

The Historical Significance of the Opening Chapter *Rāvaṇādhyeṣaṇā* of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*

Gishin TOKIWA

I. As to the title, *Laṅkāvatāra*, of this mahayana sutra, I had been ignorant of what it stood for. The oldest of the three Chinese versions, the Four-Fascicle one translated by Guṇabhadra (A.D. 443), begins with the statement like this :

Once the Awakened One stayed at the top of a Laṅkā mountain, adorned with various precious flowers, on the coast of the southern sea, together with great bhikṣus and great bodhisattvas from various Buddhalands. The latter, who, powerful with the free will derived from innumerable kinds of samādhi, sported with supernatural freedom, had a bodhisattva Mahāmāti at their head. They had had all the Awakened ones anoint them with their own hands, well realized what was meant by the “self-mind seen as something external”, universally manifested numberless ways of controlling minds and forms of various beings, all appropriate to their kinds, thoroughly attained to the five dharmas, the svabhāvas, the vijñānas, and the twofold anātman. (*Taishō Tripitaka* Vol. 16, No. 670, 480a)

The above statement is followed by the passage :

On that occasion Mahāmāti bodhisattva, with [mahā-] māti bodhisattvas, who altogether had travelled through every Buddhaland, by virtue of the Awakened One’s dignity, rose from his seat with the right shoulder uncovered, the right knee touched on the ground, the palms joined, and made a reverential bow to praise the Awakened One with verses. (Ibid.)

In the other two versions, that is, Bodhiruci’s Ten-Fascicle text (tr. A.D. 513, *Taishō* No. 671) and Śikṣānanda’s Seven-Fascicle text (A.D. 700-4, *Taishō* No. 672) in-between the above two passages is an opening chapter, “Solicitation by Rāvaṇa,” with the first passage at its head, newly provided as an introduction to the whole scripture, while the second passage starts the second chapter. The Sanskrit version also follows this same style.¹⁾ In

the opening chapter, Rāvaṇa, chief of the rākṣasas (demoniacal beings, also called yakṣas, or ghosts; both indicating the aboriginal inhabitants of Laṅkā)²⁾ solicits the Awakened One to come to the island to give instruction. This chapter seems to serve as an explanation of why the whole sūtra has the title, "Etering Laṅkā." On the other hand, Guṇabhadra's' Four-Fascicle text, which lacks this part, has no other passage which has anything to do with the specific geographic name Laṅkā. The whole scripture could be expounded without any reference to Laṅkā.

Further, it had not been very clear to me what roll the opening chapter of Rāvaṇa's solicitation should play for the understanding of the whole sūtra. Nor had it been clear to me whether "Laṅkā" meant the island now called Sri Lanka. These questions led me, through the help of several books,³⁾ to two history books of the theravada in Laṅkā: *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*. After grasping their rough meaning through translations, I focused on the first two chapters of the *Dīpavaṃsa* (*DV*). Only then, I believe, did the meaning of the opening chapter of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* and of the scriptural title become completely clear to me. I understand that the mahayana sūtra named *Laṅkāvatāra* (*LA sūtra*) was compiled at the Abhayagiri vihāra, which had been built during the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmanī Abhaya (29-17 B.C.), when it prospered as the center of study and practice for mahayana practitioners; it was written as a criticism of the theravada world view as had been expressed in the *DV* written at the Mahāvihāra.

The latter was the center of the theravada, established and developed since the time when King Asoka's son Mahinda, then his daughter Saṃghamittā, were invited from India by King Devānaṃpiyatissa (247-207 B.C.), respectively as head of the Buddhist monarchy and nunnery of Laṅkā.

II. According to the *DV*, the Buddha Gotama attained Awakening by getting free from attachment to passions (I: 12d),⁴⁾ gained the ultimate wisdom to know everything (13ab),⁵⁾ opened the fivefold eye to see all beings (16cd),⁶⁾ saw the best island Laṅkā (17cd),⁷⁾ which had been acquainted with former Buddhas and abided by many sages (18cd),⁸⁾ then he

thought: "Now the inhabitants of the island are yakṣas and rākṣasas, who are vile, and whose forces I can remove." (20)⁹⁾ "I will drive the devils off and make the island a safe place for humans." (21)¹⁰⁾ "Should they stay there, as long as they live some strange teaching (*śāsanantaram*) would arise on the island." (22)¹¹⁾ "I will drive them off, render many beings calm and expound the straight way, the noble path (23),¹²⁾ and, free from clinging, will attain *parinirvāṇa*, like the setting sun." (24ab)¹³⁾

It was when the Buddha exercised his influence on Kassapa of Uruvela that he came to the island, drove off the wailing and blood-sucking yakṣas and violent ghosts, shifted them to the lonely island Giri in the ocean, and returned to Uruvela (35-81).

