The Unchanged Intention of the Compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*:

An Examination through the Verification of the Hypothesis on
“the Independence of [Mahāyāna] Buddhism”

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1. Two Aims of This Paper: Verification of the Hypothesis and Examination of the Intention of the Compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*

Referring to the recent studies making use of *Vinaya* literature and inscriptions, the present author has already propounded a hypothesis on “the two kinds or levels of independence of Buddhism” in the previous paper¹⁾ through the examination of the *Sarasvatī-parivarta* (Chapter on *Sarasvatī*; Chapter 15²⁾) in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* (*Sūtra of Golden Light*; *Suv*) which contains many features rather unusual at first glance for the Buddhist scriptures, as follows:

[**The Hypothesis**] Owing to the account of the *Sarasvatī-parivarta*, the compilers or the proponents of the *Suv* who realized themselves as Mahāyāna Buddhists, became able to practice their daily religious rites as “Buddhist substructure” without any assistance by *Vinaya* literature or Hindu rites. We can therefore interpret the features appearing in the *Sarasvatī-parivarta* not as a token of “the assimilation of Buddhism into Hinduism” but as one of the attempts to bring about “the independence of Mahāyāna from traditional Buddhism” and “the independence of Buddhism from Hinduism.”

The aims of this paper are to verify this hypothesis by examining the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta* (Chapter on the Four Great Kings; Chapter 11·12) in the *Suv*, and to consider the intention of the compilers of the *Suv*, which has been enlarged through several stages of formation³⁾ and has been occasionally underestimated as “a mere miscellaneous medley of doctrines and religious acts.”

2. A Brief Survey of the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta* (Chapter on the Four Great Kings; Chapter 11·12)

We will begin with a brief survey of the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta* by dividing it approximately into sixteen sections (from §1 to §16).

§1: The four great kings, Vaiśravaṇa (多聞天), Dhṛtarāṣṭra (持國天), Virūḍhaka (增長天) and Virūpākṣa (廣目天), make a vow to protect those regions where the kings of men who hear the *Suv* should give protection to those monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who preach the Law.

§2: The Lord congratulates the four great kings who have planted merit-roots for a long time.

§3: The four great kings swear that in future times they will with invisible bodies protect those regions against any foreign army where the kings of men should protect the preachers of the Law.

§4: Offering congratulations to the four great kings, the Lord tells them that by the merits of holding the *Suv* the earthly peace and the proper movement of heavenly bodies will be kept, and that by the honoring of the *Suv* the numerous Buddhas of past, present and future will be also honored including the Lord Śākyamuni.

§5: The four great kings explain the various acts of honor necessary in order to hear the Law (*dharmaśravaṇapūjā*).

§6: Giving supplementary explanation to the acts of honor, the Lord teaches the mental preparation needed to meet the preachers of the Law.

§7: The four great kings tell that if there should be a king of men who hears the *Suv* in accordance with the acts of honor, vines having various perfumes and fragrances will come forth and rise to the sky above, the dwelling place of the many gods.

§8: The Lord tells that the vines will also grow to this whole triple-thousand great-thousand world-sphere and to the Buddha-fields, as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges river, and the Buddhas dwelling there will with one voice prophesy that the preachers of the Law should attain supreme and perfect enlightenment.

§9: The four great kings tell that any king of men who should be desirous of happiness of the beings in all regions, must hear the *Suv* and honor the preachers of the Law since those regions where the *Suv* is heard and honored will be protected by the gods including the four great kings who approach with invisible bodies to hear the Law, while those regions where the *Suv* is not heard or honored will be exposed to various dangers because the gods will neglect those regions. The four great kings repeat the encouragement to hear and honor the *Suv* since every mundane and

supermundane treatise has been revealed and expounded in the *Suv* by the Lord.

§10: The Lord gives instructions for the four great kings to sustain those monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who hold the *Suv* since they perform Buddha-acts (*buddhakṛtyāni*).

§11: The king Vaiśravaṇa tells the Lord that he holds a spell called Cintāmaṇi (如意寶珠) which magically protects the beings and makes them flourish, and offers to initiate them in it. Then he utters it together with three spells that make up Cintāmaṇi and explains the acts and the merits of holding the four spells. This §11 and the next §12 only exist in the larger Tibetan version *Suv*_{T2} and the third Chinese version *Suv*_{C3} rendered by Yi-jīng (義淨) in the year 703 CE. Since the second Chinese version *Suv*_{C2} combined by Bǎo-guì (寶貴) in 597 does not contain these two sections, the interpolation of these two sections into Chapter 11·12 may date back to no earlier than the 6th century.

§12: The Lord offers congratulations to the king Vaiśravaṇa.

§13: The four great kings praise the Lord with five verses. This section can be partitioned into two sub-sections, §13-1 and §13-2, in the former of which the *Suv*_{T2} differs from the smaller Tibetan version *Suv*_{T1} and in the later of which they are identical.

§14: The Lord praises the *Suv* and encourages to hear and honor it with fifteen verses.

