Amitābha cult in Bhadracarīpāṇidhānāraṇāja

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Introduction  Bhadracarīpāṇidhānāraṇāja (Bhad), now in 62 stanzas, consummates the Gandavyūha (Gand), and is sometimes called the summary of it, and have been an important work since Indian Buddhism. Gand is itself the last and important chapter of Buddhāvatamsaka (Avatamsaka). Originally Bhad was composed and diffused independently, and was taken into Gand during the compiling processes of Avatamsaka. Of Bhad, some different versions are extant in the translations. According to the Chinese translations, supposedly the Urtext was composed of 44 stanzas, and expanded into 62. Of the commentaries of Bhad, 6 commentaries are extant in Tibetan, and their author are Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, Śākyamitra and Bhadrāpana in India, and Ye shes sde in Tibet, though there were five commentaries composed by Śākyamitra, Guṇaprabha, Dignāga, Bhadrāpana and Ye shes sde according to Denkarma Catalogue, and more were to be composed by Tibetans. V.49 of Bhad and the commentaries on vs.14, 40, 49 refer briefly to Amitābha Buddha, and vs. 57-60 of Bhad and their commentaries deal with the Amitābha cult, while commentating on Avatamsaka. So in this paper, we examine Amitābha cult shown in these 4 verses of Bhad and the Indian commentaries on them.

According to the commentaries of Bhad, those born in Sukhāvatī will emanate the magical creation such as magical clouds (Skt. nirmita- / nirmānamegha), which are the symbols of reliever of painful heats and bringer of harvests in India, and cover the worlds and relieve the sentient beings with those emanations.

Owing to the limited space, this paper presents just an outline. The author is preparing another paper for the detailed description of it.

1. On vs 57-60 in Bhad  In Bhad, Amitābha cult is presented in the 4 verses, vs. 57-60. Though Amitābha cult is presented in following vs. 61-62 as well, these verses seem to be those of dedication by the copyist transferring merits of his / her
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virtuous deeds to all the sentient beings. This can been seen from the two facts: a fact that the commentaries except for Śākyamitra give no explanation to them, and a fact that these two verses, especially v. 62, are written in the orthodox Skt while Bhad as a whole is written in the BHS.

Now let us give the translations of the 4 verses:

When I pass away, all the obstacles would be removed. I would see that Amitābha directly, and go to the Blissful world (Sukhāvati). (v. 57)

When I have gone there, there would be these vows actually, there I would achieving (them) and benefit every sentient beings who are in the worlds. (v. 58)

There, born from a wonderful and superb lotus flower, in the center of Maṇḍala of the Victor, I would have the prediction just in front of Amitābha Buddha that I will be Buddha. (v. 59)

Having had the prediction, with millions of the bodies of magical creation and the power of intelligence, I would benefit the sentient beings in the ten directions. (v. 60)

2. Summary of vs. 57-60 in the 5 Commentaries The commentaries on the 4 verses by Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Bhadrāpana, resemble each other, though Śākyamitra gives enlarged and different explanations.

On v. 57, it is explained in two parts. A vow in the first half is to remove the obstacles (Skt. āvaraṇa) at one's death and to practice Bhadracaryā in order to remove them. A vow in the latter half is to be born by the grace of Amitābha immediately after death (Śākyamitra quotes the verses on the obstacles from Abhidharmakośa, cp. 4, v. 96 and gives a explanations). According to the commentaries, those born His Sukhāvati has attained the body equal to the perfection (Skt. pāramitā).

On v. 58, the Bodhisattva-practice of those born in Sukhāvati are expounded and is called Bhadracaryā, which is also the name of the text itself: The vow is, that as long as there are sentient beings in the worlds, those born in Sukhāvati would relieve them.

On v. 59, the prediction directly given by Amitābha is expounded, and the birth in Sukhāvati is explained as the magical one from the lotus flowers, which, Śākyamitra says, is different from those form the maternal wombs.

On v. 60, those born Sukhāvati are explained to be relieving all the sentient beings in the worlds, by emanating the magical creations such as magical clouds and the power of intelligence. Śākyamitra says that it is the perfection of wisdom, and the
benefits the sentient beings receive are the complete peace (Skt. parinirvāṇa).

