

The Suvarnabhasottamasutra's "Vyadhiprasamanaparivarta" and Ayurveda : Similar in Form but Different in Theory

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The *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*'s “Vyādhipraśamana-parivarta” and Āyurveda: Similar in Form but Different in Theory

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1. Descriptive Similarities between *Suv* and Āyurvedic Texts

In the “Vyādhipraśamana-parivarta,” the 16th chapter of the Sanskrit version of the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* (*Suv*), a medical discussion can be found, which Emmerick [1996: 78] translates as follows:¹⁾

⁽⁵⁾The rainy season is seen to be three months, autumn is said to be three, winter likewise three, and three too the hot season. *Thus the succession of months (forms) six periods. A year is said to have twelve months.* ⁽⁶⁾ . . . The monthly period is to be viewed in twos. Food and drink are consumed accordingly. And the doctor, his skill, and the period, have been explained. ⁽⁷⁾And the senses and elements change during the division of the year. The senses changing, the various diseases arise for corporeal beings. ⁽⁸⁾In that case, the doctor must have skill concerning the fourfold division into three months, the six periods in the (bimonthly) division, and the six elements. ⁽⁹⁾Illnesses due to excess of wind occur in the rainy season. Disturbance of the bile is taught (to occur) in autumn. Likewise, (illness) due to a combination (arises) in winter-time. Illnesses due to excess of phlegm arise in the hot season. ⁽¹⁰⁾In the rainy season, the (characteristic) tastes (are) fatty, warm, salty and sour; in autumn seasons, fatty, sweet and cold; in winter-time, sweet, sour and fatty; and in summer-time, rough, warm and bitter. ⁽¹¹⁾Excess of phlegm erupts as soon as one has eaten. Excess of bile erupts during digestion. Excess of wind erupts as soon as one has digested. In this manner do the three elements erupt. ⁽¹²⁾Give strengthening to one who has wind, a purgative to remove bile, in the case of a combination (give) something endowed with the three qualities, and one should use an emetic during a period of (excess) phlegm. ⁽¹³⁾One must know in which periods excess of wind, bile or a combination, (or) excess of phlegm (occur). That food, drink, or medicine must be prescribed which accords with the time, the element and the person.

(Prose is in *italics*, and verse numbers ^(**) were added by the author)

First the *ṛtus* (seasons) are defined, followed by the disorders found in the medical theory of *tridoṣa* comprised of *vāta* (wind), *pitta* (bile), and *kapha/śleṣman* (phlegm). Then, remedies and *rasas* (tastes) for each season are prescribed. The form of this passage,

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though simplified, corresponds to that of the seasonal regimen descriptions commonly found in orthodox Āyurvedic documents.²⁾ Thus, this passage has been considered to have been extracted from, or directly influenced by the Āyurvedic documents.

2. *Rtu* and *Rasa*

However, *Suv*'s description is different from orthodox Āyurvedic documents when it comes to specific concepts. *Suv* introduces four and six *ṛtus* as technical terms, but it actually uses only the former in its medical explanation. In contrast, orthodox Āyurvedic documents use six *ṛtus*.³⁾ If directly based on Āyurvedic documents, the regimen would be described using the six *ṛtus*, but that is not the case. In this connection, Xuanzang 玄奘 writes in his *Datang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 that there were three concepts of the seasons in India: the common notion of six seasons, and the two understandings found in the Buddhist canon of three seasons and four seasons.⁴⁾ While this single record cannot prove the four-*ṛtu* concept to be distinctive among Buddhists, we can affirm that the concept of seasons in *Suv* is not simply copied from Āyurvedic texts. In addition, *Suv*'s description of *rasas* loosely corresponds to the Āyurvedic seasonal regimen although its concept of *ṛtu* differs (fig. 1). However, the *rasas* *Suv* enumerates do not match the definition of the *ṣaḍrasa* (six *rasas*) found in orthodox Āyurveda.⁵⁾ Moreover, supposedly earlier *Mahāyāna* texts such as the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論⁶⁾ and *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra*⁷⁾ mention the concept of *ṣaḍrasa*. Thus *Suv*'s theory of *rasa* does not coincide with that of Āyurvedic texts, nor especially closer than that of other Buddhist texts.

