Gifts of the Goddess: Offerings of *Dhāraṇī* (Memory Enhancement), Mantras, and Tantric Invocation Rituals by Sarasvatī and Śrī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*

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The present study proposes that the goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī appear in the *Sutra of Golden Light* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottama sūtra,* 金光明經, ca. early fifth century CE) as exemplars of the relationship of female deities to bodhisattvahood, *dhāraṇī* bestowal, and developments in deity invocation via mantra-based rituals. The goddesses demonstrate agency as Mahāyāna practitioners (i.e., bodhisattvas) who work on behalf of the Dharma and, specifically, the sutra itself. Nonetheless, Mahāyāna sutras are generally hesitant to name female practitioners as "bodhisattvas" explicitly. This paper therefore compares the level and type of aid that Sarasvatī and Śrī offer to devotees who uphold the text. From there, we can then begin to assess each goddess's soteriological status as implied bodhisattvas. What emerges is the goddesses' active participation and presence within a distinct ritual hierarchy, wherein they support and enhance the power of all buddhas and this revered text. Part one problematizes the scholarly assertion that *dhāraṇī* (*zǒnchí* 總持) invokes female deities in the sutra. Scholars have often described *dhāraṇī* as synonymous with mantra, yet in this context *dhāraṇī* instead likely functions solely as the attainment of the superhuman power of memory for bodhisattva preachers (*dharmabhāṇakas*). Thus, the development of ritual praxis in Mahāyāna contexts may be a more complex and nuanced process than scholars have previously indicated. Part two then highlights the use of mantra-based rituals in this text as an important node in the burgeoning network of early tantric ritual technologies and female deity reverence in South Asian Buddhism.

Keywords: Mahāyāna Buddhism, bodhisattva, ritual, goddess, female deity, tantra, Sarasvatī, Śrī, mantra, *dhāraṇī, vidyā, dharmabhāṇaka*, South Asia, India, Sanskrit

INTRODUCTION

The present study[1] begins by suggesting that goddesses assume the role of implicit bodhisattvas from ca. the third century onward in Mahāyāna sutras.[2] Such an assertion may be seen as contentious, however, given that only rarely are female practitioners explicitly designated as such.[3] Mahāyāna Indian Buddhism's incorporation of "implicit" female bodhisattvas—i.e., female practitioners who are functionally equivalent to male bodhisattvas and typically highly advanced in their soteriological attainments—gained ground considerably over the course of the Middle Period of South Asian Buddhism (ca. 0–600 CE). They initially proliferate in ca. the late third-century *Gaṇḍavyūha* ("Supreme Array") *sūtra*, part of the later (ca. fifth century) *Avataṃsaka* ("Flower Garland") *sūtra*, as well as alternately being present in the Indian Buddhist material record by roughly the late fifth to early sixth centuries CE, in situ at the western Deccan monastic cave sites.[4] This

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2. There are widespread Mahāyāna prohibitions against female bodhisattvas' attainment of an advanced spiritual state while possessing a female form (whether human or divine) dating to the period of the earliest sutras. For a historical analysis of the early Mahāyāna mandate on change of sex for female practitioners wishing to attain buddhahood, see Hillary Langberg, "Gender Equity in a Mahayana Sutra: The *Gaṇḍavyūha*'s Enlightened Goddesses," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 3rd ser., vol. 1, no. 1 (2021): 43–87.

3. For a thorough discussion of the reluctance of sutra authors to identify both divine and human female practitioners with the term "bodhisattva," as well as female deities' functional equivalence to bodhisattva practitioners, see Langberg, "Gender Equity in a Mahayana Sutra," 43–87. In the *Sutra of Golden Light*, we have but a single moment of clarity on this matter—in a passage from chapter 21 of the Sanskrit edition discussed below, wherein the text explicitly names goddesses as part of an assembly of "bodhisattvas."

4. See, for example, the discussion of Kānherī cave 90 in Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (Boston: Weatherhill, 2001), 262–265. I am currently completing a study of female figures in sculptural relief at the site.

study aims to shed light on specific ways in which the figure of the goddess, as an implicit bodhisattva, serves to connect the broader phenomenon of goddess reverence in South Asia with Mahāyāna doctrine by the fifth to sixth centuries CE.[5]

It is by this period that the surviving Sanskrit recension of the *Sutra of Golden Light* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottama sūtra,* hereafter Suv) is believed to have been disseminated in ancient India.[6] Here I will look specifi-

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5. For instance, scholars have cautiously dated the *Devī-māhātmyam* ("The Glory of the Goddess")—closely associated with the rise of Śāktism and thus goddess worship in Hinduism—to ca. the fifth century; images of the goddess Durgā killing the buffalo demon Mahiṣa date prior than this (i.e., to first few centuries of the Common Era). In situ evidence is securely dated to the sixth century, for one, at the famed rock-cut caves of Badami, Karnataka. Moreover, Catherine Ludvik ("A *Harivaṃśa* Hymn in Yijing's Chinese Translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 4 [2004]: 707–734) translates an encomium to a goddess called Durgā (among other epithets) from the *Harivaṃśa,* which she dates to the first to third century CE (707). Here the goddess is also called Pārvatī and is depicted as a "bark-clad" *tapasvinī* and mother of Skanda (714–730). This goddess holds the "trident and spear," but there is no mention of the buffalo-demon who Durgā is known for decimating in the *Devī-māhātmyam* (721–722). Further, the goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī provide evidence for the appearance of so-called "Hindu" goddesses in Jainism and Buddhism. The goddess (*devī*) named Śrī is typically conflated with the goddess Lakṣmī in various Indic texts, but this is not without exception.

6. The Suv was first translated into Chinese by Dharmakṣema in the early fifth century CE. The date of this translation (ca. 417–420 CE) thus serves at the text's *terminus ante quem.* As discussed below, the text is expanded thereafter. It is also important to note that the Suv is alternately titled *Suvarṇabhāsottama sūtra* in certain recensions. For a discussion of the sutra's pan-Asian textual history see Natalie Gummer, "*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Volume One: Literature and Languages*, ed. Jonathan Silk, Oskar von Hinüber, and Vincent Eltschinger, 249–260 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), as well as Catherine Ludvik, *Sarasvatī: Riverine Goddess of Knowledge: From the Manuscript-Carrying Vīṇā-Player to the Weapon-Wielding Defender of the Dharma* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 146–154. See also the comparative study of the surviving Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese manuscripts by Johannes Nobel (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra: Das Goldglanz-Sūtra; ein Sanskrit text des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus* [Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1937]), who speculates that his published Sanskrit recension could not be earlier than the mid-fifth century CE due to Dharmakṣema's comparatively sparer edition. In the present study, I reference both the print and digitized version of Bagchi's edition (S. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, 8* [Darbhanga:

cally at Sanskrit narratives of the goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī. While scholars have previously discussed these goddess's narratives,[7] my approach differs through an examination of their functions as bodhisattva practitioners who bestow *dhāraṇī*, mantras, and/or mantra-based (i.e., tantric) ritual prescriptions.[8] I then discuss the ways in which they may be seen as exemplars not only of the early relationship of female deities to *dhāraṇī*, but also of the development of female deity invocation in South Asian religions. Given the great popularity of this text and its widespread dissemination, furthermore, its ritual prescriptions likely facilitated the increase of goddess worship within Mahāyāna Buddhist contexts.

I will also address the multivalent term *dhāraṇī* in its rather unexplored semantic context of memory enhancement in the Middle Period of Indian Buddhism. In the Suv, I suggest that *dhāraṇī* functions as the attainment of the superhuman power of memory for bodhisattva teachers, an attainment wholly distinct from a mantric incantation. I therefore challenge multiple prior studies in which scholars have suggested that "*dhāraṇī*" is synonymous with "mantra" in this particular sutra context. Instead, my findings suggest that "*dhāraṇī*" neither functions as a mantra in these goddesses' narratives, nor does a *dhāraṇī* invoke female deities in the Suv.

This article takes the form of a two-part analysis. In part one, I compare the level and type of aid offered by Sarasvatī and Śrī in connection with their roles as implicit bodhisattvas. By examining evidence for the respective soteriological status of each goddess, I aim to shed light on their power and agency as Buddhist practitioners. Moreover,

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Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning], 1967), the latter via Göttingen Registry of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_suvarNaprabhAsasUtra.htm), as well as Nobel's edition.

7. Natalie Gummer, "Articulating Potency: A Study of the *Suvarna(pra)bhāsottamasūtra*" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000); Ludvik, "A *Harivaṃśa* Hymn"; and Ludvik, *Sarasvatī.*

8. I take the term "tantra" here in its broadest sense—simply as the practice of mantra-based rituals—and thus my use of the term should not be misconstrued as pointing to nascent tantric "esotericism" or later Vajrayāna ritual developments. For a discussion of the text's tantric associations and classification as a "tantra" in a Tibetan context, see Gummer, "*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*," 256–257.

each female deity works together with the power of the Suv in the dissemination of its teachings. The transmission of this highly-revered sutra is clearly the central purpose of the goddesses' gifts. We see, for example, that Sarasvatī's *dhāraṇī* offering and Śrī's quite similar boons (albeit without the power of *dhāraṇī*) are provided to the Mahāyānist preacher-monk (*dharmabhāṇaka*) who both recites and elucidates the text. Natalie Gummer notes that "protecting the preacher of the *sūtra* and ensuring his eloquence" are "the primary foci" of the Sarasvatī and Śrī chapters, being among those "in which a series of deities rise from the assembly to offer their aid."[9]

That said, mantra-based rituals are the principal method by which the goddesses provide benefits to the sutra's audience more broadly, including the laity. As a case study, part two further examines the goddesses' offerings of such rituals to those who uphold the sutra. I focus specifically on the methods of invoking the goddesses, as well as how they are positioned within a Buddhist ritual hierarchy in each narrative. My analysis thus speaks to the ways in which goddess reverence is deeply intertwined with burgeoning tantric ritual technologies on a broader scale during this period. In sum, my analysis of these narrative episodes along with their *vidhis* (ritual prescriptions) underscores the development of deity invocation in Mahāyāna sutras as a more complex and nuanced process than scholars have previously indicated.

Mahāyāna Doctrine and Bodhisattva Soteriology

For the reader unfamiliar with its theology, the relative complexity of Mahāyāna Buddhism is often summarized as centering on the soteriological path of the bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is a being, either human or divine, who vows to attain the state of a fully enlightened buddha through arduous practice over many lifetimes. Sanskrit texts from the Indian subcontinent dating to the first half of the first millennium CE describe ten levels or stages (*bhūmis*) through which bodhisattvas must ascend to achieve full awakening. They do so by practicing the six perfections (*pāramitās*) and acting as educators to all those who desire to traverse the same arduous path toward complete and perfect buddhahood.[10]

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9. Ibid., 252.
10. Peter Skilling describes the Mahāyāna, furthermore, as "a body of ritual practice, precepts, mental cultivation, philosophy, and especially a body of

The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (ca. 100 BCE) is a text so revered that it eventually became personified as a goddess in Mahāyāna Indian Buddhism. Among the six perfections it names, the sixth is the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*). The perfections were later expanded to ten in the *Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra* (hereafter Gv), each of which is eventually paired with one of the ten *bhūmis* of bodhisattvahood as systemized in the *Daśabhūmika sūtra*.[11] Through the perfection of *prajñā* (the wisdom or insight necessary for awakening), the bodhisattva melds a compassionate mind with the complete realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This central concept states that all physical and mental elements of our existence—that is, all experiential phenomena (*dharmas*)—are inherently empty of any independent qualities.[12]

In Mahāyāna theology, the philosophy of *śūnyatā* underpins the foundational Buddhist belief of *pratītya-samutpāda*, the dependent origination and arising of all things. Through developing their understanding of the true nature of emptiness over the course of countless lifetimes, bodhisattvas aspire to become enlightened or, literally, "awakened" (*abhisaṃbodhi*) to the way things truly are.[13] In attaining the highest *bhūmi*, bodhisattvas hold the power to effectively block the arising of *dharmas*. In other words, they have mastered the principles of cause and effect. To aptly summarize the term "bodhisattva" in its broadest sense, Leslie S. Kawamura writes:

> A bodhisattva is a practitioner who, by habituating himself in the practice of the *pāramitās* (perfection[s]), aspires to become a buddha

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literature. The sūtras are repositories of 'rhetorics of emptiness' and of bold, spirited, and fantastic narratives—allegories, pageants of light and space painted on the canvas of the mind.... In our attempt to grasp the Mahāyāna, we should never lose sight of its complexity and diversity" (see Skilling, "Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisattva in India," in *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of Mahāyāna*, ed. Buddhist Publication Society, 69–163 [Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013], 108).

11. Leslie S. Kawamura, s.v. "Bodhisattva(s)," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, 58–60 (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 59.

12. While diverse, the many texts of the Mahāyāna corpus generally agree on the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which scholars often cite as one major attribute of the Great Vehicle.