Five years after his attaining Awakening Gotama again visited Laṅkā because the island had become battle-fields for sovereignty between bigger and smaller snakes (sometimes called *nāgas*), which he could not overlook. Gotama subdued them with his supernatural power, reconciled them, and returned to the Jeta forest (II: 3-51).¹⁴⁾

Three years after this, a *nāga* chief Maṇiakkhika invited Gotama and his five hundred disciples to Laṅkā to express their gratitude (52); Gotama, leading his disciples, came flying through the air; at the Mahāmegha forest he predicted that the bodhi tree under which he had attained Awakening would be planted there in the future (61-63).

In the opening chapter of the *LA sūtra* the Buddha was invited to the island by yakṣas (which the *DV* describes as having been expelled therefrom) led by Rāvaṇa.

III. In the *LA sūtra* "mahāmati" is the name of a bodhisattva among the Awakened One's audience, though there seem to be many other "mahāmati-bodhisattvas" as we saw above, whereas in the *DV* it is used by way of reverential reference to excellent monks and nuns instead of as a proper noun.

1) Upāli, one of Gotama's disciples (V: 90):¹⁵⁾

He, a mahāmati (great sage), appointed a wise fellow monk Dāsaka for the vinaya office, and died.

2) A Greek monk, despatched for instruction to a distant place by Moggaliputta Tissa in the reign of King Asoka (VIII: 7):¹⁶⁾

A Greek monk, a mahāmati, Dhammarakkhita by name, expounded the sutra "A Simile of Great Fire" to lead Aparanta people to the Awakened One's teaching.

3) Monks in the past, who orally transmitted the Pali Tripiṭaka and their commentaries (XX: 2):¹⁷⁾

Monks of mahāmati in the past days transmitted the Pali Tripiṭaka and their commentaries orally.

The *DV* also uses the respectful expressions "mahāpañño" or "mahāpaññā" ("one" or "those" of "great wisdom").¹⁸⁾

From this we know the name "mahāmati" was used in the *DV* as a common noun; it is no wonder that in the *LA sūtra* also we come across plural forms, "mahāmati bodhisattvas." This common use of "mahāmati" convinces us of the compiler of the sutra's thorough knowledge of the *DV*.

IV. Faxian, on his way from India back to China by sea, reached Laṅkā in A.D. 410 and reached home at Qīng-zhou in A.D. 412; he had acquired Sanskrit texts like the *Nirvāṇa sūtra* of mahayana in India, the *Dīrgha Āgama*, the *Samyukta Āgama*, and the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* in Laṅkā. Guṇabhadra arrived at Guang-zhou on his way from Laṅkā in A.D. 435. Bodhiruci translated the text which already had the opening chapter with it in China in A.D. 513. This means that the *LA sūtra* was compiled during A.D.c. 410-435, and its opening chapter *Rāvaṇādhyeṣaṇā* was added to it during c. 435-513, both at the Abhayagiri vihāra of Laṅkā by those who shared the same viewpoint.

The mahayanists who compiled the *LA sūtra* and its opening chapter, through transforming the yakṣas (which the theravada people had the Buddha reject from Laṅkā) into those who longed for the Buddha's teaching there, expressed their standpoint in which the Buddha's Awakening was regarded as the original way of being of every being without exception. The passage in the *Majjhima Nikāya* which Rāvaṇa, chief of the rākṣasas, quotes, possibly from the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra*:

dharmā eva prahātavyāḥ prāg-eva-adharmāḥ. (Nanjo ed., p. 17)

seems to show the *LA sutra* compiler's strong concern with the *Vajracchedikā*, for Rāvaṇa's manner of questioning reminds us of the latter sutra. The same concern is noted in the second chapter of the *LA sutra*, especially in its exposition of the 108 phrases as revealing its basic standpoint. This can be ascertained by the text itself. The mahayana point of view, which is plainly observed here, is that the contents of Awakening of the Buddha manifests itself not only in the verbal transmission but also as the original way of being of mountains, rivers, great earth, and humans as well as ghosts.

It is observed that the introductory chapter of Rāvaṇa's solicitation, though an apparently later addition to the body text, is contained in the Ten and Seven-Fascicle versions, as well as in the Sanskrit version, as a consistent part of the whole scripture. Only through the existence of this opening chapter do we know the reason for the Buddha Gotama's visit to and teaching in Laṅkā, and the compiler's intention to clarify the mahayana standpoint on which this scripture stands in relation to and as distinguished from the theravada point of view.

The two later Chinese versions and the Sanskrit version, which have Rāvaṇa's solicitation as an opening chapter, also have the *Dhāraṇī* and the *Sagāthaka* chapters at their end. The addition of the *Dhāraṇī* chapter indicates the esoteric influence on the compiler or compilers of the *LA sutra*. This seems to suggest the beginning of a serious deviation from the scripture's original standpoint on the part of the mahayanists at the Abhayagiri vihāra.

In the above I think I have been able to make at least partially clear the historical location of the *LA sutra* as well as the meaning of its opening chapter through comparisons of the Laṅkā's sovereign genealogy *Dīpavaṃsa* with the *Laṅkāvatāra* mahayana sutra's opening chapter, Rāvaṇa Solicitation.

