A Study of Stotra

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The stotra is a praising of that immeasurable virtue (guṇa) of the Buddha. Because a detailed explanations of the imports and the historical studies can be found in Dr. K. Ōyama's book entitled 'Buddhist Music and the śabda-vidyā' ('Bukkyō. Ongaku to Shōmyō'), they will be omitted here.

Concerning the word stotra in relation to the word pāṭhaka, we find that the former is a translation of the latter. To indicate this, in the Hō-on-ju-rin⁽¹⁾, we read a translation which reads 'as there is pāṭhaka in the west, there is stotra in the east.' And in India, all the poetical and melodious expressions of the Buddha's teachings (dharma) are called pāṭhaka, one aspect of which is the gāthā which is found in the sūtras that has a melody enabling followers to chant. With these indications, we can say that the stotra is a kind of pāṭhaka.

Before and after a Buddhist service, we hear the chanting of stotra. These before and after stotra are chanted with the purpose of praising the Buddha's guṇa and his cause-actions (buddha-tva) for showing us the way of attaining the Buddhahood. In the Hok-ke-kyō⁽²⁾ (saddharma-puṇḍarīkasūtra, Ed. by Kern & Nanjō, 1912, Bibl. B. X.), to support this view, we find a translation which reads 'if one versifies (gāthā) the Buddha's guṇa and chant with a joyful heart, he will attain (siddhi) all the Buddha's ways (buddha-mārga).'

A stotra chanted before a service is comprised of three Sanskrit stotras. They are Shi-chi, Shin-ryaku and Fu-dō. The stotra chanted immediately after a service are comprised of Shi-chi, Shin-ryaku in Chinese and Is-sai-buttsu-hō in Sanskrit. Regarding the original construction of the stotra, it has two aspects, the whole and the separate. The stotra of the Whole, Shi-

(1) Tai-shō-dai-zō-kyō, Volume 53, p. 574.

(2) " Volume 9, p. 9.

chi and Shin-ryaku, is the whole or combined form of the two dhātu of the Diamond (vajra) and the Womb-store (garbhakośa), while the stotra of the separate consists of Fu-dō and the Is-sai-butsu-hō. Following is the graphical presentation of the above, showing the sequence of chanting stotra for praising the Buddha.

Before stotra	—Shi-chi (Sanskrit)	}—Stotra of the whole
	(vajradhātu-mahāvairocana-stotra)	
	—Shin-ryaku (Sanskrit)	}—Stotra of the separate
	(garbhakośadhātu-mahāvairocana-stotra)	
	—Fu-dō (Sanskrit)	
After stotra	—Shi-chi (Chinese)	}—Stotra of the whole
	—Shin-ryaku (Chinese)	
	—Is-sai-butsu-hō (Sanskrit)	—Stotra of the separate

The reason of using the Fu-dō stotra especially in the before stotra is that it is suited to conducting the religious service (pūja) for the purpose of reposing the dead. In the Fu-dō-ryū-in-gi-ki⁽³⁾, there is a translation to indicate this. It reads 'all, hearing the teachings (of Buddha), attains the unsurpassed wisdom of the Bodhi-Mind (anuttara-samyaksambodhi)'.

I Shi-chi stotra

This stotra in Sanskrit appears in following sūtras: Sam-ma-ji-hō-gi-ki, Kon-gō-chō-kyō-ichi-ji-chō-rin-nō-gi-ki, Kon-gō-chō-is-sai-nyo-rai-shin-jitsu-shō-dai-jō-gen-shō-dai-kyō-ō-kyō (sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha nāmamahāyāna-sūtra). The Chinese version appears in Kon-gō-chō-ryaku-shutsu-nen-ju-kyō and Dai-nichi-kyō-ji-ju-shi-dai-gi-ki. Based on the Sanskrit which appears in Shō-dai-gi-ki⁽⁴⁾ and referring to the Chinese version in the Kon-gō-chō-ryaku-shutsu-nen-ju-kyō⁽⁵⁾, following is the translation of the Shi-chi stotra.

Om, vajra-sattva-saṃgrahād	Om, because of being received by vajra-sattva,
vajra-ratnam anuttaraṃ,	vajra-ratna is unsurpassed,
vajra-dharma-gāyanāḥ,	due to chanting many vajra-dharmas,
vajra-karma-karo bhava.	Let become the cause of karma of vajra.

(3) Tai-shō-dai-zō-kyo Volume 21, p. 1.

(4) " Volume 18, p. 68.

(5) " Volume 18, p. 248.

This stotra of four lined verse praises the teachings (dharma) of vajra-sattva. Interpreting the verse from the framework of the Esoteric Buddhism, when it is chanted secretly, mahāvairocana (vajra-sattva) causes Four Bodhisattvas to appear who praise Four Wisdoms (jñāna) and Four Buddhas who inturn causes Four Pāramitās to appear there by enabling to hold a service (pūja) for the Mahāvairocana. For this reason, this Shi-chi stotra is named ‘vajradhātu-mahāvairocana-stotra,’ used as a whole stotra in every religious service.

