

# Rituals and the Dharmabhanaka (Preacher) in the Suvarna (pra) bhasottamasutra : As an Example of Mahayana Sutras Adopting Esoteric Rituals

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## Rituals and the Dharmabhāṅaka (Preacher) in the *Suvarṇa(pra)bhāsottamasūtra*: As an Example of Mahāyāna Sūtras Adopting Esoteric Rituals

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### Introductory notes

The *Suvarṇa(pra)bhāsottamasūtra*<sup>1)</sup> (*Suv*) has both elements of Mahāyāna and esoteric Buddhism even in its shortest version<sup>2)</sup> (*SuvC1*), and the esoteric elements (spells and rituals) increase along with the textual extension. This paper focuses on the rituals and the role of the dharmabhāṅaka (preacher) in *Suv*, especially in Chapter 6 Caturmahārāja-parivarta and Chapter 7 Sarasvatī-parivarta. “Dharmaśravaṇapūjā,” which is explained in Caturmahārāja-parivarta aiming to serve the dharmabhāṅaka, has the framework of a pūjā common in Mahāyāna sūtras<sup>3)</sup>, yet it also has the features of esoteric rituals, i.e. performing rituals to a sole deity and expecting worldly benefits<sup>4)</sup>. This paper clarifies these two features of “dharmaśravaṇapūjā,” and demonstrates that it incorporates two rituals — “snānakarman” in Sarasvatī-parivarta and “the ritual for summoning Vaiśravaṇa (多聞天勸請儀礼)” in the additional part of Caturmahārāja-parivarta of the largest version of *Suv*<sup>5)</sup> (*SuvC3*) — into this sūtra. In addition, I would like to suggest the hypothesis that the dharmabhāṅaka had an important role in leading the rituals in this sūtra, and the dharmabhāṅaka participated in the formation of this sūtra.

### “Dharmaśravaṇapūjā”

“Dharmaśravaṇapūjā” explained in Chapter 6, Caturmahārāja-parivarta, has a framework and contains materials common to Mahāyāna sūtras, e.g. using flowers, incense, perfume etc. and serving the dharmabhāṅaka. However, the relationship between the executor of this “pūjā” (the king) and the deities (Caturmahārāja) is not familiar in Mahāyāna sūtras but is instead esoteric. Now, I will build a viewpoint called “relationship on the benefits between the deity, the dharmabhāṅaka and the listeners” around this “pūjā” for tentative use, and I will examine its esoteric features by comparing it with “snānakarman” and “the ritual for summoning Vaiśravaṇa.”

The motif in which Caturmahārāja protects the devotees of Buddhism, is quite popular in Buddhist canon, not only in Mahāyāna but from the era of Nikāyas<sup>6)</sup>. Caturmahārāja’s

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function of ‘protecting king’s land’ described in this chapter is unique to this sūtra, but it can be considered as an extension of this function. I refer to this relationship, in which Buddhist teachings give Caturmahārāja religious merit, and Caturmahārāja in turn, protect the devotees, as “A.”

The claim of necessity in performing the service (pūjā) for the dharmabhāṇaka is also a popular motif, but only in Mahāyāna sūtras where is explained as the duty of the listeners of teachings<sup>7)</sup>. I call this relationship, in which the dharmabhāṇaka preaches and the listeners serve the dharmabhāṇaka, as “B.”

Then, the interchange of benefits around the “pūjā” is described. A synopsis is as following: the service with incense (gandha) is given by the king to the dharmabhāṇaka (B) → The smoke of incense (gandha-dhūpa) reaches the dwellings of Caturmahārāja and their retinues in the sky and decorates them with odours and lights (C) → In return Caturmahārāja protects the king’s land (D). That is to say, the service to the dharmabhāṇaka (B) is transferred to Caturmahārāja by means of the smoke of incense (C) and the transference leads a direct relation between Caturmahārāja and the king as the executor of this “pūjā” (D). This relationship of mutual benefit (C-D) is to be considered as the peculiar feature of this “pūjā” in comparison with other Mahāyāna pūjās. The whole relationships are diagrammed in Fig. 1.

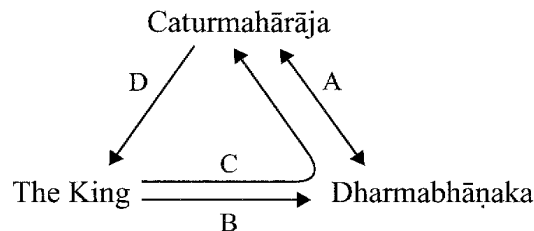


Fig. 1. Relationship on the benefits around “dharmaśravaṇapūjā”