1) *Ṣaṭtriṃśatsāhasarasarvadharmasamuccaya, Laṅkāvatāra sūtra :*

atha khalu mahāmatir-bodhisattvo mahāsattvo mahāmatibodhisattva-sahitah sarva-buddha-kṣetrānucārī buddhānubhāvenōtthāyāsānād-ekāmsamuttarāsaṅgam kṛtvā dakṣiṇaṃ jānumaṇḍalaṃ pṛthivyāṃ pratiṣṭhāpya yena bhagavāṃstenāñjalim praṇamya bhagavantaṃ gāthābhir-abhyaṣṭāvīt.

- 2) Cf. The Pali Text Society translation series No. 3, *The Mahāvamsa*, W. Geiger, 1980, p. 297, 33. YAKKHA.
- 3) D.C. Sicar: *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Motilal Banarsidas 1971, 2nd edition, p. 316.
E.W. Adikaram: *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, M.D. Gunasena, Colombo 1946:
Kyōshō Hayashima: *Abhayagiri-vihāra no Kōbō-shi* (The History of Rise and Fall of the Abhayagiri-vihāra), *TOHOGAKU* No. 21, 1961, pp. 119-133.
- 4) ñatvā dhammaṃ pariññāya pahānaṃ maggabhāvanam anusāsi mahāñāṇī vimutto upadhisamkhaṇe. (I: k12)
- 5) sabbaññūtaññāvaram abhisambuddho mahāmuni buddho buddho 'ti taṃ nāmaṃ samañña paṭhamam ahū. (I: k13)
- 6) khaṇe khaṇe laye buddho sabbalokam avekkhati, pañcacakkhu vivarivā olokesi bahū jane. (I: k16)
- 7) anāvaraṇaṇāṇan taṃ pesesi dipaduttamo, addasa virajo satthā Laṅkādiṇam varuttamaṃ. (I: k17)
- 8) sudesam utusampannaṃ subhikkhaṃ ratanākaram pubbabuddhamanuciṇṇam ariyagaṇasevitaṃ. (I: k18)
- 9) Laṅkādiṇe imaṃ kālam yakkhabhūtā ca rakkhasā sabbe buddhapaṭikuṭṭhā, sakkā uddharitum balaṃ. (I: k20)
- 10) nīharitvā yakkhagaṇe pisāce avaruddhake khemaṃ katvāna taṃ dīpaṃ vasāpessāmi mānuse. (I: k21)
- 11) tiṭṭhantu ca ime pāpā* yāvatāyumuṃ asesato, sāsānantaram bhavissati Laṅkādiṇavare tahim. (I: k22)
(*Orig.: tiṭṭhantesu ca ime pāpe...,)
- 12) uddharitvān' ahaṃ satte pasādetvā bahū jane ācikkhitvāna taṃ maggaṃ añjasaṃ ariyāpathaṃ. (I: k23)
- 13) anupādā parinibbāyī suriyo atthaṃgato yathā. parinibbute catumāse hessati paṭhamasaṃgaho. (I: k24)
- 14) atikkante pañcavassamhi Tambapaṇṇitalam agā, avaruddhake vinodetvā suññam dīpaṃ akā sayam. (II: k3)
"nāgadamaṇaṃ". (II: ...k51)
- 15) saddhivihārikaṃ theram Dāsakaṃ nāma paṇḍitam vinayaṭṭhāne ṭhāpetvāna nibbuto so mahāmati. (DV V: k90)
- 16) Yonakadhammarakkhitathero nāma mahāmati

- aggikkhandhopamasuttakathāya Aparantakaṃ pasādayi. (VIII: k7)
- 17) piṭakattayapāliṅ ca tassā aṭṭhakatham pi ca
mukhapāṭhena ānesuṃ pubbe bhikkhū mahāmatī. (XX: k20)
- 18) XIII, 54, 58, 63; XIV, 4: King of Laṅkā, Devānampiya calls to Mahinda
thera as “mahāpañña.”
XV, 78: King Asoka’s daughter, Saṃghamittā, as a ‘therī, is called “mahā-
pañña.”
XVII, 25: Mahādeva, Samano, Sabbanando, and Mahindo, the four theras
who entered Laṅkā and expounded the Buddha’s teaching, were called “mahā-
pañña.”
XVIII, 15, 39, 40: Therīs, Naramittā, Gamikadhītā, [and Dīpanayā, respecti-
vely were called “mahāpañña.”
XIX, 23: King of Laṅkā, Duṭṭhagāmāṇī (r. 101-77 B.C.) was called “mahā-
pañña.”

(The text used here is: Hermann Oldenberg: *The Dīpavaṃsa*, Asian Educatio-
nal Services, New Delhi, Reprint 1982.)

<Key Words> Laṅkā, yakṣas, mahāmatī.

(Professor, Hanazono University)

新刊紹介

谷沢 淳三

『BHARTRHARI 著 VĀKYAPADĪYA 3-14:

VRTTISAMUDEŚA 訳註研究(1)』

(BIBLIOTHECA INDOLOGICA ET BUDDHOLOGICA 2)

B 5 版・90頁・2000円

山喜房佛書林・1991年11月15日刊