| CS Sū. 6. 4–50 (seasonal regimen), [Sū. 20. 11–19] (sorts of diseases). <i>ṣaḍrasa</i> (Sū. 1. 66) | | | | Vyādhipraśamana-parivarta in <i>Suv</i> | | | |
|--|-----------------|---|------------------------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>ṛtu</i> | doṣa disordered | rasa appropriate | remedy | <i>ṛtu</i> | doṣa disordered | rasa appropriate | remedy |
| vasanta | kapha | [kaṭuka, tikta, kapāya, tikṣuṇa, uṣṇa, rūkṣa] | vamana | griṣma | kapha | kaṭuka, rūkṣa (for kaṣāya?), uṣṇa | vamana |
| griṣma | [pitta] | madhura, śīta, drava, snigdha | | | | | |
| varṣa | vāta, etc. | amla, lavaṇa, snigdha [madhura, uṣṇa] | all remedies [sthāpana, anuvāsana] | varṣa | vāta | amla, lavaṇa, snigdha, uṣṇa | sambhṛhaṇa |
| śarad | pitta | madhura, tikta, laghu, śīta, satiktaka | virecana, raktamokṣaṇa | śarad | pitta | madhura, snigdha, śīta | virecana |
| hemanta | vāta | amla, lavaṇa, snigdha [madhura, uṣṇa] | [sthāpana, anuvāsana] | | | | |
| śīśira | vāta | amla, lavaṇa, snigdha [madhura, uṣṇa] | [sthāpana, anuvāsana] | hemanta | samnipāta | madhura, amla, snigdha | triguṇopapanna |

Fig. 1 Seasonal regimen in CS and *Suv*.

3. *Tridoṣa*

In Āyurvedic texts, it is said that there are 62 *saṃnipāta* (combinations of disorders), but their particular symptoms are not assigned to specific seasons.⁸⁾ By contrast, in Buddhist texts we often find 404 types of diseases, which are seen as arising from the four elements (*mahābhūta*) or the *dhātus*. In this framework, each is assigned a *doṣa*: *vāta* to air (*vāyu*), *pitta* to fire (*tejas*), *kapha* to water (*ap*), and *saṃnipāta* to earth (*pṛthivī*).⁹⁾ In fact, *dhātu* and *doṣa* are different names for the same thing; *dhātu* is the term used to describe elements comprising the body, whereas *doṣa* is used when they are the causes of disease. Thus, in the above passage, *dhātu/mahābhūta* and *dhātu/doṣa* are used interchangeably.¹⁰⁾ In the Buddhist conception of 404 diseases, it is quite common to juxtapose *tridoṣa* and *saṃnipāta*. *Suv* supposedly also adopted this manner.

4. *Ṣaḍdhātu*

Suv mentions *ṣaḍdhātu* (six elements) in the above-cited 8th verse, as well as in the prose following the verses.¹¹⁾ In the 11th verse, *tri-dhātu* are mentioned as *doṣa*. While in this context *ṣaḍdhātu* must include *tri-dhātu/doṣa*, in orthodox Āyurveda such a conception cannot be found.¹²⁾ Thus we have no choice but to understand these three *dhātu/doṣa* as three *dhātu/mahābhūta*, and *ṣaḍdhātu* as the classical Buddhist concept of the elements of body, i.e., earth, water, fire, air, void (*ākāśa*), and cognition (*viññāna*), which includes the three *dhātus*.¹³⁾

5. Conclusion

As seen above, while the medical regimen in *Suv* is similar to Āyurvedic texts in form, it differs in content. Its understandings of seasons, etiologies, and the concept of the elements of the body are closer to classic Buddhist theory. There are two possible reasons for this: *Suv*'s seasonal regimen could be unique to Buddhism, belonging to a line of transmission different from orthodox Āyurveda,¹⁴⁾ or it could be an imitation only in the form of an Āyurvedic seasonal regimen.

Notes

1) Nob., pp. 178–180, Skj., pp. 292–297, Tib., pp. 139–141, 曇 351c–352a, 合 395a, 義 448a.