13. For further discussion of the term *abhisaṃbodhi* within the context of the enlightening process of the advanced bodhisattva *bhūmis*, see Langberg, "Gender Equity in a Mahayana Sutra," 48.

in the future by seeking *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi* (complete, perfect awakening) through *prajñā* (wisdom) and by benefitting all sentient beings through *karuṇā* (compassion). A bodhisattva is one who courageously seeks enlightenment through totally and fully benefitting others (*parārtha*) ... [and] is equipped with the necessities for enlightenment—*puṇyāsambhāra* (accumulation of merits) and *jñānasambhāra* (accumulation of wisdom)—and the quality of *upāya-kauśalya* (skillful means)....[14]

Thus, in contrast to the *arhat/arahant* of Śrāvakayāna Buddhism, bodhisattvas presumably choose to remain within the cosmic world-realms to compassionately aid beings and to teach the Dharma.[15] That said, scholars disagree on whether the most advanced or tenth-*bhūmi* bodhisattvas have indeed achieved the nascent stages of enlightenment (and, furthermore, whether there are progressive stages of the awakened state in Mahāyāna doctrine whatsoever). If this is indeed the case, bodhisattvas begin their process of awakening—and, more specifically, attain a stunningly advanced level within this process—*prior* to having attained complete, unsurpassed buddhahood and final nirvana.[16]

I underscore the definition of a bodhisattva here because I am suggesting that goddesses in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama* assume this role, regardless of the text's reluctance to name them as such. Even by the late third century CE in the Gv, for example, we see that highly advanced **bodhisattvas** have developed their ritual technologies to the point that *dhāraṇī* (the "complete retention" of Dharma teachings)

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14. Kawamura, "Bodhisattva(s)," 58.

15. Western scholars have described bodhisattvas as beings who postpone "unsurpassed, complete and perfect enlightenment" (*anuttara samyaksaṃbodhi*) until all sentient beings can also be brought to enlightenment, although this blanket definition has been increasingly called into question; see Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., s.v. "Bodhisattva," *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780190681159.001.0001/acref-9780190681159. Further, in reference to the ten stages of the bodhisattva's path toward buddhahood, there are additional levels mentioned in some Mahāyāna sutras (see Langberg, "Gender Equity in a Mahayana Sutra," 47).

16. It is perhaps more apt to state that bodhisattvas of the highest level are "contentiously enlightened" to encompass dissenting scholarly views on the issue of advanced bodhisattva enlightenment. See Langberg, "Gender Equity in a Mahayana Sutra," for a deeper discussion of this process as laid out in the *Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra*.

and mantras (strings of powerful sacred syllables) work in tandem to assist them in aiding all beings.[17] In the Suv, the innovative status of divine female bodhisattvas represents an important moment within a broader shift toward greater soteriological equity for female bodhisattva practitioners in Mahāyāna Indian sutras generally, as well as an openness to goddess reverence in these contexts.[18]

The Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra and Its Goddesses

The *Sutra of Golden Light* can be classified within the group of Mahāyāna texts that Gregory Schopen has called the "cult of the book": those that advocate the primacy, power, worship—and thus the circulation—of the scripture in question.[19] This is a common characteristic of Mahāyāna sutras wherein the text itself is believed to hold power and act as the Dharma body (*dharmakāya*) of all buddhas. As *dharmakāya*, adherents believe that these texts will impart both earthly and soteriological benefits to those who recite, expound upon, hear, write down, and distribute them.[20]

Passages devoted to female deities in the Suv have been summarized by Miranda Shaw and Susan Landesman[21] in their discussions of the salvific roles of goddesses in Mahāyāna sutras from ca. the mid-third to the fifth centuries CE. In her broad-based study of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, Gummer focuses on the text's power as an object of worship and recitation by *dharmabhāṇakas* and describes the central narratives of the goddesses in the sutra.[22] Studies by both Gummer and

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17. For more on the topic of *dhāraṇī*, see the following section.

18. This state of "greater soteriological equity" for female bodhisattvas in the Gv arises through the doctrine of great male bodhisattva emanations (*nirmāṇakāya*). See Langberg, "Gender Equity in a Mahayana Sutra," 52.

19. Gregory Schopen, *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 180.

20. Gummer ("*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*," 251) points out that the Suv describes itself as "the 'dharma realm' (*dharmadhātu*)" as well.

21. Miranda Eberle Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Susan Amy Sinberg [Landesman], "Tārā and the '*Tārāmūlakalpa*': The Tārā Cult's Formative Period in India" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1995).

22. Gummer, "Articulating Potency." Gummer also discusses Dṛḍhā, whom I have not included here namely because she is invoked via the sutra's recitation rather than a mantra-based ritual (ibid., 142–143).

Catherine Ludvik affirm that Sarasvatī "bestow[s] *dhāraṇī* to prevent the loss of memory" for preachers reciting the text.[23] In examining Yijing's Chinese translation of the Suv (703 CE), Ludvik identifies a hymn to Sarasvatī that replicates a hymn to the goddess Durgā from the appendix to the critical edition of the *Harivaṃśā* (ca. second to third century CE).[24] The extant Sanskrit recension I translate below does not include the hymn but does make clear that Sarasvatī is perceived to be closely connected with other gods in the Brahmāṇical pantheon. Ludvik has also undertaken an extensive text-critical investigation of the Sarasvatī *parivarta* (chapter) of the Suv that informs the present study.[25]

My analysis of both Sarasvatī's and the goddess Śrī's chapters, the latter previously summarized by Shaw and Gummer, aims to expand upon prior work by examining the goddesses' connections to Mahāyāna soteriology.[26] It focuses on their functions and status as Dharma teachers who seek to advance on the bodhisattva path. As I will argue below, both goddesses act on behalf of the Buddha(s), the Dharma, and more specifically, this most highly-revered *Sutra of Golden Light.* In their narratives, these two goddesses introduce elaborate tantric rituals into a Mahāyāna sutra—rituals which function as the means by which they offer many of their gifts to practitioners and, in turn, facilitate acts of goddess reverence in Mahāyāna contexts*.*

The Multivalence of Dhāraṇī in Mahāyāna Texts

Drawing upon the scholar-monk Asaṅga's fourfold division of *dhāraṇī* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (ca. fourth century CE), studies by Etienne Lamotte, Jens Braarvig, Paul Copp, and Ronald M. Davidson have made

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23. Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 158–159; Gummer, "Articulating Potency," 240–241.

24. Ludvik, "A *Harivaṃśa* Hymn," 707–734.

25. Ludvik notes that only the first section of the Sarasvatī chapter (i.e., her offering of *dhāraṇī*) appears in Dharmakṣema's Chinese translation (ca. 417–420 CE). The rest of the Sarasvatī chapter in the Sanskrit recension consulted here (common to Nobel's and Bagchi's editions) is quite similar to that translated into Chinese in 578 CE by Yaśogupta and Jñānagupta (Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 147–149 and Appendix A). The earliest Sarasvatī chapter including her bathing ritual thus appears to stem from a redaction ca. the mid-fifth to sixth centuries CE (ibid., 154).

26. Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 237; and Gummer, "Articulating Potency," 115n73.

important strides in our understanding of the changing dynamics of this complex Buddhist technical term.[27] With the etymological meaning of "to hold" or "to grasp" in Sanskrit, *dhāraṇī* appears in multiple Middle-Period Mahāyāna sutras as a powerful mental attainment that aids bodhisattva preachers in the "extraordinary," superhuman remembrance and exposition of the Buddha's Dharma.[28] In this context, the power of *dhāraṇī* is typically "grasped" within the intensive meditative state (*samādhi*).[29] In my translation below, I follow Lamotte's rendering of the Chinese counterpart of *dhāraṇī* (*zǒnchí* 總持)—"*totalement retenir*"—employing its nominal English equivalent, "complete retention."[30] Moreover, Davidson's extensive studies have revealed that one's attainment of *dhāraṇī* may at points indicate the "complete retention" of multiple other forms of Buddhist knowledge

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27. Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā śāstra*) (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut orientaliste, 1944); Jens Braarvig, "*Dhāraṇī* and *Pratibhāna*: Memory and Eloquence of the Bodhisattvas," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 8 (1985): 17–29; Paul Copp, "Notes on the Term *Dhāraṇī* in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Thought," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, no. 3 (2008): 493–508; and Ronald M. Davidson, "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature I: Revisiting the Meaning of the Term *Dhāraṇī*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37, no. 2 (2009): 97–147. Ulrich Pagel's formidable survey of *dhāraṇī* underscores the complexity of the term and its context-specific usages across Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan sources: see also Pagel, "The Dhāraṇīs of *Mahāvyutpatti* #748: Origin and Formation," *Buddhist Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2007): 151–191. Asaṅga's four categories give us a useful framework from which to begin an analysis of the term. This is because, as Copp states, "It is possible that these four are to be taken as stages of accomplishment, moving in the direction of a progressively more refined 'grasp' of the Dharma" (Copp, "Notes on the Term *Dhāraṇī*," 498). For a full overview of scholarship on *dhāraṇī* ca. the twentieth century, see Davidson, "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature I," 98–106.

28. Braarvig ("*Dhāraṇī* and *Pratibhāna*," 19) states that *dhāraṇī* attainment in this context results in a memory of "extraordinary power." Q.v. n31.

29. See, for example, Copp, "Notes on the Term *Dhāraṇī*," 498.

30. The phonetic rendering of *dhāraṇī* into Chinese (*tuóluóní* 陀羅尼 or *tuóliánní* 陀憐尼), discussed by Lamotte (*Le Traité*; cited in Davidson, "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature I," 103), is addressed below as the first variant appears in the Baogui 寶貴 edition of the Suv, *Hebu Jinguangmingjing* 合部金光明經, (T. vol. 16, no. 664).

as well. Thus, the broader range of the term's usage will be touched upon only briefly here.

Despite *dhāraṇī*'s semantic function as "the complete retention [of x]" in a number of Mahāyāna sutras including the Suv,[31] the most common scholarly conception of the term instead centers upon its connection with mantras (i.e., strings of efficacious phrases and syllables often translated as "spells").[32] What's more, *dhāraṇī* also functions as a type of mantra that produces "the complete retention [of x]." Thus, we have at least three semantic possibilities for the translation of *dhāraṇī* in any given Mahāyāna text. That said, recent scholarship asserts that *dhāraṇī* is most often synonymous with mantra and/or *vidyā* (a feminine-gendered mantra often used to invoke goddesses).[33] I therefore see two major problems with current scholarship on *dhāraṇī*. The first is the automatic scholarly assumption that a *dhāraṇī* is mantric, that it carries (at least in part) a meaning synonymous with mantra. I have encountered this problem specifically in Mahāyāna sutras, and—postulating from my findings discussed below and elsewhere—*dhāraṇī* seems not to be mantric whatsoever in at least some sutra contexts. The Sanskrit recension of the Suv published by both Nobel and Bagchi is one of these contexts. To dig a bit deeper, the earlier Gv (ca. late third to early fourth century CE) mentions the term "*dhāraṇī*" at length but

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31. In addition to the Suv, examples of *dhāraṇī*'s non-mantric semantic function of "complete retention" arise in the Gv as well as the *Daśabhūmika sūtra*. See Hillary Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess: The Role of Female Deities in Mahāyāna Indian Buddhism of the Middle Period (ca. Second to Seventh Centuries CE)" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2018).

32. Sanskritists also typically read *dhāraṇī* as occurring in a *dvandva* and/or appositional formation with the former members of compounds. The possibility of its use as a genitive *tat-puruṣa* (i.e., as "the complete retention [of x]"), however, deserves greater consideration.

33. See, for example, Gergely Hidas's discussion ("*Dhāraṇī* Sūtras," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Volume One: Literature and Languages*, ed. Jonathan Silk, Oskar von Hinüber, and Vincent Eltschinger, 129–137 [Leiden: Brill, 2015], 129): "At least synchronically speaking, *dhāraṇī* is decidedly polysemic and context sensitive (Davidson, 2009). In the present literary context, the 'spell' interpretation of *dhāraṇī* as used here describes a reasonably distinct scriptural body. However, *dhāraṇī* is often appositional or interchangeable with two other closely related words—mantra and *vidyā*, which also refer to a spell."

provides us with no formulas (long, mantra-like invocation verses).[34] The sutra states only that *dhāraṇī* is a *bala* (power) that takes on multiple forms, having distinct names (in the manner of *samādhi*), categories (*gotra*), and levels of proficiency (*bhūmi*).[35] Such factors led Braarvig to make the important assertion that "magic"—what I take to be a reference to magical formulas (i.e., mantras)—is not as typically used in connection with *dhāraṇī* in earlier Mahāyāna contexts.[36] This study aims to shed much-needed light on one of these specific contexts.

The second problem I routinely find in scholarship on *dhāraṇī* arises in contexts in which a *dhāraṇī* clearly functions as an incantation (i.e., as a "*mantra-dhāraṇī*"[37]). In such cases, I suggest that *dhāraṇī* would be most accurately classified as a mantra *type* rather than as its unproblematized synonym. My reasoning for this assertion will be clarified further in my analysis below. Yet, for one, "mantra" in Sanskrit literature is a broad-based term with many sub-types (e.g., *vidyā*, *hṛdaya*,

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34. Scholars have more typically affirmed otherwise, and this is a point to which I will return in my analysis below, which questions the broad-based use of *dhāraṇī* as a categorical term for mantra-based rituals.

35. See Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess," 164–168.

36. Braarvig, "*Dhāraṇī* and *Pratibhāna*," 17–29. This is not to say that we do not find mention of mantric *dhāraṇī* in earlier texts, however. See Ingo Strauch, "The Evolution of the Buddhist *Rakṣā* Genre in the Light of New Evidence from Gandhāra: The *Manasvi-nāgarāja-sūtra* from the Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭhī Manuscripts," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77 (2014): 66. There is also the issue that the meaning and function of *dhāraṇī* is by no means static and that Chinese translators may have applied the generally accepted meaning of *dhāraṇī* at the time of their translations.