II Shin-ryaku (Dai-nichi) stotra

The principle basis of this stotra appears in Shō-ryū-giki, both in Sanskrit and in Chinese. In the Shō-ryū-gi-ki⁽⁶⁾, this stotra is translated as ‘next, praise the ocean-like virtues (guṇa) of the Buddha with clear voice. The body (dhātu) of the Law (dharma-kāya) is like the ocean-like virtues (guṇa) of the Buddhas. Truly, praise with the chants with clear voice.’ Following is the translation of it having the Sanskrit text as its original manuscript and referring to the Chinese translations.

sarva-vyabhibhava, agrāgriya,	The one who surpasses all, the highest of purities,
sugata-adhipate, jina,	the one who has fared well, the winner,
traidhātuka-mahārāja vairocana,	Oh Vairocana, King of the Three worlds (tri-dhātu),
namo 'stu te.	Let there be namas (followers who take refuge in your command).

It is apparent that this stotra praises mahāvairocana explaining the reasons for receiving and dealing widely as ‘garbhakośadhātu-mahāvairocana-stotra.’ Its traditional name, Shin-ryaku stotra, was entitled so because this stotra is the abridgment of the essentials found in the thirty-seven versed Dai-nichi-dai-san (mahāvairocana stotra) which are expounded in the Gen-bō-ji-gi-ki⁽⁷⁾.

(6) Tai-shō-dai-zō-kyō, Volume 18, p. 150.

(7) " , Volume 18, p. 114.

III Fu-dō stotra

This stotra appears in Santkrit in following sūtras: Ichi-ji-chō-rin-nō-nen-ju-gi-ki, Chi-ri-sam-ma-ya-fu-dō-shi-sha-nen-ju-hō, and Kin-rin-nō-buchō-yō-ryaku-nen-ju-hō. The Chinese version has not been found yet. Based on the Sanskrit found in Chi-ri-sam-ma-ya-fu-dō-shi-sha-nen-ju-hō⁽⁸⁾, following is the translation of the Fu-dō stotra.

namas sarva-buddha-bodhi-sattvānām.	I take refuge(namas)in all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
Om, sarvatra saṃkusumita,	Om, of the flowers that opens and spreads everywhere,
abhiññā-rājñe,	for the King of skillful Wisdom (jñāna),
namo 'stu te, svāhā.	Let there be namas(followers who take refuge in your command), svāhā.

In order to praise Fu-dō-myō-ō (acala), this stotra begins with the verse 'namas sarva-buddha-bodha-bodhi-sattvānām' which is customarily and traditionally chanted by the devotees of the Esoteric Buddhist order (mantra-ācārin).

Generally, their practice of conducting a service starts with taking refuge (namas) in all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, followed by praising the acala with chanting of 'sarvatra saṃkusumita-abhiññā-rājñe, namo 'stu te'.

IV Is-sai-butsu-hō stotra

The Sanskrit version of this stotra is found in Kō-dai-gi-ki⁽⁹⁾, and the Chinese, in So-shij-ji-kyō⁽¹⁰⁾ (susiddhikara-mahā-tantrasāadhanopāyika-ṣaṭṭa-sūtra). Following is the translation of it based on above sūtras.

mahā-kāruṇikam, nātham,	For the possessor of Great Compassion, for the protector,
śāstāram, sarva-vedinam,	for the Master, for knower of all,
puṇya-udadhya-guṇa-dharam,	possessor of limitless-ocean-like virtues(guṇa),
praṇamāmi tathāgataṃ.	I pay homage to the Truth (tathāgata).

(8) Tai-shō-dai-zō-kyō. Volume 21, p. 9.

(9) " Volume 18, p. 97.

(10) " Volume 18, p. 617.

Excluding the fourth line of above stotra, all three lines praise the virtue (guṇa) of the Buddha. The term 'udadhya-guṇa' appearing in the third line is synonymous with the Buddha.

The above stated concerns the stotras which are chanted before and after the service. Following refers to the melody of the chanting of the stotra. The historical origin of the melodies traces back to the time of the Buddha, about 2500 years ago, and in the later ages these melodies were transmitted to China and to Japan. In the Gen-gu-kyō⁽¹¹⁾, there is an exponent which is translated as follows: 'During the time when the Buddha was living, there was a king prasenajit of Kosala, leading his soldiers. While passing by the Jetavana-vihāra, they heard the voice of a monk (bhikṣu) praising the virtues (guṇa) of the Buddha. Upon hearing the voice, the soldiers immediately came to a standstill.' This translation indicates the result of being entranced with the melodies of a stotra being chanted.

Because an extensive explanations and researches of melodies and musical construction of the stotra are introduced in Dr. K. Ōyama's book entitled 'Buddhist Music and śabda-vidyā', they will be omitted here.

Accompanying the chanting of the stotra, there is a musical instrument called nyō-hachi. This instrument is an ancient Chinese instrument, same type of which also existing in India. Kumbhāṇḍa of Garbha-kośadhātumaṇḍala and Gandharva both show the accompaniment of nyō-hachi. In the Hok-ke-kyō⁽¹²⁾, the reason of having this instrument is found. When translated, it reads 'Conducting a religious service (pūja), having vi-wa (viṇa), dō-hachi, and the likes of which produce an exquisite melodious sound, will enable all to attain (siddhi) the Buddha's way (mārga).

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(11) Tai-shō-dai-zō-kyō, Volume 4, p. 424.

(12) " Volume 9, p. 9.