§15: This section can be partitioned into two sub-sections, §15-1 and §15-2. In the former the first Chinese version *Suv*_{C1} rendered by Dharmakṣema (曇無讖) in the 5th century (412-421), the *Suv*_S, the *Suv*_{T1} and the *Suv*_{C2} conclude the whole chapter. The four great kings become amazed, astonished and delighted, and make a vow to be attached to the preachers of the Law to honor and protect the *Suv* (§15-1). They also propose to bestow a dhāraṇī to recollect the *Suv* in the second sub-section (§15-2).

§16: This section only exists in the *Suv*_{T2} and the *Suv*_{C3}. By the hearing of this chapter in the *Suv*, the assembly obtains the mundane and supermundane merits such as to be skilled in every treatise, and also obtains the genuine supermundane merits such as to become non-returners in supreme and perfect enlightenment.

The structure of Chapter 11·12 can be tabled as follows:

Table 1. The structure of the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta* (Chapter 11·12)

	<i>Suv_{c1}</i>	<i>Suv_s</i>	<i>Suv_{T1}</i>	<i>Suv_{c2}</i> (= <i>Suv_{c1}</i>)	<i>Suv_{T2}</i>	<i>Suv_{c3}</i>
§1	340c17-341a26	64.1-68.6	48.1-51.4	382a9-b16	= <i>Suv_{T1}</i>	426c27-427b12
§2	341a27-b13	68.7-69.10	51.5-52.12	382b17-c2	„	427b20-c5
§3	341b13-c3	69.11-72.14	52.13-54.30	382c3-21	„	427c6-27
§4	341c4-342a9	72.15-77.2	55.1-57.25	382c22-383a26	„	427c28-428b2
§5	342a10-27	77.3-79.8	57.26-59.22	383a27-b14	„	428b3-23
§6	342a27-c2	79.9-83.7	59.23-62.25	383b15-c16	„	428b24-429a4
§7	342c2-18	83.8-85.9	62.26-64.7	383c17-384a3	„	429a5-22
§8	342c18-343a28	85.10-91.4	64.8-67.32	384a3-b12	„	429a22-c4
§9	343a29-344a13	91.5-98.4	68.1-74.6	384b13-385a24	„	429c5-430b23
§10	344a13-21	98.5-99.7	74.7-28	385a25-b3	„	430b24-c4
§11	—	—	—	—	276.1-280.31	430c5-432a5
§12	—	—	—	—	281.1-7	432a5-7
§13-1	344a21-23	99.8-12	75.1-7	385b3-5	281.8-12	432a8-10
§13-2	344a24-b6	99.13-100.3	75.8-27	385b6-17	= <i>Suv_{T1}</i>	432a11-20
§14	344b7-c11	100.4-101.17	76.1-78.4	385b18-c22	„	432a21-b23
§15-1	344c12-19	101.18-102.11	78.5-22	385c23-29	„	432b24-c2
§15-2	—	—	—	—	281.15-20	432c2-5
§16	—	—	—	—	281.21-30	432c5-9

Table 1 indicates that the content of the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta* was enlarged through the two stages of formation.

Chapter 11·12: *Suv_{c1}* (= *Suv_{c2}*), *Suv_s*, *Suv_{T1}* (the first stage) → *Suv_{T2}*, *Suv_{c3}* (the second and last stage)

3. The Unchanged Intention of the Compilers of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*: “An Attempt at the Independence of [Mahāyāna] Buddhism”

As can be seen from the survey presented above, two different levels of both the doctrines and acts coexist in the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta*, that is, the level of supermundane or spiritual ones (superstructure) and that of mundane or worldly ones (substructure). As to the doctrines, this chapter has both those of the attainment of supreme and perfect enlightenment (supermundane) and of the protection of the regions and of worldly prosperity (mundane). And as to the acts, those of honor in order to hear the Law lead particularly to the attainment of supreme and perfect enlightenment (supermundane), whereas those of holding the spells bring about chiefly

self-protection and flourishing (mundane). This coexistence of the various doctrines and acts of the different levels is not only characteristic of this chapter but also of the *Suv* itself⁴⁾; and the lack of proper interpretation of this characteristic of the *Suv* may have brought the underestimation that “the *Suv* is nothing other than a mere miscellaneous medley of doctrines and religious acts.” Based on the hypothesis and the account of the *Caturmahārāja-parivarta*, however, we may propose an answer to this question. Let us now start to consider it by citing the following three passages:

Quotation 1 (from §9): [The four great kings spoke to the Lord:] “However many, dear Lord, various mundane and supermundane (*laukikalokottara*) treatises have been expounded by the lord Brahma, however many various treatises have been expounded by Śakra, king of the gods, however many various mundane and supermundane (*laukikalokottara*) treatises have been expounded for the sake of beings by various seers who possess the five kinds of supernatural knowledge, this excellent *Suv*, king of sūtras, is superior and more outstanding. Dear Lord, superior to and more outstanding than the hundreds of thousands of Brahmalords, numerous hundreds of thousands of millions of Śakras, and all the hundreds of thousands of millions of seers possessing the five kinds of supernatural knowledge is the Tathāgata, who for the sake of beings expounds in detail this excellent *Suv*, king of sūtras.” (*Suv*_s 95.10-96.1; Emmerick [1996] 40.)

