parallel to the *SAS* that are preserved outside of the *Mv* corpus—the *Avalokana(-/ā) Sūtra* (*AS*) (quoted twice in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* [*Śikṣ*]), and the Tibetan translation of the *Ārya Avalokana-nāma-mahāyāna Sūtra* (*ĀAS*).¹⁾ These two texts also focus on stūpa worship. Some researchers have suggested that the *SAS*, *AS*, and *ĀAS* are derived from a common prototype.²⁾ It seems likely that the *SAS* was created by adding a large part of its introduction and the section on the Buddha's biography to a prototype similar in form to that of the *ĀAS*.³⁾

In this study, I explore why the texts are called *Avalokita* and *Avalokana*. Additionally, while considering the formation process of the *SAS*, I will examine the relationship between the *FAS* and the *SAS* and the prototype of the *SAS*.

2. The Shared Function of 'Avalokita' and Vyākaraṇa in the *FAS* and *SAS*

In the *AS* and *ĀAS*, the title *Avalokana* appears only in comments by Śāntideva or in the colophon. However, it is never mentioned in the main body of the texts themselves.⁴⁾ Therefore, we cannot say for sure why they are named *Avalokana*. Conversely, the *FAS* and *SAS* call themselves *Avalokita* not only in the colophon but also in the texts proper.⁵⁾ The introductions of the texts indicate their own understanding of themselves as 'avalokita.'

Zimmer (1922) concluded that the term 'avalokita' (observation) can mean 'Saṃyaksambodhi' (enlightenment), which tallies well with the contents of the *FAS* and *SAS*. Yoshioka (1964) considered only the *SAS* and also claimed that the Buddha's observa-

tion from the Bodhimaṇḍa is ‘avalokita.’⁶⁾ However, while discussing the *SAS* title *Avalokita*, these scholars neither referred to the *ĀAS* nor considered the formation process of the *SAS*.

The beginning of the *FAS* depicts a scene in which the deva Nanda pleads with the Buddha to preach the ‘vyākaraṇa named Avalokita.’⁷⁾ The Buddha, replying to Nanda’s petition, says, ‘Listen, monks, to the vyākaraṇa which is called Avalokita.’⁸⁾ Then, the Buddha begins describing what he observed while defeating Māra. We can note that in the context of the *FAS*, the term ‘avalokita’ (observation) indicates the Buddha’s observations in his biography; this discourse is called ‘vyākaraṇa,’ which is one of the nine-fold (*navāṅga*) or twelve-fold (*dvādaśāṅga*) classifications of the Buddha’s teachings.⁹⁾ In the main context, the word ‘vyākaraṇa’ is used in the *FAS* to indicate a detailed explanation.

Let the Exalted One disclose what the Exalted One, as a Bodhisattva, observed like an elephant (*nāgāvalokita*) when he had come to the Bodhimaṇḍa and stood on the Bodhimaṇḍa for the benefit and welfare of the whole world.¹⁰⁾

As quoted above, in the beginning of the *SAS*, the monk Viśuddhamati refers to the Buddha’s observation as ‘Avalokita’ when he seeks the story of the Defeat of Māra.¹¹⁾ Furthermore, at the beginning of the *SAS*, Viśuddhamati repeatedly requests: ‘Please answer (*vyākaroḥi*) my question (*praśna*), how did the Buddha cross the Nerañjanā river?’¹²⁾ Here, Viśuddhamati’s request is presented by the imperative form ‘vyākaroḥi’ (Let you answer). This implies that the following discourse, which is the story of the Buddha’s Defeat of Māra as preached by the Buddha himself, is his *vyākaraṇa* (answer).

3. Consideration and Conclusion

The *FAS* and *SAS* have three similarities. First, they refer to the observation of the Buddha around the Bodhimaṇḍa as ‘avalokita.’ Second, each refers to the discourse itself is regarded as the ‘vyākaraṇa,’ implying a detailed explanation or answer. Finally, they focus on the Buddha’s Defeat of Māra. These similarities all stem from the section that was added when the *SAS* was expanded from the prototype. In other words, the sections of the *SAS* that are similar to those of the *FAS* would not have been found in the prototype. As some scholars have pointed out, the *SAS* is one of the latest works of *Mv*.¹³⁾ It can be inferred, therefore, that the *SAS* imitated the *FAS*, since the former was probably composed after the latter.

That is, we can infer that the *SAS* was based on a prototype that was similar to the *ĀAS* and augmented with the beginning text and the Buddha's biography in order to imitate the *FAS*.

