The samādhi of dharmaśaṅkha described in the Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṃgītiṭīkā of Mañjuśrīkīrti

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I. Introduction: Nāmasaṃgīti (c. 700AD, hereafter NS) is one of the Buddhist Tantras which describes the characteristics of Mañjuśrīnjānasattva through various names (nāma) as well as the benefits (anuṣamsā) on reciting it. Since the tantra itself does not serve any specific doctrines and ritual practices, it was interpreted from various standpoints. The respective commentators were designated as the founder of the schools that offered their own doctrines and ritual practices. One of such commentaries is the Āryamanjuśrīnāmasaṃgītiṭīkā (hereafter Tikā) 1), authored by Mañjuśrīkīrti in the first half of the tenth century 2), about which ‡T already published a paper 3), describing its doctrines and ritual practices.

The main purpose of this paper is to focus on some account of ‘the samādhi of dharmaśaṅkha’ (hereafter Dh-samādhi) 4) which is offered by Mañjuśrīkīrti in his Tikā, to annotate the ‘dharmaśaṅkha’, found in the 78th verse of the NS. 5)

II. Dharmaśaṅkha and śaṅkha: From ancient times in India, the conch (śaṅkha) is a kind of musical instrument as well as one of the objects carried by Viṣṇu God. Since it produces the powerful sound, it is used to assemble people and to convey messages to them. When adopted in esoteric Buddhism, it is regarded as one of the eight auspicious symbols (aṣṭamaṅgala) and is often used as a container of ambrosia (amṛta) just like the lotus-vessel. Moreover, the prosperous situation of a Buddhist preaching (dharma) is used to compare with the blowing of the conch, so that it is called ‘the conch of the dharma’ (dharmaśaṅkha; chos kyi dung). 6)

The Tikā is the largest commentary of the NS, interpreted from the standpoint of Yogatantra class, where Mañjuśrīkīrti quoted different scriptures as well as ritual methods. In the Tikā, by comparison with the theoretical explanations, the practical ones are relatively small. The Dh-samādhi is one of those ritual practices in the Tikā. This samādhi is not seen in the other commentaries, and is therefore considered
The samādhi of dharmāsāṅkha described in the Aṅryamanjusrīnāmasaṅgitiṭikā of Manjusrīkirti (S. Shakya) as the unique annotation which also provides the characteristic accounts of the Tīkā.

III. The samādhi of dharmāsāṅkha: I divided the Dh-samādhi into eight stages and outlined below:

[1] Meditation of water-cycle; Visualization of self as Mañjuśrī: At first, a lotus flower with eight petals is meditated upon the water-cycle which is white in colour and has ambrosia (amṛta) as its nature. In the centre of the lotus flower Mañjuśrī is generated out of a syllable Maṁ and then one visualizes oneself as Mañjuśrī.

[2] Visualization of a conch generated out of the syllable Kham: A syllable Kham is meditated at the lotus flower on the moon-disc of one’s heart. Then a conch is generated out of the syllable Kham. The syllables of Vajra-tongue ‘Om vajra jihva Raṁ’ are set up in the centre of the conch. Above the tongue there is a Jewel-lotus (*ratnapadma) where Amitābha is visualized. Then a syllable Vam is meditated at the palate (tālu), from which a drop of ambrosia (amṛtabindu) flows. This kind of meditation should be done for half a month, a month, or half a year.

[3] The method of drawing a Maṇḍala: After obtaining the good omen, a maṇḍala is drawn, square with four gates where four guards are installed. Next, eight offering goddesses, Lasyā, Mālyā, Gitā, Nṛtya, Puṣpā, Dhūpā, Dipā, Gandhā, are installed at the outer circle.

[4] Offerings: After drawing the maṇḍala, either in the day of full moon of Bhādra or in the day of full moon Vaiśākha, all kinds of offerings are made and one is seated in the middle of the maṇḍala in the cross-legged posture (vajraparyanya).


[6] Re-absorption: Next, one should meditate: “Arriving the signs of body, speech and mind of all-Tathāgatas from all directions, and entering into my body, speech and mind and be firm.”

[7] Emanation of all syllables to the universe: The conch is now visualized at the lotus flower on the moon-disc of one’s heart. It is encircled by all the syllables which have the keśarabindus as their nature. These keśarabindus become atoms of voice (vākparamāṇu) that ascend to the throat (kaṇṭha) and transform into sound (svara). Then this sound changes to the loud sound (nāda) which changes into the form of
letters (aṇḍarūpa) and reach at the tongue (jihva). They change into Vajra-like forms which emanate one after another, illuminating the space.

[8] The merits: Then, meter (chanda), verse (gāthā), mantra, vidyā, hrdaya etc. will arise from the conch14) without exertion. Furthermore, the significance of all speeches of the beings will understand. The ‘all-kinds-of-knowledge’ will be also accomplished without taking a long time.

IV. Relation with the Sādhanaamalā: It turned out that the contents of the above explained Dh-samādhi in the Tīkā is almost the same with the sādhanas recorded under the title of “Dharmaśaṅkhasamādhiṣeṣārāmānjuśrīsādhana (hereafter Dh-sādha)”15) in the Sādhanamalā (hereafter SM).16) While the Dh-sādha of the SM is recorded as one of the individual sādhanas, ‘the Dh-samādhi’ of the Tīkā is described as an annotation of the 78th verse of the NS. This is the greatest difference between them.

In the Tibetan Tripitaka, it lists three kinds of the sādha-collections17) that edit and compile various kinds of individual sādhanas of esoteric Buddhism. Among those, the *Sādhanasāgara (sGrub thabs rgya mtsho) is presumed to be the latest collection, translated into Tibetan by Grags pa rgyal mtshan in the latter half of the thirteenth century. This is the only collection where the Tibetan translation of the Dh-sādha appears as Chos kyi dungs gi ting nge ’dzin ’jam dpal gyi sgrub thabs (Tohoku 3474; Otani 4296), while the other two collections have no record of it.