37. In his cogent scholarship on *dhāraṇī*, Davidson ("Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature I," 117), generally takes *mantra-dhāraṇī* as an "appositional compound," (i.e., "a dhāraṇī that [is] a mantra"). Yet he also takes *mantra* as a synonym or, more problematically, a "subset" of *dhāraṇī* (ibid., 116–117). For his full series on *dhāraṇī* studies, see also Davidson, "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature II: Pragmatics of *Dharāṇīs*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* 77, no. 1 (2014): 5–61; and "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature III: Seeking the Parameters of a *Dhāraṇī-piṭaka*, the Formation of the *Dhāraṇīsaṃgrahas*, and the Place of the Seven Buddhas," in *Scripture:Canon::Text:Context: Essays Honoring Lewis Lancaster*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2014): 119–180.

and *mūla*, to name some of the most common).[38] The meaning of "mantra" is, for the most part, also semantically stable. On the other hand, "*dhāraṇī*"—by stunning contrast—is highly-changeable, context-dependent, and "bewilderingly polysemic."[39] To rely on this multi-faceted, changeable term as the more apt Sanskrit signifier for "spell" or "incantation"—including the use of "*dhāraṇī*" as a category marker for a corpus of Buddhist literature that includes seemingly any text that incorporates a mantra-based ritual—needlessly complicates and even hinders *dhāraṇī* studies moving forward.[40]

The highly-changeable semantic and functional nature of this term has led Davidson to conclude, through a careful analysis of a wide array of textual examples, that *dhāraṇīs* work as "codes" or "coded" formulas.[41] This is an assertion I find promising in texts that (1) provide incantory formulas (i.e., strings of magical phrases and syllables), and (2) more often than not date toward the end of the Middle Period in the case of Mahāyāna sutras specifically.[42] It is within these textual examples that thinking of *dhāraṇīs* as "codes," wholly subsumed within mantra

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38. A second important reason that *dhāraṇī* may be best described as a *type* of mantra, rather than its synonym, is that in certain contexts *dhāraṇī* grants soteriological benefits that *vidyā* and *mantra* do not. We see, for instance, in the ca. sixth-century *Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhāna sūtra*, a text discovered at Gilgit, that *dhāraṇī* takes the form of a soteriologically efficacious mantra (Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess," 195–205). An example from this text is cited in Davidson, "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature II," 21.

39. Davidson, "Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature I," 111. This tendency to conflate the term "*dhāraṇī*" with a set of "*mantrapadas*" can be traced back to early- to mid-twentieth century studies by, for one, the great Johannes Nobel. See, for example, his comments on the Sarasvatī *parivarta* (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 105n17).

40. I define "mantra-based ritual" in this context as a rite centered on an incantatory verse. The mantra phrases (*padas*) may be labeled as just that (e.g., "*mantra-padas*") or, depending upon the context, those of other mantra types (e.g., "*vidyā-padas*" or "*dhāraṇī-padas*"). The type of mantra employed in a ritual might change dependent upon several factors: for example, who is offering the ritual, the period of its composition, the textual genre, the language the text is written in, and so forth.

41. Davidson, ibid.

42. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is of course a notable exception as Strauch has shown ("The Evolution of the Buddhist *Rakṣā* Genre," 66). Incidentally, I agree with Lamotte and Braarvig's view of Asaṅga's text, namely that *mantra-dhāraṇī*

terminology, is unequivocally accurate. In a departure from Davidson's findings, however, I am suggesting that, in certain Mahāyāna texts, *dhāraṇī* appears to be unconnected with a mantric formula or coded statement. Instead, *dhāraṇīs* seem to function in some Mahāyāna sutra contexts as an attainment of "complete-retention" only—rather than as a type of mantra—while acknowledging that these two functions can and do certainly overlap.[43] Further, as we shall see below, *dhāraṇī* does not in and of itself invoke a goddess in the Suv.[44]

Much has been written on Sarasvatī's chapter in the Suv, including Ludvik's close analysis comparing Indic and Sinitic recensions. That said, the general assumption common to multiple studies has been that her mantra-based bathing ritual is encompassed within (or somehow connected to) the *dhāraṇī* (i.e., various powers of complete retention) that the goddess gives to the preaching monk at the outset of the chapter. The presumption here must be that the performance of Sarasvatī's bathing ritual, including the recitation of its multiple mantras, activates the *dhāraṇī*'s benefits in addition to its own myriad forms of aid. One aim of this study is thus to complicate the current understanding of *dhāraṇī* in the Suv and elsewhere, namely so that the many distinctions that may arise between *dhāraṇī* and mantra/*vidyā* in Mahāyāna sutras will be carefully assessed in mantra studies moving forward.

"designates the capacity 'in retaining or remembering spells' rather than the spell itself" (ibid., n6).

43. In the first case, when *dhāraṇīs* function in Mahāyāna sutra contexts solely as an attainment of "complete-retention," they do not necessarily appear to "have their *mantradhāraṇīs* abstracted elsewhere" (ibid., 142). I believe this is the case in the Sarasvatī *parivarta.* Moreover, it is unclear whether Davidson believes that *dhāraṇī* must always be connected with a mantric formula or coded statement (see ibid., 141–142).

44. Bodhisattvas typically attain *dhāraṇī* via *samādhi,* but Sarasvatī does not mention *samādhi* in conferring her *dhāraṇī* in the Suv. *Dhāraṇīs* also appear in chapter 1 of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* (ca. sixth to eighth centuries CE) and, as per Glen Wallis's translation, "arise from the penetrative mind which ensues from meditative absorption [*samādhi*]" (Glenn Wallis, *Mediating the Power of Buddhas: Ritual in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002], 33). Thus, they continue to be accessed through the state of *samādhi* in early tantric ritual manuals. In the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, however, the role of *dhāraṇī* remains enigmatic, and it is clearly distinguished from both *mantra* and *vidyā.*

I. A COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF AID:
GODDESSES SARASVATĪ AND ŚRĪ IN THE SUV

Among the Suv's nineteen brief chapters in Bagchi's edition, three are devoted to goddesses: the eighth and ninth chapters (or seventh and eighth in Nobel's edition) center on the "great goddesses" (*mahādevīs*) Sarasvatī and Śrī, while the eleventh chapter (tenth in Nobel) is dedicated to the "great earth goddess" (*mahāpṛthividevī*), Dṛḍhā. I am excluding the goddess Dṛḍhā's narrative from this study, as she mentions neither mantra/*vidyā* recitations nor *dhāraṇī*.[45] By contrast, the chapters on Sarasvatī and Śrī both begin with their bestowal of benefits to the monk who preaches the Dharma contained in this "most excellent king (*indrarāja*) among sutras, the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* [alternately, *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama*]." Moreover, the goddess Sarasvatī's narrative employs all three terms under analysis here. I have therefore organized part one according to, first, an examination of Sarasvatī's *dhāraṇī* and subsequent bathing ritual. Here I specifically aim to: (1) underscore the nature of the goddess's offering of various benefits, and (2) provide evidence that marks Sarasvatī's gift of a *dhāraṇī* (i.e., a bodhisattva attainment of "complete retention" in this context) as wholly distinct from her mantra-based bathing ritual. I then move on to (3) compare her *dhāraṇī* offering and ritual benefits with the aid offered by the goddess Śrī. Overall, my analysis in part one traces the ways in which power is shared by each goddess within the sutra's context and examines what little the sutra reveals about their respective stages of soteriological advancement as Buddhist practitioners (i.e., bodhisattvas) in comparison with the gifts they bestow. The strategies laid out for each goddess's invocation, along with the ritual hierarchies within which they operate, will be considered further in part two of this study.

1.1 Sarasvatī's Bestowal of Dhāraṇī

To begin, I wish to clarify that Sarasvatī is the only figure who bestows a *dhāraṇī* in the Sanskrit recension of the Suv published by both Bagchi and Nobel.[46] Her offering here has a very similar function to *dhāraṇīs*

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45. Gummer ("Articulating Potency," 240–241) has conducted an in-depth analysis of this goddess's functions in the Suv, including her invocation via the sutra's recitation.

46. Gummer writes: "Although the chapter divisions vary somewhat among the extant Nepalese [Sanskrit] manuscripts, all represent a single recension

gifted by bodhisattva-goddesses in the Gv.[47] After paying obeisance to the Buddha Śākyamuni, she proclaims:

> Blessed One, I, the Great Goddess Sarasvatī, will confer eloquence upon the monk who preaches the Dharma, for the sake of ornamenting his speech. I will bestow complete retention (*dhāraṇī*) upon him and develop his ability (*bhāva*) for clear expository speech (*suniruktavacana*). I will bestow the great light of knowledge upon the monk who preaches the Dharma, and whatever phrases or syllables are lost or forgotten of this most excellent king (*indrarāja*) among sutras, *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama*, I will supply all of those lucidly-explained phrases and syllables to the monk who preaches the Dharma. I will give him complete retention (*dhāraṇī*) so that he does not lose any part of his memory.
>
> *aham api bhadanta bhagavan sarasvatī mahādevī tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣor vākparibhūṣaṇārthāya pratibhāṇakam upasaṃhariṣyāmi / dhāraṇīṃ cānupradāsyāmi / suniruktavacanabhāvam sambhāvayiṣyāmi, mahāntam ca dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣor jñānāvabhāsaṃ kariṣyāmi / yāni kānicit padavyañjanāni itaḥ suvarṇabhāsottamāt sutrendrarājāt paribhraṣṭāni bhaviṣyanti vismaritāni ca, tāny ahaṃ sarvāṇi tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣoḥ suniruktapadavyañjanāny upasaṃhariṣyāmi, dhāraṇīṃ cānupradāsyāmi smṛtyasaṃpramoṣaṇāya /*[48]

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of the *sūtra*" ("*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*," 250). Further, while the prerequisite of attaining the *samādhi* state is not indicated in Sarasvatī's chapter, the term appears in close proximity to *dhāraṇī* in chapter 4 of Bagchi's edition (chapter 3 of Nobel's). Here the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu confesses, vowing to establish beings in the tenth stage of bodhisattvahood. He states: "May I become an excellent buddha with hundreds of thousands of meditations (*samādhi*), with inconceivable *dhāraṇīs* [Emmerick takes the term here as "magic formulas"], with [power over] the senses, and with the (ten) powers (and) the (seven) members of enlightenment (*bodhyaṅga*)" (R. E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* [London: Luzac & Company, 1970], 11–12).

47. It has parallels, for example, with the tenth-stage bodhisattva-goddess Trāṇojaḥśrī's bestowal of *dhāraṇī* upon the pilgrim Sudhana (see Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess," 164–168).

48. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 55. See Davidson ("Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature II," 21–22) for an alternate translation of this passage (i.e., Suv 102.16–103.6 of the Nobel edition). See Ludvik (*Sarasvatī,* 158) for an English rendering of the cognate passage in Dharmakṣema's Chinese translation of an earlier Sanskrit recension. In Dharmakṣema's translation *dhāraṇī* (*zǒnchí*

Here the goddess promises to provide knowledge (*jñāna*), skill in clear exegesis (*suniruktavacanabhāvam*), and eloquence in teaching (*pratibhāṇaka*) for any *dharmabhāṇaka* monk who preaches the Suv.[49] Sarasvatī declares that he will have complete retention (*dhāraṇī*) of the content of the sutra through a flawless memory of all its "phrases and syllables." She also states that when the preaching monk calls the sutra content to mind, he will completely understand the meaning as it is "lucidly explained" by the goddess. The goddess's offering of *dhāraṇī* therefore imparts a complete retention of the clear and correct interpretation of the sutra.

The *dharmabhāṇaka*'s understanding will then be bolstered by the ability to explain the sutra to others with incomparable skill. If we compare this instance of *dhāraṇī* to the Gv grammarian Megha's *sarasvatī-dhāraṇī*—*sarasvatī* here being another term for eloquence, or the power of speech—then eloquence may be seen as a resulting benefit of the power of *dhāraṇī*, as Braarvig has emphasized.[50] Sarasvatī's bestowal of *dhāraṇī* is therefore perfectly logical given this eponym; her gift to the preaching monk incorporates her inherent powers as a goddess who imparts knowledge and eloquence.[51] That the sutra's author(s)

總持) arises once, at the end of this passage, in contrast to twice in the Nobel and Bagchi editions.

49. I take *sunirukta* ("well-explained") as an adjectival form of *sunirukti*, "lucid exegesis." *Suniruktapada* (well-explained or lucid expository phrases) may be contrasted here with *vyañjana*, the actual sutra syllables themselves, instead of the more typical *artha* ("meaning"). I have not taken them this way, however, as *padavyañjanāni* is a prior compound in the passage. Within Edgerton's entry for "*nirukta*" he gives "*suniruktaṃ* (well-explained)" in an example from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* (Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 2 vols. [New Haven: Yale Univ. & Cologne Digital Edition Press, 2014 (1953)]). *Dharma-dhāraṇī* and *artha-dhāraṇī* are two of the four categories of *dhāraṇī* mentioned in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* that appear to be included among Sarasvatī's gifted benefits (ibid., 199 and 284).

50. Braarvig ("*Dhāraṇī and Pratibhāna*," 18, 22–23), who has analyzed this passage in Sarasvatī's chapter, states that "when the two concepts appear together, *dhāraṇī* usually precedes *pratibhāna* as a prerequisite..." (see also Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 158–161). For a discussion of the *dhāraṇī* of the grammarian Megha in the Gv, see Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess," 172.