### Comparison with “snānakarman” in Sarasvatī-parivarta

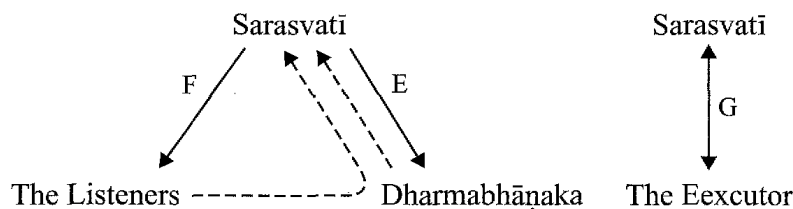
Then I will compare the previous relationship with the relationships surrounding “snānakarman” in Sarasvatī-parivarta. In this chapter, a female deity, Sarasvatī, teaches “snānakarman,” in which one could sumonn her and receive worldly benefits, on the beings (sattva) containing the listeners and the preacher of *Suv*. “Snānakarman” can be regarded as a pure esoteric ritual because of the features such as mantras and rituals, performed to a sole deity and worldly benefits such as a long life and health. The interchange between Sarasvatī and the executor is completed in this ritual, and no religious supermundane merit is mentioned here.

This esoteric ritual, explained by verses (*Suv* 104.6-107.3), appears unusual in terms of Mahāyāna doctrine. However, the proses (102.13-104.5, 107.3-12) which appears in front of

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and behind the verses supply the context necessary to explain it. The proses explain that Sarasvatī is among the retinue of Caturmahārāja, and she enjoys benefits through “pūjā,” so in return she offers to bestow the eloquence, wisdom and the method of this ritual. The interchange of benefit in Caturmahārāja-parivarta thus necessitates the explanation of this ritual within Sarasvatī-parivarta (Fig. 2).

“Snānakarman” is considered to have been introduced to the Buddhist canons through *Suv*. There are no known examples of rituals dedicated to Sarasvatī in Mahāyāna texts, and only a few examples exist in some esoteric texts, obviously formed later than *Suv*<sup>8)</sup>. Moreover, Sarasvatī-parivarta has some verses in parallel with the *Harivaṃśa*<sup>9)</sup>, and the nature of Sarasvatī in this sūtra closely resembles that found in Hinduism<sup>10)</sup>. Thus “snānakarman” and the depiction of Sarasvatī in this ritual can be considered to have been transferred directly from the ritual in Hinduism directly. It is often said that the esoteric rituals in Buddhism originate in Hinduism<sup>11)</sup>, and this “snānakarman” can be viewed as an example. And in this *Suv*, from the context of “dharmaśravaṇapūjā” in Caturmahārāja-parivarta, “snānakarman” — that is direct interchange between the executor of the ritual and the deity — can be brought into Mahāyāna Buddhist context.



**Fig. 2. Relationship on the benefits around “snānakarman”**

(E: Bestowing the eloquence/teaching “snānakarman”, F : bestowing wisdom/teaching “snānakarman”,

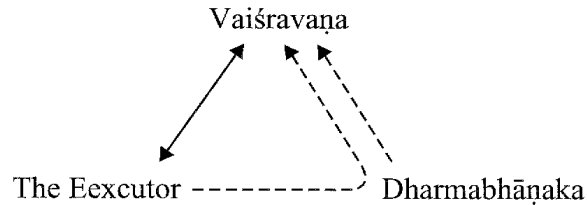
G : interchange of benefits in “snānakarman”, dotted lines express the suppliment of Caturmahārāja-parivarta)

### Comparison with “the ritual for summoning Vaiśravaṇa”

Finally, I will compare “dharmaśravaṇapūjā” with “the ritual for summoning Vaiśravaṇa,” found in Caturmahārāja-parivarta at the stage of *SuvC3*. This ritual is explained by Vaiśravaṇa, the chief of Caturmahārāja. In it, the executor summons Vaiśravaṇa by using four mantras and painting, and expects worldly benefits such as money, as well as preternatural power from him. This is cited in *Pishamentianwang jing* 毘沙門天王經 (T. 1244) and can be seen a pure esoteric ritual. The method of this ritual is explained by Vaiśravaṇa as a return of “dharmaśravaṇapūjā,” a continuation of protecting the land by Caturmahārāja, just like “snānakarman” of Sarasvatī. And this lacks the description of necessity for the deity to explain the ritual, which “snānakarman” lacks as well and “dharmaśravaṇapūjā”

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includes. Thus, this ritual is also can be considered to be brought in on the base of “dharmaśravaṇapūjā” (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3. Relationship on the benefits of “the ritual for summoning Vaiśravaṇa (多聞天勸請儀礼)”** dotted lines express the suppliment of Caturmahārāja-parivarta)

### Final remarks

Thus my hypothesis is as following: In *Suv*, “dharmaśravaṇapūjā” in Caturmahārāja-parivarta is formed from the elements familiar to Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as having Caturmahārāja protect the devotees of Buddhism and presenting service to the dharmabhāṇaka as a quasi-ritual of sorts. The esoteric rituals such as “snānakarman” and the ritual for summoning Vaiśravaṇa are incorporated on the contextual and benefit-related basis of “dharmaśravaṇapūjā” at the later stage, maybe from Hinduism. This hypothesis is confirmed by the history of textual extensions, in that the shortest version (*SuvC1*) has “pūjā” and lacks “snānakarman,” while the Sanskrit text, the second-shortest version, includes “snānakarman,” and only the largest version (*SuvC3*) includes “the ritual of Vaiśravaṇa.”