3. The magical creations emanated by bodhisattvas in Avatamsaka According to AKBh and Bodhisattvabhūmi, both in Hinayāna and Mahāyāna, the magical creations are closely related to the miraculous powers achieved through the concentrations. The term “the magical creations such as clouds” emanated by bodhisattva-yogin is characteristic to Avatamsaka, and Tantric texts under influences of the former. The commentators of Bhad quotes from Gand, thus seems to share the concepts with Gand. According to Daśabhūmi (Daśa), another important chapter of Avatamsaka, the skillful bodhisattva emanates numerous bodies to relieve all the sentient beings, and this activity is one of the 12 kinds merits achieved on each stage by the bodhisattva who have entered the special concentrations, and the numbers of the emanations together with the other merits multiplies, as the bodhisattva progresses from the first Pramuditābhūmi to the tenth Dharmameghābhūmi. Especially on the tenth stage, the clouds of compassion generated by the power of vows fill the innumerable worlds, just as the space does. According to Daśabhumikavyākhāṇa, a commentary on Daśa, the clouds are metaphor of compassion. Besides Saddharmapuṇḍarīka has the famous accounts of the emanation bodies of Avalokiteśvara, whose bodies are manifested in the most proper forms to guide each sentient being. Upāiparipṛcchā (Upāli) mentions the emanations by a bodhisattva in concentrations, and explains them as ‘the appearances of various forms (Tib. nam par rig pa’i gzugs nam pa sna tshogs)’, implying the emptinesses of them. Upāli also says the bodhisattva is in the state of complete equality, who do not objectify the sentient beings and oneself as the relieved and the reliever. So these magical creations emanated are the united activities of exalted wisdom and great compassion; the wisdom which see the emptinesses of all the phenomena, and the compassion which goes on relieving all the sentient beings.

4. The Comparison of the activities of Bodhisattvas toward and in Sukhāvatī According to the verses of Sukhāvatīvyūha (Sukh), famous as the Eastern Verses (東方偈 EV), the bodhisattvas in the Buddha-fields in all the directions, visit Sukhāvatī, worship and praise Amitābha. Amitābha give the prophesies that they will be Buddha, and they attain miraculous powers. Śākyamuni encourages the bodhisattvas to visit Sukhāvatī, and concludes the verses. This concept of transportation
by magical creations is seen in the 5th, 22th of Dharmakāka （former personality of Amitābha Buddha）’s 48 vows of Sukh too, and traced back to the description of “the visits from the ten directions” in 大阿弥陀経 （T. No. 362, one of the early translations of Sukh into Chinese). As v.19d, 20ab of EV says, “If one oneself also want to liberate many sentient beings, that person should quickly visit Sukhāvatī”, the purpose of the visit is to liberate sentient beings. Bhad and its commentaries gives a systematic account of the process a bodhisattva goes through, dying in this world and born in Sukhāvatī, and his / her activities thereafter, thus giving more concrete substances to the descriptions in Sukh. In Sukh, EV just presents the visit to Sukhāvatī from the other worlds, but not a systematic account, although the relief-activity of Bhadracaryā is mentioned in the 21nd vow of Dharmakāra as an exceptional case where this vow is not necessarily fulfilled.

**Conclusion**  According to the Bhad and its commentaries, those born in Sukhāvatī relieve all the sentient beings in the worlds of the sufferings, by the miraculous activities of wisdom and compassion, like emanating the creations such as the clouds. This activities seems to have a similar connotation to that of No-abiding nirvāna （Skt. apratisthitanirvāṇa）, developed by the Yogācāra School. According to the commentaries of Bhad, the activities of Bhadracaryā are the accumulations of provision of virtues, and those of Bodhisattvacaryā are the accumulations of provision of wisdom, and the latter is included in the former, implying that compassion is the most fundamental in Buddhist practice. The commentaries of Bhad present more developed forms of Amitābha cult under the influences of the Avatamsaka. As Kamaraśila says in Bhāvanākrama, a practicing yogin worships and praises all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and make vows such as Bhad, and make efforts in order to accumulate every possible provisions of wisdom and virtue, which provisions have the emptinesses and great compassions as their matrix.

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〈Key Words〉  Amitābha cult, Bhadracariprajñādhānārāja, commentaries of Bhad, Sukhāvatīvyūha, nirmita- / nirmānamegha

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