51. Ludvik shares this view in her analysis of the Chinese translation of the name "Sarasvatī," which she takes as "Great Eloquence Deity" (*Sarasvatī*, 154–157). She notes here that Sarasvatī's "function as goddess of eloquence...

view her as such is made clear at multiple points in the text. For example, in his encomium of the goddess later in the chapter, the brahman Kauṇḍinya states: "I will praise her because of her distinguished virtues of excellent speech ... her excellent teaching ... and because she is a mine of knowledge."[52] The gods of the assembly then enjoin her to "set free the tongues of beings, Let them speak a brilliant speech" (*jihvāṃ vimuñca sattvānām / bhāṣantu vacanaṃ śubham //*).[53] Kauṇḍinya clearly sees Sarasvatī as a goddess known for her great knowledge, while the gods view her according to her powerful eponym.

After enumerating the benefits she provides, Sarasvatī then tells the Buddha that she bestows this gift of *dhāraṇī* to the preaching monk, as per Emmerick's translation: "(so that) this... [sutra], may long go forth in Jambudvīpa for the welfare of those beings who have planted merit-roots under thousands of Buddhas, (so that) it may not soon disappear, (so that) numerous beings who have heard this excellent *Suvarṇabhāsa* ... may obtain" the benefits of "old age and prosperity in life."[54] The monk's full mastery in the recitation and exegesis of the sutra shall result, she tells us, in a variety of benefits to all Buddhist practitioners who hear it. Moreover, it is the power of the text and its teachings, rather than the goddess herself, which imparts these secondary benefits to all beings. A change in verbal tense or mood, from the first-person future to the third-person optative/potential, signals the goddess's transition from her discussion of the primary benefits of

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carries relevance irrespective of geographic, historical, cultural, or linguistic context" (ibid., 157). In the Indic context, examples of Sarasvatī's eponym are also found in the *Mahābhārata*, where *sarasvatī* can mean "speech or the power of speech, eloquence, [and] learning wisdom" (M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1899], 1182, 3).

52. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 47, vv. 110–117.

53. Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 108 (v. 7.12). Like Ludvik, I also see problems with Emmerick's translation here of "Let loose your tongue. Speak to beings a fine speech" (Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 46). In Nobel's edition, the second person singular imperative is used to address the goddess in the first half of the stanza; the third person plural in the second half must therefore refer to beings (see Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 300). I have translated *jihvāṃ* as the masculine *jihvān* "tongue," which avoids the repetition of "speech" (*jihvāṃ*, feminine singular accusative).

54. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 44. The Suv is alternately titled *Suvarṇabhāsottama sūtra* (q.v. n6).

her *dhāraṇī* aid (i.e., those gifted directly to the *dharmabhāṇaka*) to the secondary benefits arising from the sutra itself. For instance, Sarasvatī states that she imparts *dhāraṇī* so that beings who hear the clear and correct exposition of the text "may comprehend an inconceivable accumulation of knowledge" (*acintyaṃ ca jñānaskandhaṃ pratilabheyuḥ*)[55] and "(so that) they may become conversant with all the *śāstras* and learned in the performance of various arts" (*sarvaśāstrakuśalāś ca bhaveyur nānāśilpavidhijñāś ca*).[56] Thus, *dhāraṇī* in this context signals both the power of complete retention and the power of effective textual transmission. Further, the secondary benefits of the goddess's *dhāraṇī*, arising from the power of the sutra skillfully disseminated by the preaching monk,[57] also include soteriological benefits leading to the attainment of enlightenment. These include "the inconceivably sharp wisdom of insight" (*acintya tīkṣṇaprajñā*) and, in addition to the mundane benefits of "help in living" (*jivitānugraha*) discussed further below, "an unlimited accumulation of merit" (*cāparimitaṃ ca puṇyaskandhaṃ*). The *dharmabhāṇaka*'s masterful exposition activates the power of the sutra for his audience and, as a result, the powers of the goddess and the powers of the text work in tandem in the Suv.

1.2 Sarasvatī's Offering of a Mantra-Based Bathing Ritual

The goddess then prescribes a bathing ritual involving a list of medicinal herbs and the recitation of multiple mantras. Because this multiform ritual results in the invocation of Sarasvatī's presence, I discuss the details of its preparation further in part two. The passage on the bathing

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55. The Sanskrit passage for this sentence and the rest of this paragraph reads: *yathā cāyaṃ Suvarṇabhāsottamaḥ sūtrendrarājas teṣāṃ buddhasahasrāvar uptakuśalamūlānāṃ sattvānām arthāya ciraṃ Jambudvīpe pracaret / na ca kṣipram antardhāpayet / anekāni ca sattvāni Suvarṇaprabhāsottamaṃ sūtrendrarājaṃ śrutvācintyatīkṣṇaprajñā bhaveyuḥ / acintyaṃ ca jñānaskandhaṃ pratilabheyuḥ / dṛṣṭadhārmikāṃ ca āyuḥsampattiṃ pratilabheyuḥ / jivitānugrahaṃ ca aparimitaṃ ca puṇyaskandhaṃ pratigṛhṇīyuḥ /... sarvaśāstrakuśalāś ca bhaveyuḥ / nānāśilpavidhisaṃpattiṃ ca pratilabheyuḥ //* (Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 103).

56. Bagchi (*Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 55) has a variant reading of the end of this passage: *sarvaśāstrakuśalāś ca bhaveyur nānāśilpavidhijñāś ca //.*

57. Ludvik (*Sarasvatī*, 160) notes "the greatness and prestige accorded to the orator" in the sutra, "for it is through him that the sutra is preserved and beings are led to awakening."

ritual immediately follows Sarasvatī's enumeration of benefits for all beings who hear the *dharmabhāṇaka's* gifted exposition of the sutra. She continues here as the narrator: "I will explain the act of bathing furnished with mantras and medicinal herbs (*mantrauṣadhisaṃyuktaṃ*) for the sake of the monk who preaches the Dharma and for the sake of those beings who hear the Dharma."[58] While, just prior to this statement, the powers of *dhāraṇī* are gifted solely to the preaching monk, it is now the case that all individuals who fully engage with the text may perform the goddess's bathing ritual and receive its benefits. The goddess then immediately declares:

> Suffering caused by all planets, constellations, births, and deaths,
> Suffering caused by discord, quarrels, foulness, disturbances, riots,
> nightmares, poisonous water, (and)
> All evil demons and animated corpses
> will proceed to extinction.
>
> *sarvagrahanakṣatrajanmamaraṇapīḍā kalikalahakaluṣaḍimbaḍāmaraduḥ*
> *khasvapnaviṣodakapīḍāḥ*[59]
> *sarvakākhordavetālāḥ praśamaṃ yāsyanti /*[60]

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58. I have translated Nobel's edition here: *mantrauṣadhisaṃyuktaṃ snānakarma bhāṣiṣyāmi / tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣos teṣāṃ ca dharmaśravaṇikānāṃ sattvānām arthāya /* (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 104). Bagchi's edition has no break between the first two lines, and further differs from Nobel's in the omission of the phrase "*mantrauṣadhi-*" as the prior member of the compound with *saṃyuktam*, providing instead "*tad idaṃ*": *tad idaṃ saṃyuktaṃ snānakarma bhāṣiṣyāmi tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣos teṣāṃ ca dharma-śravaṇikānāṃ sattvānām arthāya //* (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 55). Thus, the translation would be: "Then, together with this [i.e., the previous passage or speech], I will explain the act of bathing...." While *idaṃ* appears to refer to the preceding text, it cannot be taken as a reference to *dhāraṇī* specifically (i.e., "the act of bathing together with the *dhāraṇī*"). This would obviously require the feminine pronoun *iyam*, a pronominal form that appears elsewhere in Bagchi's edition.
59. Nobel's edition adds *vināyaka-pīḍāḥ* here (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 104).
60. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 55. I have restored "*sva*" into "*svapna*" here, as the second very similar list at the end of the bathing ritual passage states: *sarvagrahakalikaluṣanakṣatrajanmapīḍān vā duḥkhasvapnavināyakapīḍān sarvakākhordavetālān praśamayiṣyāmi /* (ibid., 57). Differentiations in Nobel's edition are as follows: "*...kaluṣaḍimbaḍāmaraduḥsvapnavināyakapīḍāḥ...vetāḍāḥ*" (*Suvarnaprabhāsottamasūtra*, 104). Note that *vināyaka* appears in both similar passages in Nobel (c.f. 107) but in only the second in Bagchi.

Sarasvatī promises peace and protection to all those who uphold the sutra. By means of her gift of the bathing ritual, she assures the sutra's audience of the banishment of various modes of suffering wrought by external forces. Following this, the goddess begins the bathing ritual prescription by listing the proper herbs to use, how and when to prepare them, and how to "consecrate" the powdered herb mixture "a hundred times with a *mantrapada*" that she then recites in the text.[61] After giving instructions on how to properly prepare the space, she states that while continually "scatter[ing] incense," one must "play the five kinds of musical instruments and thoroughly adorn the goddess...."[62] This passage therefore indicates that an image of the goddess in some form should be present during the ritual. The goddess then provides additional *mantrapadas* to be recited while bathing.[63] After proclaiming her invocatory mantra (analyzed in part two), Sarasvatī makes the following pronouncement:

> By means of this action of bathing, for the sake of the monk who preaches the Dharma (and) for those who hear it and write it down, I myself will go there, together with the troops of *devas* in the atmosphere; and there in all villages, cities, towns and monasteries, I will heal all disease.
>
> *etena snānakarmaṇā tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhakṣor arthāya teṣāṃ ca*
> *dharmaśravaṇikānāṃ teṣāṃ lekhakānām arthāya svayam evāhaṃ tatra*

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61. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 44–45. Nobel's edition here reads: *auṣadhayo mantrā yena snāpayanti ca paṇḍitāḥ // vacā gorocanā spṛkkā śirīṣaṃ śāmyakaṃ śamī / indrahastā mahābhāgā jñāmakam agaru tvacam // 7.1 // śriveṣṭakaṃ sarjarasaṃ śallakī guggulurasam / tagaraṃ patra-śaileyaṃ candanaṃ ca manaḥśilā // 7.2 // sarocanā tu kuṣṭhaṃ ca kuṅkumaṃ musta-sarṣapāḥ / naladaṃ cavya-sūkṣmailā uśīraṃ nāgakeśaram // 7.3 // etāni samabhāgāni puṣyanakṣatreṇa pīṣayet / imair mantrapadaiś cūrṇaṃ śatadhā cābhimantrayet // 7.4 //* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 104–105).

62. Ibid., 45. Bagchi's edition here reads: *gomayamaṇḍalaṃ kṛtvā muktapuṣpāṇi sthāpayet / suvarṇabhāṇḍe rūpyabhāṇḍe madhureṇa sthāpayet // 8.5 // varmitāś ca puruṣāste catvāri tatra sthāpayet / kanyāḥ subhūṣitāḥ nyastāś catvāro ghaṭadhāriṇyaḥ // 8.6 // gugguluṃ dhūpayannityaṃ pañcatūryāṇi yojayet / chatradhvajapatākaiś ca sā devī samalaṅkṛtā // 8.7 // anena mantrapadakrameṇa sīmābandhaṃ samārabhet // 8.8 //* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 56). Q.v. n103 for preceding *mantrapadas*.

63. I return to this point in my discussion of her invocation below (n107).

gamiṣyāmi / devagaṇena sārdhaṃ tatra ca grāme vā nagare vā nigame vā vihāre vā sarvato rogapraśamanaṃ kariṣyāmi /[64]

Presiding over several powerful entities in this passage, the goddess mobilizes their forces to heal all disease wherever a devotee performs the ritual. Immediately thereafter, she once again describes the removal of various modes of suffering in a passage very similar to that given above. Taken together, these two apotropaic injunctions form the bookends, so to speak, of the goddess's bathing ritual prescription.[65] Ludvik, comparing Sarasvatī's bathing ritual benefits to those the goddess "will provide to the monk who expounds the sutra and to his audience,"[66] writes: "These advantages, however, are of a rather different nature: no longer do they belong to the lofty realms of eloquence [and] knowledge … but now extend into the practical, concrete problems of this world…."[67] Sarasvatī's gift of the bathing ritual therefore does that which a "spell or charm" (a mantra or a *vidyā*) most typically was employed to do in Buddhist texts.[68] Here the goddess's focus is not on the intellective benefits that her powers generally produce, but rather on this-worldly aid: apotropaic, protective, healing, and quite different from that of her *dhāraṇī.*

In fact, after declaring the bathing ritual and its procedures, Sarasvatī clarifies her motivation for bestowing it. She states:

(So that) there may be aid in living for those monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who retain in their minds this chief among sutras. (So that) they may obtain cessation of the cycle of rebirth (*nirvāṇa*), and may become non-regressing toward supreme, perfect enlightenment.

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64. The Sanskrit here is from Nobel (ibid., 107). Bagchi's edition, (*Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 57), which omits *teṣām* after *dharmaśravaṇikānāṃ* as well as *gamiṣyāmi,* thus translates to: "I myself (am) there" (*svayam evāhaṃ tatra*). Bagchi's edition (ibid.) also differs in the description of Sarasvatī's retinue, where we get "*gagaṇasiddhayakṣa-devagaṇaiḥ sārdhaṃ"* ("together with the troops of *siddhas, yakṣas,* and gods in the atmosphere"), while the Nobel passage translated above has: "*sarvadevagaṇena sārdhaṃ.*" The remainder of the two passages are identical.

65. Ludvik also notes the similarity of these two passages (see *Sarasvatī,* 171n25).

66. Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 162.