V. Conclusion: Summarizing above, the main points that I have attempted to make are as follows.

1. In the Tīkā, we can see that Maṇjuśrīkirti’s doctrines and ritual practices have a tendency to value voice (vāc) when interpreting the NS. Therefore, his school is also known as ‘Dharamdhātuvaṇīśvara-school’. Assuming that the process of generating voice in a human’s throat is similar to that of a conch, in the ‘Dh-samādhi’, Maṇjuśrīkirti explained the structure of generating voice in the following steps: ‘keśarabindu’→‘atoms of voice(vākparīmāṇu)’→‘throat(kaṇṭha)’→‘sound(svara)’→‘loud sound(nāda)’→‘form of letters(aṇḍarūpa)’→‘tongue(jihva)’→‘Vajra-like form’→‘emanation into space’. It is also explained that on performing the Dh-samādhi, one could be able to obtain the ‘all-kinds-of-knowledge’ rapidly.

2. As mentioned above, it becomes clear that the contents of the Dh-samādhi, described in the Tīkā of Maṇjuśri, is almost the same with the Dh-sādha of the SM.
And, the Tibetan translation of the Dh-sādhana appears only in the ‘*Sādhanaśāgara’ translated by Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Neither the Dh-sādhana nor its Tibetan translation conveys the author’s name. However, judging from the similar contents and period of translation of the ‘*Sādhanaśāgara’, it can be thought that the ‘Dh-samādhi’ was extracted from the Tikā and treated as an individual sādhanā in the ‘*Sādhanaśāgara’ at the time of compilation.


1) Tohoku 2534 (115b3-301a8); Ota 3357(135a1-351a3);『中華大藏經丹珠爾』, 中国藏学出版社Vol. 32, pp.307-811 [Ch-32].
2) According to Bu ston’s The History of Buddhism (Tohoku 5197), Ānandagarbha, who was one of the renowned scholars, and Maṇjuśrīkīrti were the disciples of the same mentor. The Tikā is considered as Maṇjuśrīkīrti’s prime work. Unfortunately, the original Sanskrit text does not exist. See [Shakya 2004: 77-79].
3) [Shakya 2004].
4) Tikā, 213a4–214a1; Ch-32, p.554, 1.7-p.556.t.14.
7) The summary of the Dh-samādhi is introduced here, using the Tikā as the main text. The contents of this samādhi is almost the same with the Sanskrit text of the SM (SM No.81, pp.157-158 = [SM-81]) and Grags pa rgyal mtshan’s Tibetan translation (Tohoku 3474; Otani 4296= [Grags pa]). The variants are seen and the latter notes will confirm
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only the main variants. The detail will be discussed later again.

8) The ‘bdud rtsi’i rang bzhin can’ (ambrosia as its nature)’ is one of the characteristics of the water-cycle, read only by the Tikā 213a⁴, while the other texts are omitting it.

9) There is no different reading for the syllable ‘Mum’ in the Tikā’s other editions. The SM-81 and the Grags pa both, however, read ‘Mam’. Again, [Mallmann: 211-212] which is the revised edition of the SM-81, reads ‘Am’. For the syllable of Maṇjuśrī, ‘Mam’ is thought to be the appropriate syllable.

10) [Mallmann: 211] reads Kham, while the SM-81 reads Vaṃ which agrees with the Grags pa.

11) The reading of the SM-81 and the Grags pa is the same, while [Mallmann: 211] reads as ‘raktapadma= red lotus’.

12) The NS is proclaimed as one of the extracted chapters of the Māyājālatanra, where the three Buddhas —Vairocana, Amitābha and Akṣobhya— are allotted to body, speech and mind respectively. See M. Yoritomi Mikkyobutsu no Kenkyu, Hozokan, 1990, p.290. Since Amitābha symbolizes the speech, in the Dh-samādhi, one visualizes oneself as Amitābha.

13) Here, the reading of the Tikā is different from the three texts — the SM, the Grags pa and [Mallmann: 211] — which read as ‘the day of full moon of Kārttika, Phālguna, or Vaiśākha’. These are the months of the Hindī lunar year.

14) Tikā, 213a⁸; Ch-32,p.556, l.10 reads ‘dan’, but Otani reads ‘dung’ which means a śankha. The latter one is followed here.

15) SM No.81, pp.157-158. This sādhana is not included in the list of [GB: 31-36].

16) Bhattacharya, using 8 different kinds of Sanskrit manuscripts, edited the SM. It is published in II-vols where 312 Buddhist sādhanas are collected. See [Bongo-IV: 382-485].

17) The following are the three sādhanā-collections found in the Tibetan Tripitaka, which are arranged in the chronological order of translation.

1) Ba ri brgya rtsa [Tohoku 3306-3399; Otani 4127-4220] translated by Amoghavajra and Ba ri lo tsa ba Rin chen grags in the first half of the 11th century.

2) SGrub thabs brgya rtsa [Tohoku 3143-3304; Otani 3964-4126] translated by Abhayakaragupta and Pa tshab Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan in the first half of the 11th century.

3) Sāhanāsāgara (sGrub thabs rgya mtsho) [Tohoku 3400-3644; Otani 4221-4466] translated by Grags pa rgyal mtshan in the latter half of the 13th century. See [Bongo IV: 382-385] and [Sakurai 2000: 4-5].

〈Keywords〉 Nāmasamgiti, Maṇjuśrīkirti, Āryamanjuśrīnāmasamgitiṭīkā, dharmaśāṅkha, Sādhanamālā

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