Quotation 2 (from §9): [The four great kings spoke to the Lord:] “Whatever mundane and supermundane (*laukikalokottara*) royal duties, royal textbooks, and royal acts have gone forth in the whole of Jambudvīpa, by which these beings will be blessed, all those have been revealed, expounded, and set forth here in the excellent *Suv*, king of sūtras, by the Lord, the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the fully enlightened one.” (*Suv*_s 97.10-98.1; Emmerick [1996] 41.)

Quotation 3 (from §16): When the Lord had expounded this religious discourse to the assembly, the beings there should acquire knowledge, eloquence and an unlimited heap of merit, should defeat afflictions and become endowed with wel-

fare, should become skilled in every [mundane and supermundane (**laukikalokot-tara*)]⁵⁾ treatise, should obtain escape from the cycle of existence, and should soon become non-returners in supreme and perfect enlightenment. (*Suv*₇ 281.21-30.)

What will be clear from these quotations are two points. The first is that the *Suv* explains that every mundane and supermundane treatise including those treatises expounded by the Hindu gods and seers, has already been expounded in the *Suv* by the Buddha, and that the *Suv* is superior to them. The second is that the *Suv* has been consistent in this manner from the stage of the formation of the *Suv*_{C1}⁶⁾ to that of the *Suv*_{C3}. Taking the hypothesis into consideration, this consistency in attitude of the *Suv* might account for the characteristic of the *Suv* uninterpreted properly to date.

Various Buddhist doctrines are expounded in the *Suv* such as the Śūnyatā theory, the Tathāgatagarbha theory, the Deśanā theory and so on, and contradictions among those doctrines are not rare. Some of these are, for instance, against Stūpa worship and some are for it (see Suzuki [1999, 2003]). It might be possible to interpret this collection of various Buddhist doctrines as an attempt at “the independence of Mahāyāna Buddhism from Traditional (or non-Mahāyāna) Buddhism” by collecting various doctrines either of Mahāyāna or of non-Mahāyāna. Likewise, we might also reasonably say that the feature of the *Suv* setting forth daily religious acts such as bathing as well as sophisticated doctrines, reflects an attempt at “the independence of Buddhism from Hinduism” by collecting various doctrines and acts either of Buddhism or of Hinduism in accordance with the manner that all the mundane and supermundane treatises expounded by the Hindu gods and seers, must have been expounded in the *Suv* by the Buddha, and that the *Suv* is superior to them.

The *Suv* has, as has been shown, demonstrated the various doctrines and acts of both mundane and supermundane levels from the stage of the formation of the *Suv*_{C1} to that of the *Suv*_{C3} consistently. If one of the intentions of the compilers of the *Suv* lies therefore in these two kinds of “attempt at the independence” by collecting as many doctrines and acts, mundane or supermundane, as possible expounded in the treatises either of Mahāyāna, of non-Mahāyāna or of non-Buddhism (i.e., of Hinduism), we might be able to suppose that the intention of the compilers has remained

unchanged all through the stages of the formation of the *Suv*. Furthermore, it might turn out that the *Suv* is not “a mere miscellaneous medley of doctrines and religious acts” but a collection of them which is intrinsic to the value of the *Suv*. Along with the question of the intention of the compilers of the *Suv* we began to consider in this paper, verification of the hypothesis is to be continued in further research by the present author.

- 1) Suzuki, T. [2004] Rites and Buddhism: A Perspective from the *Sarasvatī-parivarta* in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* #104, Tokyo, pp. 12-17. 〈Texts and Abbreviations〉 in this paper follow those in Suzuki [2004].
- 2) The way of numbering the chapters in this paper follows the way in the *Suv*_{C3}.
- 3) Though the numbers of the stages of formation vary with every chapter, it is clear in any case that the *Suv*_{C1} is the smallest and oldest text ever known, which consists of nineteen chapters, and the *Suv*_{C3} is the most enlarged one which consists of thirty one chapters.
- 4) See Suzuki, T. [1999] Conception of the Life Span and the Relics of the *Tathāgata* in the Second Chapter of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* (in Japanese), *The Memoirs of the Institute of Oriental Culture* #138, Tokyo, pp. 195-219; and Suzuki, T. [2003] *Stūpa* Worship and *Dharma* Evaluation in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* #102, Tokyo, pp. 32-36.
- 5) Reconstructed by the present author from the context of this chapter and from parallel passages.
- 6) The passages equivalent to the quotations already existed in the *Suv*_{C1}. (若闍浮提一切衆生及諸人王, 世間出世間所作國事, 所造世論皆因此經. 欲令衆生得安樂故, 釋迦如來示現是經廣宣流布. (*Suv*_{C1} 344a9-12))

〈Key words〉 金光明經の編纂意図, 金光明經四天王品, 宗教の上部構造 (出世間, 超俗, 聖) と下部構造 (世間, 世俗, 俗), [大乘] 仏教の [ヒンドゥー教からの] 自立の模索.

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