67. Ibid.

68. Q.v. n38.

yathā teṣāṃ sūtrendradhārakāṇāṃ bhikṣubhikṣuṇyupāsakopāsikānāṃ jīvitānugraho bhavet / saṃsāra-nirvāṇaṃ pratilabheyuḥ / avaivartikāś ca bhaveyur anuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodheḥ //[69]

The first sentence in this passage summarizes those who may undertake Saravatī's bathing ritual—both monastics and laypeople—so that there may be aid in everyday living for Buddhist practitioners who hold the sutra in mind (*dhāraka*). The etymology of the phrase *dhāraka* ("retain in mind") has clear associations with the goddess's earlier *dhāraṇī* gift, yet here those who have not been blessed with an extraordinary gift of complete retention (*dhāraṇī*) may nonetheless benefit extensively from this bathing ritual that itself invokes the goddess. Sarasvatī then shifts to discussing soteriological benefits, which are, as at the end of the *dhāraṇī* passage above, imparted by the powers of the sutra itself.

As Ludvik's cogent study has pointed out, when we compare the extant Sanskrit to the earliest Chinese translation by Dharmakṣema (ca. 417 CE), no bathing ritual is found in that edition.[70] Looking closely at the Sanskrit passage, it is interesting to note that the verbal mood does not follow the future-tense linguistic structure of the previous passage (wherein the goddess states, "I myself will go there"), nor does it follow that of the goddess's direct benefits to the preaching monk in the *dhāraṇī* section. Sarasvatī's motivations and summary of her mundane aid are uncharacteristically composed here in the optative/potential mood. This is likely because the sentence is an interpolation—a segue so to speak—between the added bathing ritual in its entirety and the material presumably already present in the Sanskrit text when the ritual was added, albeit now quite a bit later in the chapter.[71] This extant sentence laying out soteriological benefits was initially included as a benefit of the power of text resulting from the preaching monk's

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69. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra,* 57. I am following Edgerton's translation here for *dhāraka* as "one who retains in his mind or memory" (Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 284, col. 2).

70. Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 154.

71. The first sentence of this passage is thus a segue between the added bathing ritual and the lines which we find in Dharmakṣema's edition, which are presumably already included in the no-longer-extant Sanskrit recension he translated. While Ludvik states that the passage on nirvana and non-regression does not appear in the extant Sanskrit (ibid., 161n9), it is, rather, not in a parallel position with Dharmaksema's edition (ibid., 282) but now at the end of the bathing ritual section (ibid., 295–296).

exposition of the sutra (so it would naturally be given in the optative/ potential mood). In any case, this repositioning of the sutra's gifts of nirvana and non-regression (*avaivartika*) at this later point indicates precisely where the bathing ritual passage was inserted in roughly the mid to late fifth century CE.[72] This interpolated rite points to a greater interest on the part of the sutra's redactor(s) in tantric/mantra-based rituals along with the importance of the goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī (discussed below) in a pan-Indic context.[73] This, in turn, evinces a greater interest in goddess reverence in Mahāyāna Buddhist contexts, not the least for their powerfully restorative and protective powers.

As noted, the aid resulting from the bathing ritual differs from both the primary and secondary effects of Sarasvati's bestowal of *dhāraṇī*. The benefits of the gifts of *dhāraṇī* and those of bathing rite completely diverge, save a single point of overlap: Sarasvatī's promise that both will provide aid in living (*jīvitānugraha)* to those who uphold the text in their everyday life. This, in turn, affords greater ease in advancing to the level of non-regression of a bodhisattva, the attainment of nirvana, and thus full and complete buddhahood. The Suv's promised gift of *jivitānugraha* (c.f. p. 72 above) is certainly fortified through the redactors' addition of the bathing ritual, with aid in living being precisely the motivation Sarasvatī declares in offering it. We thus again see a melding of two beneficent sources of power in the Suv, the goddess and the sutra. Her gifting of mundane benefits is meant to support the lives of those who strive, above all, for the higher soteriological benefits taught in (and promised by) the text.

1.3 Distinguishing Sarasvatī's Gift of the Bathing Ritual from Her Dhāraṇī Bestowal

Prior studies of the Suv have dealt with Sarasvatī's gift of *dhāraṇī* in various ways. Ludvik describes the last line of the passage on *dhāraṇī* (discussed in 1.1 above) as follows: "The goddess announces, moreover,

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72. This is made evident from the side-by-side comparison that Ludvik provides of Dharmakṣema's Chinese translation (of an earlier, and sparer, Sanskrit recension that she renders into English) and the Sanskrit recension of Nobel's edition. Q.v. n25.

73. Sarasvatī is also incorporated in Jain texts during this (ca. fifth century) period, as per John Cort, "Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions," *Numen* 34, no. 2 (1987): 235.

that she will teach him [i.e., the preaching monk] a *dhāraṇī* (*zǒnchí* 總持 'complete hold'), a talismanic charm or spell, to prevent loss of memory."[74] Ludvik thus takes *dhāraṇī* here as a spell, synonymous with a mantra, that is nonetheless also specified as a "complete-hold" for memory enhancement. Reflecting on her conflation of the two major semantic meanings of *dhāraṇī*, she then states: "The *dhāraṇī* is both the means of remembrance [i.e., the spell], as well as remembrance itself [i.e., the attainment of 'complete-hold,' *zǒnchí* 總持]."[75] The issue of contention in this case, then, is not the semantic meaning of *dhāraṇī*. Instead, I raise the question of whether the term must hold both meanings simultaneously. We must then inquire as to how Sarasvatī's gift of complete retention is believed to function, that is, how is it to be imparted upon the monk?[76] More to the point, can we locate "the spell" that would presumably impart it (i.e., the mantra phrases or *dhāraṇīpadas* directly associated with this *dhāraṇī*)? Ludvik, approaching the issue with much greater care than most studies to date, writes:

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74. Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 159.

75. Ibid. Whether or not one agrees with Ludvik's reading, her statement supports my view that *dhāraṇī* is indeed a *specific type* of spell (mantra), rather than synonymous with mantra (which I take to be a categorical term). This is the case when *dhāraṇī* shifts semantically to become completely associated with mantric invocation (q.v. n38). Here, however, I do not take the semantic force of *dhāraṇī* as being inclusive of "spell."

76. Davidson ("Studies in *Dhāraṇī* Literature I," 140) writes: "The mantric aspect is frequently associated with the emphasis on the relationship between *dhāraṇīs* and concentration [i.e., *samādhi*], so that the compound '*dhāraṇī* and concentration entrances' (*dhāraṇīsamādhimukha*) is a standard accomplishment of advanced bodhisattvas, as has been noticed many times before." The function of mantras in these contexts is not described, however. "Moreover," he continues, "when *dhāraṇīs* occur in one or another of the great soteriological scriptures or other texts—like the *Daśabhūmika* or *Samādhirāja*, they often foreground the question of the special knowledges (*dharma-, artha-, nirukti-,* and *pratibhāna-pratisaṃvid*), all of which are related to skills necessary to the ritualized act of preaching" (ibid., 140). Again, Davidson does not describe any mantras occuring in these texts. In my own review of the *Daśabhūmika sūtra*, I have located no mantra (i.e., incantory or "spell") phrases listed in connection with the text's discussion of *dhāraṇīs*. The focus, as Davidson notes here, is on the "special knowledges" necessary for the preaching monk. This example is quite similar to the ways in which *dhāraṇī* functions in the Suv.

> The fact that no incantory formula appears following this passage supports Braarvig's interpretation [i.e., that *dhāraṇī* here only indicates memory retention]. Nevertheless, the term *dhāraṇī* reappears several times in the Sarasvatī chapter, and, in all these subsequent occurrences, is immediately followed by an incantation.[77]

Even if it were the case that "the term *dhāraṇī* reappears several times," which unfortunately it does not, the presence of additional incantations for the bathing ritual directly afterwards provides us with no evidence that there is a "spell" associated with this bestowal of *dhāraṇī* ("complete hold"). Herein lies my central intervention in the analysis of this narrative, and Ludvik is but one among several scholars who have made similar arguments.[78]

First, when we look at the rest of the chapter in both the extant Sanskrit provided by Nobel, as well as Baogui's Chinese-language redaction of the Suv (*Hebu Jinguangmingjing*, 合部金光明經, T. vol. 16, no. 664), it is only the term "mantra" (i.e., "*zhou* 呪") that arises multiple times throughout the bathing ritual passage in both the Sanskrit recension (published by both Nobel and Bagchi with substantial variations) and the Chinese translation by Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta. At no point do the terms *dhāraṇī*, *zǒnchí* 總持, and/or *tuóluóní* 陀羅尼 appear within Sarasvatī's bathing ritual *vidhi*.[79] Further, the term *zǒnchí* 總持 appears again only once in the Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta translation of

77. Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 159–160 (q.v. n48). In Sarasvatī's ritual offering, the terms "mantra" or *zhou* (呪) are, indeed, typically followed by an incantation.
78. Gummer ("Articulating Potency," 242), for example, notes that "the primary vehicle for obtaining Sarasvatī's apotropaic and elocutionary aid is a complicated bathing ritual." See also Nobel's prior conflation, q.v. n39.
79. Ibid., 282–308. *Tuóluóní* 陀羅尼 does appear several times in the chapter prior to that of Sarasvatī, called the "*Dhāraṇī* (*Tuóluóní*) of Non-Attachment" (銀主陀羅尼) interpolated as chapter 11 in Baogui's redaction, a point to which I return below. I have also reviewed all incantation sections in the Sarasvatī chapter of the Sanskrit recension and, particularly, in Baogui's redaction that Ludvik's study omits (*Hebu Jinguangmingjing* 合部金光明經, T. vol. 16, no. 664): 386c13–c17 and c20–c24; 387a05–a06, a10–a11, a16–a24, and b17–c25; accessed via *The SAT Daizōkyō Text Database*, https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT2015/T0664_.16.0387b02:0387b02.cit (Aug. 1, 2022).

the Sarasvatī chapter, long after the bathing ritual ends, during the Brahmin Kauṇḍinya's praises of the goddess.[80]

A useful example of the changeable nature of *dhāraṇī* arises outside of the two goddesses' chapters in Baogui's redaction. Notably, the translator(s) have assigned differing terms to reflect *dhāraṇī*'s divergent semantic roles (i.e., *zǒnchí* 總持 vs. *tuóluóní* 陀羅尼).[81] Entitled the "*Dhāraṇī* (*Tuóluóní*) of Non-Attachment" (銀主陀羅), chapter 11 in Baogui's redaction is a later addition, also found in Tibetan translation, which directly precedes the Sarasvatī *parivarta*. Here, *tuóluóní*, a phonetic spelling of *dhāraṇī* associated with its use as a powerful mantra, appears several times. The chapter provides a *dhāraṇī-mantra* that promises non-regression in complete and perfect enlightenment (*anuttara samyak saṃbodhi*) and relief from various threats and forms of evil. This *dhāraṇī* acts as yet another ritual support to achieve the promises of the text for both aid in living and soteriological benefits for all those beings who uphold it. Further, on account of what would appear to be a late interpolation (not surviving in the Sanskrit recension), the meaning and function of *dhāraṇī* changes completely, from one chapter to the next, *in the same text*. An overt example of the obvious need to look carefully at textual history and accretions across time and translations, it also perfectly illustrates the slippery semantics of *dhāraṇī.*

That said, another recent example of the scholarly conflation of the two terms *mantra* and *dhāraṇī* occurs in Hidas's summation of Sarasvatī's chapter, wherein he employs the phrase "*dhāraṇī*-spells" in discussion of her bathing ritual despite the term given in the sutra

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80. Ludvik, *Sarasvatī*, 304–305. While in Nobel's Sanskrit edition the brahmin praises Sarasvatī for her memory (*smṛti*), Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta have rendered the term as the Chinese equivalent of *dhāraṇī*, *zǒnchí* 總持 ("complete hold" or "complete retention"). Furthermore, Ludvik identifies each set of "*mantrapadas*" set forth in the bathing ritual as a "*dhāraṇī*," the term which, as just noted, is clearly and indisputably related to the monk's complete retention of the text and its teachings within this ca. fifth to sixth century context of the Suv. See, for example, *Sarasvatī*, 166n16, 167n17, and 169.

81. Ludvik makes the point that phonetic renderings of Sanskrit terms into Chinese signal their mantric importance. In the matter of the Chinese translation of Sarasvatī's name, for example, she distinguishes between "mnemonic" and "phonetic" translations (*Sarasvatī*, 154–157).

repeatedly being "*mantrapada[s].*"[82] Moreover, Hidas does not address the actual appearance(s) of the term *dhāraṇī* in the first part of the chapter, instead noting the goddess's "gift of eloquence."[83] Thus, while Śrī and Sarasvatī's invocation rituals are certainly based in the recitation of a mantra or *vidyā*, there is simply no evidence that *dhāraṇī* is meant to be translated as "spell" in the Suv's Sanskrit recension found in the Nobel and Bagchi editions, nor in the Śrī and Sarasvatī chapters of Baogui's Chinese redaction.[84] The conflation of *dhāraṇī* with mantras/spells is problematic in that it may lead to potential exegetical errors and, at the very least, unnecessary obscurations. Goodall and Isaacson as well as Holz have all expressed the importance of following the methodology set forth by Skilling, who writes: "Scholars often use the two words [i.e., *dhāraṇī* and mantra] interchangeably; it would be more accurate, however, to use the word actually employed in the text under consideration."[85] In addition, the question of terminology arises

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82. Hidas summarizes the rite as follows: "One should use incense, music, umbrellas, flags, banners, mirrors, arrows, spears, and *dhāraṇī-spells*, and in due course bathe behind an image of the Buddha" ("Buddhism, Kingship and the Protection of the State: The *Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra* and Dhāraṇī Literature," in *Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions*, ed. Dominic Goodall, Shaman Hatley, Harunaga Isaacson, and Srilata Raman, 234–248 [Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2020], 237). In Indic language versions provided by both P.O. Skjærvø (*This Most Excellent Shine of Gold, King of Kings of Sutras: the Khotanese Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* [Cambridge, MA: Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University], 177 v. 32), whose version Hidas cites, and Nobel (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 106 v. 7.8), the term given is the same: "*mantrapada.*" It seems unusual in an English translation to substitute one (more common) Sanskrit term for another (more obscure and "bewilderingly polysemic" one), but such is the nature of the current scholarly conflation of mantra and *dhāraṇī.*

83. Hidas, "Buddhism, Kingship, and the Protection of the State," 236. He also states here that "*dhāraṇī*-spells" occur in both Śrī and Sarasvatī's rituals (ibid., 235 and 237). The term *dhāraṇī* does not arise in connection with the rites in either goddess's narrative, however.