Jones (1952, 329, note 5) suggested that the original prototype was likely titled either *Avalokita* or *Avalokana*. However, given that it is the term *Avalokana* that appears in the title of the *AS* and *ĀAS*, and given that the forms of these two texts must be similar to the prototype, it is more likely that the prototype had the name *Avalokana* as well. Shizutani (1974, 262), focusing on the title of the *SAS*, *Avalokita*, speculates that the Bodhisattva's name 'Avalokiteśvara' could be linked to stūpa worship. Saitō (2011) stated that the past passive participle 'avalokita' and the verbal noun 'avalokana' can be considered synonymous, because the descriptions of the *AS* (*Avalokana Sūtra*) quoted in *Śikṣ* corresponds well with that of the *SAS* (*Avalokita Sūtra*). However, as mentioned above, the predicate 'avalokita' in the *FAS* and *SAS* refers to the Buddha's actions inside the text, while in the *AS* and *ĀAS*, 'avalokana' is a name that originated outside of the text. These points are neglected in the arguments of Zimmer, Yoshioka, Shizutani, and Saitō.

In conclusion, we can infer the following developmental stage of *Mv*: *Mv* absorbed the text named *Avalokanasūtra* and harmonised it with the *Mv*'s own *FAS*. Hence, we must distinguish between the two scripture titles, *Avalokita* and *Avalokana*.

Notes

- 1) The correspondence between these parallel texts is detailed in Sugimoto 1984. 2) Cf. Winternitz 1933, 245, Edgerton 1953, 8, § 1.47–48, and Sugimoto 1984, 479–520. 3) Cf. Satō 2019a. The part *Mv* II 294.2–362.2 seems to represent an additional section. Here, I fix some errors contained in that earlier publication. I correct the errors in the page numbers shown in Satō 2019a table 1. (Error /Correct; 294.7/294.1, 294.8/294.2, 362.16/362.2, 362.17/362.3). Based on this, I stated that the description of śīlaskandha has no correspondence with the *ĀAS*, which is wrong. Therefore, it seems that the beginning and the Buddha's biography are both additions. 4) The *AS* in *Śikṣ* 89.15–90.3 is referred to as 'Avalokanā Sūtra,' in *Śikṣ* 297.10–309.4 it is referred to as 'Avalokana Sūtra.' 5) The colophon of *FAS*; *Mv* II 293.15, Sa 211a.6: avalokitasūtram (*Mv*: *kitam nāma sūtram) samāpt-aḥ (*Mv*: *ptam) // The colophon of *SAS*; *Mv* II 397.7, Sa 235a.6 : avalokitam nāma sūtram mahāvastusya parivāram samāptam // 6) Yoshioka also stated that the *SAS* has a description of the intonation of the name of the Buddha, and this is a preparation for faith in the name of Avalokiteśvara. This allegation is, however, based on misreading as a result of over revision by the editor, Senart. While in Senart's edition (*Mv* II 295.3) the Buddha's nāma (name) is praised, in the oldest manuscript (Sa 211b.6), the Buddha's roma (hair) is admired. 7) *Mv* II 257.13–259.2. 8) *Mv* II 259.4–5. 9) Maeda (1964, 281–318) reported that according to the traditional interpretation of the śāstras written by Buddhist monks, this literary form of 'vyākaraṇa' can be classified in three ways: an answer to a question, a detailed explanation, and a prediction. 10) *Mv* II 294.1–3, Sa 211b.2: yad bhagavā (*Mv*: bhagavatā) bodhisatvabhūtena bodhimaṇḍe (*Mv*: *mandam) upasamkramitvā bodhimaṇḍe sthīhitvā nāgāvalokitam (*Mv*:

shihitvānāvalokitaṃ) sarvalokahitāya sarvalokasukhāya taṃ bhagavāṃ nirdiśatu // 11) See Satō 2019b, 62–63, note 33 for the term ‘nāgāvalokita’ (observation like an elephant).

12) Viśuddhamatī’s statement ‘Let you answer’ (vyākaroḥi) can be found below. *Mv* II 294.8–11; 296.1–3. *Sa* 212b.2 (corresponds to *Mv* II 297.6–8). 13) Cf. Tournier 2017, 110–123; 272–278.

Abbreviations

- AS* *Avalokana* (-/ā)-*sūtra* (Śikṣ 89.15–90.3; 297.10–309.4).
ĀAS Tibetan translation of *Ārya Avalokana-nāma-mahāyāna Sūtra*. ‘*Phags pa spyan ras rzigz shes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*. D no. 195 (tsa), P no. 862 (mu).
FAS The First *Avalokita Sūtra* (*Mv* II 257.6–270.19; 276.16–293.15).
Mv *Le Mahāvastu*. Ed. É. Senart. 3 vols. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1882–1897.
Sa Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin/Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin: No. PSB2. See Yuyama 2001.
SAS The Second *Avalokita Sūtra* (*Mv* II 293.16–397.7).
Śikṣ *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. Ed. C. Bendall. St. Petersburg: Commissionnaires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1897–1902.

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