In addition, in the sanskrit text, the descriptions of the deities and the rituals dedicated to them are limited to five chapters from Caturmahārāja-parivarta to Saṃjñāya-parivarta, as are the descriptions of praise for the dharmabhāṇaka<sup>12)</sup>. If “dharmaśravaṇapūjā” for the dharmabhāṇaka was formed as a quasi-ritual, and this “pūjā” led to the inclusion of the esoteric rituals into *Suv*, it would be possible that the preaching of the dharmabhāṇaka who would have had frequent contact with the religious practices of Hinduism has participated in bringing in or forming these rituals. That is, the dharmabhāṇaka introduced these (quasi-) ritual into this sūtra for their suitability in the oral preaching, and what the dharmabhāṇakas’s preaching reflected the written text. The possibility that the dharmabhāṇaka committed the formation of Mahāyāna sūtras has already been pointed out<sup>13)</sup>, and if the hypothesis mentioned above hold true, this paper thus cites *Suv* as one of the examples.

1) *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra, Das Goldglanz-sūtra, Ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus, Nach den Handschriften und mit Hilfe der tibetischen und chinesischen Übertragungen*, Johannes

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Nobel, 1937, Otto Harrassowitz, Leipzig. 2) *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經 trans. Dharmakṣema (T. 663). 3) The general pūjā in Mahāyāna Buddhism is the service to buddhas, stūpas, the sacred books and monks by using items such as flower (puṣpa), perfume (dhūpa), incense (gandha), garland (mālya), etc., as are described in many mahāyāna sūtras, including the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Daśabhūmika*, the *Gandhavyūha*. 4) Mentioned here are the features common to the rituals in *Suv*. In addition, reciting mantras and dhāraṇīs, drawing the object of the ritual, making a maṇḍalas and mudrās could be enumerated as the general features of the esoteric rituals (see Matsunaga [1978]). 5) *Jingguangmin zuisheng wang jing* 金光明最勝王經 trans. Yijing (T. 665). 6) The character of Caturmahārāja is researched in Komoro [2001], Hashimoto [1936]. Especially the function of “protecting the sacred books and the dharmabhāṅaka who carries it,” is described in Stuti-parivarta in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, Dhāraṇī-parivarta in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, and other sources. 7) Remarkable examples are come from Dharmabhāṅaka-parivarta and Dharmabhāṅakānuśaṃsa-parivarta in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. For other examples, see Shizutani [1974]. 8) I cannot find other examples, and Watanabe [1918] also testifies. Similar examples in the esoteric texts is seen in *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 第十一 (T. 901), *Bukongjuansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* 不空羼索神變真言經 第二 (T. 1092). 9) The similarities have been noted between “snānakarman” and the *Harivaṃśa* Calcutta ed. 3218-3219 (Crit. ed. 43:3:6cd-7) (Nobel [1951]), and a parallel between verses praising Sarasvatī in *SuvC3* and verses praising Durgā in the *Harivaṃśa* (Crit. ed., vol.2 app. no. 8, pp. 34-37) (Watanabe [1918], Ludvik [2001]). 10) The similarities include the character as the deity of River Sarasvatī read from “snānakarman” (see Nobel [1951]), assimilation to Vāc (see Lal [1980], Gonda [1985]), assimilation to Durgā (see note 7 and Nagano [1988]). The similarities are reexamined in detail by Ludvik [2001]. These resemblances are contrasted with the character of Caturmahārāja, that is unique in Buddhist canons and not similar to that in Hinduism (see Mevissen [2001] etc.). 11) Many researchers make this claim, including Matsunaga [1978] pp. 87-89. 12) T. Suzuki has treated these five chapters — Caturmahārāja-, Sarasvatī-, Śrī-, Dṛdhā- and Saṃjñāya-parivarta — and named these “the Five Chapters on the Various Gods and Goddesses.” Suzuki [2008] builds a hypothesis that “the unchanged intention of the compilers” of *Suv* was “an attempt of Buddhist to survive in the Indian religious world by emphasizing the value, the usefulness and the completeness of [Mahāyāna] Buddhism.” 13) The possibility that the dharmabhāṅaka participated in the formation of Mahāyāna sūtra is argued for long since Shizutani [1974] by Nishimura [1992] and others, and Watanabe [1970] builds a hypothesis on the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* that dharmabhāṅaka participated in changing and adding some parts or chapters of the sūtras before they were compiled.

(Due to the limited space the references are omitted)

〈Key words〉 Ritual, Dharmabhāṅaka

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