84. Śrī's chapter in the Sanskrit recension uses the term *vidyāmantra* once, *vidyā* twice, and *mantrapāda* twice. In the corresponding Chinese redaction translated by Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, the terms *vidyā* (*míng* 明) and *mantra* (*zhou* 呪) are given as parallel semantic constructions.

85. Peter Skilling, "The Rakṣā Literature of the Śrāvakayāna," *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 16 (1992): 151; Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson, "The

in the practice of categorizing textual genres. I take no issue with the category of "incantation literature"—as Hidas eloquently puts it—or, perhaps, "mantra literature," but I must emphasize that to take mantra as a synonym of *dhāraṇī*, or even a subset of *dhāraṇī*—as Davidson has previously proposed[86]—cannot support clarity in the advancement of mantric knowledge.

While further inquiry must be made into the Mahāyānist use of *dhāraṇī*, specifically in instances where no mantric formulas are given (thus building upon Braarvig's work of over three decades ago), there is no evidence that "*dhāraṇī*" (as "complete hold/complete retention," *zǒnchí* 總持) simultaneously functions as a spell in the Suv. And when taking *dhāraṇī* as a type of mantra—which is clearly more accurate than taking it as a synonym—this reading will only hold where the semantic meaning of *dhāraṇī* is not in dispute (as it is in the present sutra). Overall, by overstating the mantric function of *dhāraṇī* in Mahāyāna sutra contexts, and thereby marginalizing potential non-mantric appearances of *dhāraṇī*, nuances of meaning in mantra studies and the study of Mahāyāna sutra developments more broadly may well be lost.

1.4 Sarasvatī's Status as a Bodhisattva

To return now to a central argument of this study, Sarasvatī's role in the Suv is also one in which she works as a bodhisattva on behalf of the Dharma (i.e., as a Mahāyāna practitioner). In each portion of the narrative, her role is to provide benefits to members of the sangha, both lay and monastic, who hear, write down, and/or retain the sutra in mind. Yet how do we know that Sarasvatī is meant to be read as a bodhisattva in this context? In the Suv, there is a continued reluctance on the part of the text's author(s)—just as there is in the possibly earlier Gv[87]—to name them as such. Nonetheless, Sarasvatī's ability to aid in furthering beings soteriologically—working both with and within

Shared 'Ritual Syntax' of the Early Tantric Traditions," in *Tantric Studies: Fruits of a Franco-German Collaboration on Early Tantra*, ed. Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson (Pondichery: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2016), 6n14; Kathrin Holz, *The Bhadrakarātrī-Sūtra: Apotropaic Scriptures in Early Indian Buddhism (Monographs on Indian Archaeology, Art and Philology 27)* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2021), 184.

86. Q.v. n37.

87. Q.v. n3.

the text—certainly favors this designation. We saw that she offers her bathing ritual to remove various mundane oppressions and disease, which in turn aids Mahāyānist practitioners in their aspirations to attain future buddhahood. Moreover, only highly advanced bodhisattvas possess the ability to impart *dhāraṇī*, a protean gift of complete retention and an indication of Sarasvatī's potentially advanced bodhisattva status.[88]

We also know that she is greatly revered in the Suv's assembly. In response to Sarasvatī's second mantra-based ritual offering (described here as a "*vidyā*"),[89] Kauṇḍinya praises her as the "supreme, chief, excellent goddess."[90] He also describes her as being "luminous with merit" (*puṇyojjvalā*), "fully endowed with deep insight wisdom" (*gambhīraprajñāya samanvitāyai*), "complete in her mindfulness" (*smṛtisamagratāyai*), and "highly resolute" (*susattvatāyai*).[91] Given these traits, particularly that she is "fully endowed" with the deepest *prajñā*, it is plausible to regard her as an ideal bodhisattva practitioner. In sum, Kauṇḍinya's description of her spiritual attainments and the goddess's ability to bestow *dhāraṇī* provide convincing evidence of her high-level bodhisattva status.[92]

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88. For instance, according to the *Daśabhūmika sūtra*, possessing the power of *dhāraṇī* (*dhāraṇībala*) is a defining characteristic of an advanced bodhisattva of the ninth *bhūmi* (see Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess," 117). Further, we see advanced bodhisattva-goddesses of the Gv imparting *dhāraṇī* as well (ibid). It also appears to be the case that one can receive *dhāraṇī* benefits from an advanced bodhisattva (e.g., as a miraculous gift) without being of an advanced level oneself.

89. Following Kauṇḍinya's injunction to the goddess: "Let [beings] speak a brilliant speech" (q.v. n53), Sarasvatī offers a second invocation ritual. While reciting its phrases she implores: "Let the intellect of all beings be unobstructed! Let my *vidyā*-mantra succeed!" (*sarvasattvānāṃ buddhir apratihatā bhavatu vidyā me siddhyatu...* / [Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra,* 57]). The rite concludes with: "Homage to the Blessed One, Sarasvatī! Let my mantra phrases succeed, *svāhā*!" (*namo bhagavatyai sarasvatyai siddhyantu mantrapadāḥ svāhā //* [ibid., 58]). In Baogui's redaction, the translation for *vidyā* (*míng* 明) can be found at 387c23, which alternately may be read as "radiance" (*guāng míng* 光明). No additional terminology for mantra or *dhāraṇī* arises in this ritual passage, however (*Hebu Jinguangmingjing,* 合部金光明經 [T. vol. 16, no. 664]).

90. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 47.

91. For *susattvatāyai*, Emmerick has "an excellent being" (ibid., 47).

92. Q.v. the brahmin's additional praises discussed on p. 70.

1.5 Boons for the Preaching Monk: Śrī Mahādevī in the Suv

In the Suv's next chapter, the great goddess (*mahādevī*) Śrī confers various boons on the preaching monk, some similar to those of Sarasvatī, yet without bestowing *dhāraṇī*. The passage following this offering of gifts describes an elaborate *vidyā*-based ritual to invoke Śrī's presence. At the beginning of her narrative, in the presence of the Buddha, she states:

> Blessed One, I, the venerable Great Goddess Śrī, will also zealously give aid to the preaching monk. By means of the monk's robe, alms food, a resting place (cell), medicine to cure the sick, personal utensils, and other benefits, accordingly, the expounder of the Dharma will be endowed with all means of subsistence. And he will speak without faltering. He will be sound in mind. His comfort will be attended to night and day. He will present phrases and syllables of this excellent king of all sutras, the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, in various arrangements, (and) he will ponder them thoroughly.

> *aham api bhadanta bhagavan bhagavatī śrīr mahādevī tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣor autsukyatāṃ*[93] *kariṣyāmi / yad idaṃ cīvara-piṇḍapāta-śayanāsana-glānapratyaya-bhaiṣajya-pariṣkārair anyaiś copakaraṇair yathā sa dharma-bhāṇakaḥ sarvopakaraṇa-saṃpanno bhaviṣyati / avaikalpatāṃ ca pratila-psyate / svasthacitto bhaviṣyati / sukhacitto rātriṃ divā pratinām ayiṣyati / itaś ca suvarṇaprabhāsottamāt sūtrendrarājān nānāvidhāni padavyañjanāny upanām ayiṣyati / vyupaparīkṣiṣyati /*[94]

In addition to the material needs of the preaching monk, Śrī also offers the power to speak with confidence, the power to skillfully present various linguistic constructions from the sutra—both facets of eloquence—and to thoroughly contemplate their meaning. She thus bestows the monk with an enhanced mastery of the text. Yet, the bulk of the terminology used in the above passage, save *padavyañjanāny* ("phrases and syllables"), differs from that of Sarasvatī's passage on her *dhāraṇī* offering and does not seem to go as far. This differentiation between Sarasvatī's *dhāraṇī* and Śrī's boons may stem from Sarasvatī's status as a goddess of eloquence and learning, which in turn may uniquely position her, rather than Śrī, to bestow complete retention.

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93. I am taking *autsukyatāṃ* adverbially here.
94. V. 9.2; Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 60.

We then get some sense of Śrī's inherent powers as a goddess of abundance in this passage. Śrī states that she imparts her gifts to the *dharmabhāṇaka* so that, by hearing the Suv, beings:

> may during numerous hundreds of thousands of millions of aeons experience inconceivable divine and human pleasures, that famine may disappear, and plenty may manifest, that beings may be blessed with the supply of excellent human blessings, may meet Tathāgatas, and in [a] future time may awaken to supreme perfect enlightenment, [so] that all the woes of hells, animals, and the world of Yama, may be fully cut off.[95]

These inherent powers of the goddess are, as in Sarasvatī's narrative, combined with the soteriological benefits offered by the text. Śrī therefore works in tandem with the power of the Suv to enact the disappearance of famine and the manifestation of abundance. As was the case with Sarasvatī's *dhāraṇī*, the preeminence of the text's power—implicitly combined with that of the goddess's presence therein—must be established as foremost in each of these chapters. The benefits of the sutra in each narrative thus eclipse that of the goddesses' primarily mundane, this-worldly benefits.

To return to a comparison of the gifts that Sarasvatī and Śrī bestow (e.g., *dhāraṇī* vs. an enhanced facility with the text and material comforts), these differences may also stem from a variation in their level of bodhisattva status. We know that, because Śrī previously "planted a merit-root" (*kuśalamūla*) in the presence of a *tathāgata* named Ratnakusumaguṇasāgara, the text thus implicitly characterizes her as a bodhisattva practitioner.[96] This does not in itself constitute advanced bodhisattvahood, however. Perhaps she does not bestow *dhāraṇī* because she has not yet gained the status of an advanced bodhisattva.[97]

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95. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 48. *anekāni ca kalpakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāṇy acintyāni divyamānuṣyakāni sukhāni pratyanubhaveyuḥ / durbhikṣaś cāntardhāpayet / subhikṣaś ca prādurbhavet / sattvāś ca manuṣyasukhopadhānena sukhitā bhaveyuḥ / tathāgatasamavadhānagatāś ca bhaveyuḥ / anāgate 'dhvati cānuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisaṃbodhayeyuḥ / sarvanarakatiryagyoniyamalokaduḥkhāny atyantasamucchinnāni bhaveyur iti //* (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 60).

96. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 48. The *tathāgata*'s full name is Ratnakusumaguṇasāgaravaiḍūryakanakagirisuvarṇakāñcanaprabhāsaśrī, typically shortened to Ratnakusuma (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 61).

97. Q.v. n88.

Further evidence for a difference in status would seem to be that she is not praised by the Buddha in the formulaic manner that he praises Sarasvatī after her bathing ritual.[98]

In any case, at the close of the text—while possibly added after Dharmakṣema's translation of 417 CE and/or in the mid to late fifth century as per Nobel—the sutra's composer(s)/redactor(s) reveal that the Suv considers these goddesses to be bodhisattvas:

> ...this the Lord (Buddha) spoke, [and] the minds of the bodhisattvas—headed by the *kula* goddess Bodhisattvasamuccayā[99] and the great goddess Sarasvatī—were transported with joy, and the gods, humans, *asuras, garuḍas, moragas,* etc. of the all-encompassing assembly greeted the Blessed One's speech with gratitude and praise.

> *idam avocad bhagavān āttamanās te bodhisattvā*
> *bodhisattvasamuccayākuladevatāsarasvatīmahādevīpramukhā*
> *sā ca sarvāvatī parṣatsadevamānuṣāsuragaruḍakiṃnaramahoragādipramukhā bhagavato bhāṣitam abhyānandann iti //*[100]

Not only that, these two female deities stand at the fore of the bodhisattva assembly. A similar passage occurs in chapter 1, wherein the list of great goddesses, headed by Sarasvatī and Bodhisattvasamuccayā, goes on to include the great goddess Śrī, the great earth goddess Dṛḍhā, and the great goddess Hārītī prior to a long hierarchical list of divine, semi-divine, and human beings.[101] Thus, while Śrī is not named in this closing verse, her omission may not necessarily place her at a lower level than Sarasvatī as a bodhisattva, but rather allude to the longer version of the same list earlier in the text in chapter 1. What we can say with certainty, however, is that, in all, goddesses in the Suv are given an unexpectedly high ontological standing in the text's assembly of all beings, and that Sarasvatī is clearly named among a group of bodhisattvas at close of the text.

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98. The praises may be a later interpolation along with the bathing ritual; however, the Buddha also praises the goddess Bodhisattvasamuccayā in Suv chap. 19.