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- 2) *CS* Sūtrasthāna (Sū) 6, *SS* Sū. 6, *AH* Sū. 3, *YS* 105ff. 3) *CS* Sū. 6. 4–7, *SS* Sū. 6. 5–9, *AH* Sū. 3. 1–2. Cf. *CS* Sū. 7. 46, Yano [1988: 55]. See also Kane [1958: 667]. 4) T. no. 2087, vol. 51, 875c–876a. See also *AKBh* III 89, p. 177, *AKV* III. 81, p. 333. Three seasons: *Vin.* I. III. 1. 1, *Sifen lü* 四分律, T. no. 1428, vol. 22, 830b, etc.; four seasons: *Foyi jing* 仏医經, T. no. 793, vol. 17, 737a, *AKBh* III. 15, p. 127, *Lal.* 15, p. 211, etc. On the Buddhist calendar, see Mori [1999].
- 5) *CS* Sū. 1. 66, 26. 9. 6) T. no. 1509, vol. 25, 60a, attributed to Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250), possibly compiled by Kumarājīva (402–405); proto-*Suv* must precede 曇 (412–421) but the legend She Moteng 攝摩騰 preached *Suv* (–75) could not be the historical fact. 7) See Shimoda [1993: 158, 185], Nakagawa [1989]. 8) *CS* Sū. 17. 41–43, *Vimānasthāna* 6. 11; *SS* regards blood (*śonita*) as the 4th *doṣa*. (Sū. 1. 20) enumerates 15 *saṃnipātas* (Sū. 21. 25.). 9) Juxtaposing *tridoṣa* and *saṃnipāta*: *SN* IV, p. 230, *AN* II, p. 87, V, p. 110, *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經, T. no. 220, vol. 6, 695c, etc.; 404 diseases out of 4 causes: *Xiuxing daodi jing* 修行道地經, T. no. 606, vol. 15, 188c, 209b, *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律, T. no. 1425, vol. 22, 316c, *Da zhidu lun*, T. no. 1509, vol. 25, 119c, 469c, 478b, etc.; only 404 diseases: *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature in the Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism in Taisho University, ed., Tokyo: Taisho University Press, 2004, ch. II, p. 68), *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (P. L. Vaidya, ed., Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1960, II v. 55), etc. See also Fukunaga [1972: 56–61], Demiéville [1937: 249–253, 255–257], Lamotte [1976: 36 n. 26], Shimoda [1993: 45 n. 54]. 10) *Xiuxing daodi jing* 209b, *Da zhidu lun* 469c, see also *AKBh* III. 44, p. 157, Habata [1989]. 11) Nob., p. 178, l. 1, p. 180, l. 13, Skj., p. 292, p. 297. 12) *Dhātu* has two meanings: *doṣa* and seven bodily tissues. See Yano [1988: 15 n. 40]. 義 translated *ṣaḍdhātu* in the 8th verse as 七界 (seven *dhātus*). 13) Ex. *AKBh* I. 28, p. 18. *CS* also presents *ṣaḍdhātu* as consisting of earth, water, fire, air, void, and *ātman* (Sū. 8. 9, 25. 14). Nowhere else in *Suv* is *ṣaḍdhātu* found, despite *dhātu* being used in "Relic" (ch. 2) and in "Four Elements of the Body" (ch. 5). 14) See G. Zysk [1991].

Abbreviations

- AH* *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*. Ed. Yadunandana Upādhyāya. Kasi Sanskrit Granthamala 150. Varanasi: Chaukhamba, 1959.
- AKBh* *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya of Vasubandhu*. Ed. P. Pradhan. Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1967.
- AKV* *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā: The Work of Yaśomitra*. Ed. U. Wogihara. Tokyo: Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, 1936.
- AN* *Āṅguttara-nikāya*. Ed. Richard Morris. London: Pali Text Society, 1885–1910.
- CS* *Charakasamhitā by Agniveśa*. Ed. Vaidya Jādavaji Trikamji Ācārya. Chaukhamba Ayurveda Granthamala 34. Reprint, Varanasi: Chaukhamba, 1992.
- Lal* *Lalitavistara*. Ed. S. Lefmann. Halle a. S.: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Weissenhauses, 1902.
- Nob. Johannes Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra: Das Goldglanz-sūtra, ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-buddhismus*. Leiden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1937.
- Skj. Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *This Most Excellent Shine of Gold, King of Kings of Sutras: The Khotanese Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*. [Cambridge, Mass.]: Harvard University, 2004.

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- SN *Samyutta-nikāya*. Ed. Léon Feer. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1884.
- SS *Suśrutasaṃhitā*. Ed. Kavirāja Ambikādatta Shāstri. Kasi Sanskrit Granthamala 156. Reprint, Varanasi: Chaukhamba, 2006.
- T. Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經.
- Tib. Johannes Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra, das Goldglanz-sūtra, die Tibetischen Übersetzungen mit einem Wörterbuch*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1944.
- Vin *The Vinaya Piṭakam*. Ed. Hermann Oldenberg. London: Pali Text Society, 1879–1883.
- YS *Yogaśataka*. Ed. J. Filliozat. Paris: Institut Français d'indologie, 1979.
- 曇 Tanwuchen 曇無讖 (Dharmakṣema), trans. *Jinguangming jing* 金光明經. T. no. 663, vol. 16.
- 合 *Hebu Jinguangming jing* 合部金光明經. T. no. 664, vol. 16.
- 義 Yijing 義淨, trans. *Jinguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經. T. no. 665, vol. 16.

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〈Key words〉 *Suvarṇa (pra) bhāsottamasūtra*, Mahāyāna, Āyurveda, *rtu*, *dhātu*, *doṣa*

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