99. The *kula* goddess Bodhisattvasamuccayā acts as the Buddha's interlocutor in the later chapters of the text. Here the two goddesses are described as *kuladevatā* vs. *mahādevī*, potentially inhabiting two different categories of female deity.

100. Suv chap. 21; Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 128.

101. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 1.

II. BENEFITS OFFERED THROUGH MANTRA-BASED INVOCATION RITUALS & METHODS OF MANIFESTATION

The narratives of the bodhisattva-goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī have major points in common beyond their shared focus on upholding the *dharmabhāṇaka* and Dharma transmission. Both act as interlocutors, a characteristic of the text that affords female deities a great deal of agency in bestowing their rituals. In contrast to texts in which we rarely have their opinions mentioned (e.g., the later *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*), these sutras allow us access to the goddesses' soteriological and beneficent motivations.

In this section, I analyze the methods of manifestation of the goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī in the Suv by unpacking their ritual roles. I look further into their positions in the text, examining each narrative's respective ritual hierarchies and their functions within them. I will specifically focus on their strategies of invocation and the form each goddess's invoked presence assumes.

2.1 Sarasvatī's Invocation via the Bathing Ritual

The function of protection is a common theme throughout the Suv, and the goddesses' inherent methods of assistance seamlessly overlap with the altruistic powers of a bodhisattva. In part one of this study, I discussed evidence for Sarasvatī's bodhisattvahood. Here we can say that she excels as a bodhisattva without being explicitly identified as such in her narrative. As briefly introduced above, the goddess's bathing ritual includes the use of magical and medicinal herbs (*oṣadhi*) in the bath as well as recitations of various mantra phrases (*mantrapada*), which, when performed together, are believed to invoke her presence in order to directly aid all beings who uphold the sutra.

Ludvik has closely analyzed the various bathing ritual mantras, and I therefore refer the reader to her study for the bulk of its details. It is important to point out, however, that Sarasvatī's *mantrapadas* overall follow the *rakṣā* typology first outlined by Skilling and subsequently taken up by Strauch as well as Holz in a recent monograph.[102] There are four distinct mantras within the bathing rite in the Sanskrit recension:

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102. Skilling, "The Rakṣā Literature of the Śrāvakayāna"; Strauch, "The Evolution of the Buddhist *Rakṣā* Genre"; Holz, *The Bhadrakarātrī-Sūtra*.

(1) *mantrapadas* for consecrating herbs,[103] (2) *mantrapadas* for sealing the boundary line (*sīmabandha*),[104] (3) *mantrapadas* for "peace in (the act of) bathing behind the Buddha,"[105] and (4) *mantrapadas* for invocation, which honor the goddess herself as well as other Brahmāṇical deities, including Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā.

The first and second mantras in the list above reflect the *rakṣā* typology in, for one, their use of certain "magical syllables" (e.g., *hili, mili, khili*).[106] They also characteristically begin with *tadyathā* and end with the vocative *svāhā*.[107] Moreover, the variants we find throughout Bagchi's and Nobel's editions may be in part explained by scribal differences in hearing the sutra as it was recited by a *dharmabhāṇaka*. The first and second mantras of the bathing rituals are prime examples of this phenomenon. In the various examples given below, we can see the

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103. Bagchi's edition reads: *tadyathā /* **sukṛte karaj̄ātabhāge haṃ**sara**ṇḍe indrajāla**mali**laka** u**pasade avatāsike kutraku** kala vima**lamati śīlamati saṃdhi budham**ati śi[ri] śiri satyasthita svāhā //** (*Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 56). The *mantrapadas* given in Nobel's edition have significant differences; for instance, we find "*kapila kapilamati*" where Bagchi's edition has "*kala vimalamati*" (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 105). *Mantrapadas* that are the same or very similar (e.g., phonetically) in Nobel's edition are in bold above.

104. The *mantrapadas* mentioned in v. 8.8 for securing the boundary line (i.e., *anena mantrapadakrameṇa sīmābandhaṃ samārabhet // 8.8 //*) are: *ane* **nayane hili** hili **gili khile** svāhā / (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 56). In Nobel they are: *arake nayane hile mile gile khikhile svāhā /* (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 106). *Mantrapadas* that are the same or very similar (e.g., phonetically) in Nobel's edition are in bold above.

105. These are followed by the recitation of the "mantra" for peace in (the act of) bathing behind the Buddha: *bhagavataḥ pṛṣṭhataḥ snātvānena mantrajāpena snānaśāntiṃ yojayet / tadyathā / sugate vigate vigatāvati svāhā /* (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 56). Note that Nobel's edition also gives "*mantrajāpena*" in the injunction (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 106).

106. These syllables are alternately given in Bagchi and/or Nobel with *e-kāra* endings. See also Strauch ("The Evolution of the Buddhist *Rakṣā* Genre," 75n17) for references to both Buddhist and Brahmāṇical texts in which such phrases appear.

107. It is worth noting here that "*oṃ*" is not used together with the rote ending *svāhā*, itself having a semantic force similar to the Christian prayer ending "amen" or the Wiccan phrase "so shall it be." For phrases with alternate *-e* endings, along with typical beginning/ending terminology for *rakṣā* mantras, see Skilling, "The Rakṣā Literature of the Śrāvakayāna," 152–153.

refracted meanings that occur by the act of "writing down the text" that a devotee hears a *dharmabhāṇaka* recite.[108]

Moreover, the third *mantrapada*, which the practitioner is to recite while bathing "behind the Lord" (*bhagavataḥ pṛṣṭhataḥ*), is of a rather different character than the first two of the *rakṣā* type. Bagchi's edition has:

> *sugate vigate vigatāvati svāhā /*

While the words themselves have semantic value, the necessary rhyming structure of magical phrases effectively ignores standard grammatical conventions—specifically with the repetition of the -*e* and -*i* endings. This leaves the accuracy of any attempted translation in question. That said, this mantra appears to include the common epithet of the Buddha, "Sugata" (very literally, "one who has gone to bliss"),[109] and clearly plays with the rhyme scheme of "*sugate*." Due to its irregular grammar, this magical phrase has at least three potential translation options:

> Sugata, Departed One, Departed One, show favor toward (this rite), *svāhā*!
> Sugata, Departed One, Departed One, protect (this rite), *svāhā*!
> Sugata, Departed One, Departed One, [be] in the proximity (of this rite), *svāhā*!

There is a significant link between the potential appearance of this epithet and the proximity to the Buddha in the ritual *vidhi* itself. In the final line the nominal form *āvat*, meaning "proximity," closely connects to the ritual action and certainly provides a play on the Departed One (*vigata*) signaled by the name "Sugata." It is not clear, however, whether *avati* is instead (or additionally) meant to be read as a finite verb (from √*av*), meaning "protect" or "accept favorably," as both renderings are appropriate here. A semantically ambiguous mantra is apt

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108. Given the *va>ba* shift in orthography in the Nobel edition (unless of course Bagchi "corrected" this tendency in his 1967 edition), these appear to be two recitation traditions. Even if there were uniform orthographic conventions across manuscripts, the two editions show major scribal differences.

109. The vocative of the Sanskrit term *sugati* (f.), which means "bliss" or happiness, does scan gramatically here. It does not appear to reference the goddess herself, however, as we would instead expect *sugati* (the vocative of *sugatī*), a term that does not appear elsewhere in reference to Sarasvatī to my knowledge.

in this context, and if this is indeed the case, it would seem to be a deliberate choice on the part of the redactor(s). The play on protection[110] and proximity is effective, as this mantra follows up the sealing of the boundary line that protects the rite, and is itself meant to be recited while bathing behind the Buddha (i.e., in his "proximity") in order bring peace to the ritual action.[111] While it appears that the protection of the practitioner and the alleviation of misfortunes is first and foremost to be accomplished by Sarasvatī (see below), the redactor(s) may have seen the presence of Sugata as supporting both the rite and the maintenance of a clear-cut Buddhist ritual hierarchy in the text.[112] But again, to glean such semantic possibilities we must ignore the grammatical inconsistencies of the mantric language, and as such this rendering can only be provisional.

Mantra four is the invocation ritual itself. The first two lines depart from the linguistic pattern of the rest of the *mantrapadas*, which follow the typical mantric encomium of a deity's name with a dative ending indicating praise or homage to them. Instead, its first two lines mirror the structure of mantra three.[113] Here, the two editions differ semantically, and I agree with Ludvik's assessment that, in Nobel's edition,

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110. The meaning of "protection" is found in the ca. fifth-century *Raghuvaṃśa* and thus could potentially also arise in the bathing ritual's interpolation.

111. Peace is referenced in the following mantra with "*śame.*"

112. After the rite, the Buddha praises Sarasvatī, saying "Well done, Well done, Great Goddess Sarasvatī!" (*sādhu sādhu Sarasvati mahādevi*) (Nobel, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 107). Here he mentions "spells and medicaments" (*mantrauṣadhi*) which the Buddha would not have mentioned in Dharmakṣema's early fifth-century translation (see Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, 46; Nobel, ibid.).

113. Nobel's *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* has the not uncommon use of "*ba*" in place of "*va*" throughout. These *mantrapadas* in each edition are as follows (Bagchi first | Nobel second):

> *śame viṣame svāhā | śame / biśame svāhā*
> *sugate svāhā | sagaṭe bigaṭe svāhā*

Here I have amended "*same*" in Bagchi's online edition to *śame*, which is not noted as a variation in Nobel. See http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_suvarNaprabhAsasUtra.htm.

these *mantrapadas* appear to be "unintelligible."[114] I will therefore limit my discussion to Bagchi's edition, which reads:

> *śame viṣame svāhā / sugate [vigate] svāhā /*
> Alleviate misfortunes, *svāhā*! Sugata, the Departed One, *svāhā*![115]

Again, given the irregular grammar, my translation should be taken as a cautious estimation. The semantic meaning of the first *mantrapada* clearly aligns with the intention of the rite, however.[116] In translating *śame*, which is typically the singular locative form of a masculine noun meaning "tranquility," I have opted instead for the imperative verb form characteristic of *rakṣā* mantras.[117] It is, moreover, unclear as to whether the first *mantrapada* is directed toward the goddess herself or to "*sugate*," a term which cannot be convincingly taken as a feminine eponym.[118] That said, when we compare the context of *sugate* here with that of mantra three, it appears to again reference the Buddha himself. In the Bagchi edition, the *mantrapadas* then continue by paying homage to deities using unambiguous grammatical forms.[119] While

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114. Ludvik, who consults Nobel's edition, also notes the similarity of these initial phrases to the previous invocation (*Saravsatī*, 170). Moreover, while the first line of Nobel's edition does have some semantic value, a definitive translation is not possible. I have translated *śame* above as if it were *śama*, an imperative verbal form meaning "pacify/appease," yet this is also a masculine noun meaning "tranquility." Because *[v]iśame* could carry the meaning of the verbal stem √*viś,* it might conceivably be rendered as: "Enter into tranquility, *svāhā*!" This meaning would follow the force of the prior mantra meant to invoke peace (*śānti*). Another possibility is that *viś* refers to a group, in the sense of "Pacify these subjects (i.e., of Sugata)!," referring to the Brahmāṇical deities about to be mentioned. In any case, because of the opaque morphology of the mantras, these translations should be taken merely as suggestions. In line two of the mantra in Nobel's edition, the unintelligibility stems from the inclusion of *sagaṭe* together with the seemingly Prakritic retroflexion in both terms.

115. Here I have added in *vigate*, which appears in the parallel location of Nobel's edition, albeit with a retroflex "ṭ" also found in the Taishō transliteration (q.v. n119).

116. Q.v. n60.

117. Holz writes that "common elements of *rakṣā mantras*" include injunctions and second-person imperative verbs (*The Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra*, 185).

118. Q.v. n109.

119. The Nobel edition has a third, impenetrable *mantrapada* that does not appear in Bagchi's edition (*sukhatinate svāhā*). Were we to render this instead

some of the names of the deities praised here are unclear, we doubtless have mention of a number of Brahmāṇical gods, and likely at least one goddess, in addition to Sarasvatī.[120] The linguistic differences in the lines introducing mantra four and the similar lines in mantra three—both of which also appear to name the Buddha—point to an interpolation on the part of the redactor(s). These potential mantric additions effectively "mark" the rite. Sarasvatī's invocatory ritual, filled with Brahmāṇical deities and interpolated from elsewhere, now may be seen to first and foremost give praise to the Buddha and thus align with the religious identity and ritual hierarchy acceptable to Buddhist decision makers (i.e., placing the power of Buddha and the sutra above all else).

Additional evidence for the "Buddhification" of this mantra, so to speak, is found in its Taishō transliteration, which gives us *sāgara-saṃbuddhayā svāhā*[121] in place of an encomium to "To the ocean-borne one, *svāhā*" (*sāgarasaṃbhūtāya svāhā*) that appears in both Sanskrit editions.[122] While as-is this feminine instrumental ending does not scan grammatically (however well it rhymes with *svāhā*), and despite

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as *sugatinate,* the meaning of "one turned toward bliss, *svāhā*!" would be conceivable. The Taishō transliteration has "*Vigata* (蕃 *pamgaci) vatisvāhā*" (cited in George Keyworth, "Did the Silk Road(s) Extend from Dunhuang, Mount Wutai, and Chang'an to Kyoto, Japan? A Reassessment Based on Material Culture from the Temple Gate Tendai Tradition of Miidera," in *Buddhism in Central Asia II*, ed. Henrik Yukiyo Kasai and Henrik H. Sørensen, 17–67 [Leiden: Brill, 2022], n105, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004508446_003).

120. See Ludvik (*Sarasvatī*, 170–171) for details on the potential translations of these *mantrapadas.* A few notes to add here: whether the intended meaning is that reproduced in Nobel, *skandamātrāya svāhā*, or in Bagchi, *skandhamārutāya svāhā*, the two diverge quite a bit. For an interpretation of the first, given in Nobel's edition, see Ludvik (*Sarasvatī*, 170). The Bagchi edition *mantrapadas* would be rendered: "To Skanda and Māruta (i.e., Vāyu), *svāhā*!" In Nobel's edition, Vāyu is mentioned in chap. 14 (v. 35) along with "Indra, Soma, Varuṇa, Skanda, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, Prajāpati, and Hutāśana [Agni]" (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra*, 161).

121. Bagchi's edition: *sāgarasaṃbhūtāya svāhā* / To the ocean-born one *svāhā*!

122. The identity of the "ocean-born one" is a matter of debate, yet the Vedic storm god Varuṇa, who is mentioned by name later in the chapter, appears to be a viable candidate. Sarasvatī, too, has been called "the ocean-born one" in the later Tibetan tradition (Jonathan C. Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Pandita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet* [State University of New York

multiple spelling errors in the Taishō transliteration generally, the se-mantic meaning is still clear. If we transpose the final two *a-kāras* of the oblique ending, then we would get, very literally, "to the Buddha who is an ocean (i.e., of wisdom), *svāhā*!"

Further, while the initial *mantrapada* of the invocation ritual (*appease misfortunes, svāhā!*) may be alternately meant for Sarasvatī, she is named only at the very end of the invocation mantra alongside the god Brahmā:

> B: *namo bhagavatyai brāhmaṇyai namaḥ sarasvatyai devyai /*
> N: *namo bhagavate brahmaṇe / namaḥ sarasvatyai devyai /*

> B: *sidhyantu mantrapadās taṃ brahma namasyantu svāhā /*[123]
> N: *sidhyantu mantrapadā / taṃ brahmānumanyatu svāhā //*[124]

> B: Homage to the Blessed Brāhmaṇī! Homage to the Goddess Sarasvatī!
> N: Homage to Lord Brahmā! Homage to the Goddess Sarasvatī!

> B: Let (these) mantra phrases succeed! Let it[125] be honored, O Brahmā, *svāhā*!
> N: Let (these) mantra phrases succeed! Let it be granted, O Brahmā, *svāhā*!

While such variations are not surprising across written accounts of the sutra, how do we then decide which manuscript to privilege? In any case, it is clear that Sarasvatī is praised, and the mantra closes with a final supplication to her divine consort, the creator god Brahmā. While the sutra tells us elsewhere that Sarasvatī sits at the head of "unfathomable divinities" in the great assembly, it would appear that this mantra preserves a separate ritual hierarchy of the Indic world wherein Brahmā is seen as chief among the *devas*. In sum, there is quite convincingly an effort to name the Buddha first in this mantra, par-ticularly as this opening section does not align grammatically with the rest of the incantation. This may be sufficient evidence to indi-cate either that Sarasvatī is not considered by the text's author(s) to be part of the Buddhist pantheon, and thus the Buddha's name must be added to her ritual, or—by contrast—that all gods and goddesses are

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Press, 2008], 34–35). In any case, it is Lakṣmī, not Sarasvatī, who is typically believed to be born from the churning of the ocean of milk.

123. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 57.

124. Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 107.

125. In translating both Bagchi's and Nobel's versions here, I take *taṃ*, in both cases, as referring to the rite itself, and thus the line may alternately be translated: "Let this (rite) be honored, *svāhā*!"

encompassed therein. Looking deeper into the Suv, it seems that the latter is indeed the case.

Suv chapter 15 (chapter 14 in Nobel's edition) outlines a vast assembly of divine and semi-divine beings of every class. This assembly is quite similar to, and thus seems to be a forerunner of, the "invitation prayer" that opens early Tibetan *dhāraṇī* (i.e., mantra-based ritual) collections as well as tantras in the later canons.[126] Jacob P. Dalton describes this "invitation prayer" as being "directed at the mundane gods and spirits of the Indian pantheon, from Indra to the *saptamātaraḥ*," who are then enjoined to hear the *dhāraṇī* recitations of the Buddha and thus respond to them.[127] In this chapter of the Suv, we indeed have a group beginning with Brahmā and Indra (v. 15.22), enumerating by name a vast assembly of deities ending with the seven mothers (*saptamātṛsthitāni*).[128] Within this assembly are Śrī, the Buddha's interlocutor in that chapter, along with Sarasvatī, both of whom stand at the head of all divinities.[129] Here the Buddha Śākyamuni tells us that "all these deities, with minds greatly rejoicing, will give protection to those to whom the Sūtra is dear."[130] Thus, while Sarasvatī's bathing ritual invocation mantra (in its listing of gods) may initially seem to be of Brāhmaṇical rather than Buddhist origin, it is clear that the Suv presents this multitude of divinities without acknowledging the boundaries of sectarian affiliation. Instead, the text's author(s) include all divine beings within the Buddhist fold. They do not view them as borrowed from elsewhere but rather rightfully included.

Further supporting this view, in the preceding chapter on King Susaṃbhava, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni proclaims that in a former life he was this king who heard the Suv recited by the Tathāgata Akṣobhya

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126. Jacob P. Dalton, "How *Dhāraṇīs* WERE Proto-Tantric: Liturgies, Ritual Manuals, and the Origins of the Tantric," in *Tantric Traditions in Transmission and Translation*, ed. David B. Gray and Ryan Richard Overbey, 199–229 (New York: Oxford University Press), 204.

127. Ibid., 204.

128. V. 15.47–48; Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 87.

129. The text states that "Sarasvatī heads unfathomable divinities (*devatā[ḥ] ca*) just as Śrī heads all divinities" (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, v. 15.50). These goddesses thus stand at the head of all the gods.

130. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 68. For further discussion of the sutra's focus on protection, see Hidas, "Buddhism, Kingship and the Protection of the State," 234–237.

(who was then a monk and *dharmabhāṇaka* named Ratnoccaya).[131] As a result of hearing the sutra, the king (and future Buddha) achieved soteriological acceleration. As he "rejoic[ed] at the hearing the Sūtra," his body became resplendent.[132] He was reborn as a *cakravartin* for millions of "aeons" before he then became, "for inconceivable aeons," Śakra (an epithet of Indra), and "likewise Brahmā, whose mind is tranquil."[133] Because the Buddha has here been born as the Vedic gods in countless previous lifetimes, the perspective of the sutra is one that clearly incorporates all divinities within Buddhist ontology. A hierarchy is nonetheless established with the Tathāgata at the fore of all beings divine and otherwise.

The Suv therefore follows the common Mahāyāna trope of the great assembly, also taken up in detail in chapter 1 of the early tantric ritual manual, the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*. In the text's cosmology, there is no being, tree, or planet outside of the great assembly of the Buddha. Suv chapter 15 states that for those who revere the sutra, even "the asterisms ... wind and rain, will come at the proper time."[134] All phenomena and all beings are called upon for aid and protection therein, including every class of divine being. We also see that there is a relationship between divine beings and the Buddha in these sutras that eclipses his relationship with human beings in most cases. These relationships are demonstrated most clearly in those rare texts, including the Suv and the later *Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhāna sūtra* (hereafter Sta), wherein the goddesses are interlocutors with the Buddha himself.

Moving back to Sarasvatī's narrative, once the practitioner has successfully performed the aggregate components of the bathing ritual, Sarasvatī proclaims: "I myself will go there" (*svayam evāhaṃ tatra gamiṣyāmi*).[135] This statement clearly signals the invocation of her presence. Yet the Suv authors do not make clear the nature of Sarasvatī's invocation in terms of an embodied or disembodied presence. Because the goddess does not mention the invocation of her form (*rūpa*), a visible physical manifestation may not be indicated in this case. In the

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131. Suv 13:26–27; Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, chap. 13; Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, chap. 14.
132. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 64.
133. Ibid., 65.
134. Ibid., 69.
135. Q.v. n64.

preceding chapter of the Suv, after a "king of men" performs an extensive ritual centered on the sutra in his palace, the Four Great Kings state that they "will with invisible bodies" (*adṛśyair ātmabhāvair*) enter the king's palace to hear the recitation of the Dharma.[136] It is perhaps also the case that Sarasvatī and, as we shall see below, Śrī, are best understood here as "disembodied" presences. That said, it is certainly plausible that the goddess's presence is believed to enter her image. Sarasvatī also says that she will be present there in a broader sense (i.e., in terms of various public spaces) as she heals disease within the area of a town, city, and/or monastery, together with her troop of gods.

Subsequent to her description of the mundane benefits of the bathing ritual, Sarasvatī then proclaims the soteriological benefits one may gain from the sutra directly. As discussed above, the intersection of these two sources of power (goddess and text) enhances the practitioner's potential to advance successfully toward full and complete buddhahood. After the *vidhi*, Śākyamuni then praises the goddess for offering it and its myriad benefits. This is typical of the closing passages of *vidhi* narratives in Middle Period Mahāyāna texts.[137]

Unlike every other female deities' and male bodhisattva's ritual in the Suv (and the later, ca. sixth-century Sta),[138] however, no offering must first be made to the Buddha in Sarasvatī's chapter. This special circumstance therefore does not result in the same scenario of obeisance or *pūjā* to be paid to the Buddha that we will see at the outset of Śrī's invocation ritual, which allows for a clear-cut ritual hierarchy to be ascertained in the order of worship. We have seen, however, that the bathing ritual is an interpolation and, as I further suggest, there

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136. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 36; Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 47.

137. Q.v. n112. Śrī does not receive such statements from the Buddha, most likely because she is not his interlocutor in her *vidhi* narrative. When the Buddha's laudatory statements do appear, however, they take place immediately following the ritual prescriptions. While all other female deities in both the Suv and Sta assume the role of narrator in the *vidhi* itself, Śrī addresses the Buddha only at the outset of the narrative, with regard to the boons she offers to the *dharmabhāṇaka.* As mentioned below, however, she converses with the Buddha again in chap. 15 (Nobel ed. chap. 14). Further text critical work is necessary to understand the history of Śrī's chapter, and its potential accretions, as well as that of her other appearances in the text.

138. For an in-depth discussion of goddesses in the Sta, see Langberg, "Invoking the Goddess."

appears to be an addition of *mantrapadas* addressing the Buddha added by the redactor(s). As a result, those who uphold the sutra pay homage to the Buddha while bathing and, it seems, at the outset of the goddess's invocation mantra. Nonetheless, the lack of ritual obeisance paid to the Buddha is a major point of difference, and such an omission therefore may support the bathing ritual's once cross-traditional use.[139] A clear sense of ritual hierarchy is restored, however, when, at the close of her *vidhi*, Sarasvatī takes a seat next to the Buddha in the assembly. The goddess thus plainly functions as a Buddhist practitioner in the sutra. Such a relational positioning is an important index of the ritual hierarchy at work in this chapter, yet it also speaks to her role as a bodhisattva-goddess of elevated status.

2.2. The Goddess Śrī's Invocation Rituals

In Śrī's chapter, directly following that of Sarasvatī, the goddess's ritual role operates within an interdependent and triadic source of power: the Tathāgata, the text, and the goddess.[140] This is because the ritual very clearly enjoins the devotee to worship the Tathāgata Ratnakusumaguṇasāgara first, prior to the goddess. Śrī's *vidhi* thus demonstrates well the nexus of the goddess's function and position in relation to a buddha. She has laid down wholesome roots under this particular Tathāgata, a metaphor Mahāyana sutras often use for the praxis of an early-stage bodhisattva. Further, while nothing in this chapter provides evidence that she can be affirmatively classified as an advanced-level bodhisattva, she does emerge in chapter 15 as an interlocutor of the Buddha, suggesting a significant status for the goddess in the text.

Following her *dhāraṇī*-like boons to those monks who preach the Dharma, a third-person narrator (rather than the goddess) describes her first ritual as follows:

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139. As I have noted above, however, the mention of Brāhmaṇical gods in the *mantrapadas* of the bathing ritual may not necessarily be evidence of its origin outside the Buddhist fold.

140. Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra,* chap. 8; Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra,* chap. 9. Further study is necessary to determine the textual history of Śrī's narrative, namely to what extent the goddess's rituals survive in Dharmakṣema's translation.

And worship is to be made of that Tathāgata
To whom fragrance, flowers, incense, and lamps are to be given,
The name of Śrī Devī is to be declared three times
and to her, fragrance, flowers, incense, and lamps are to be given....

tasya ca tathāgatasya pūjā kartavyā / gandhāś ca puṣpāś ca dhūpāś ca dīpāś ca dātavyāḥ / śriyo devyās triṣkṛto nāmadheyam uccārayitavyam / tasyāś ca gandhaṃ puṣpaṃ dhūpaṃ dīpaṃ dātavyam.... //[141]

One must therefore honor the Buddha Ratnakusumaguṇasāgara first with multiple offerings before worshipping the goddess with offerings and repeating her name three times. The Tathāgata must then be worshipped for many days while invoking Śrī's name. Following this are verses to be recited—in lieu of a mantra with magical phrases—that describe the abundance of the Earth. These include a rich metaphor of planting and the fruition of nature's subsistence provided by earth and tree goddesses. Then, the texts states:

The name of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama,* king among sutras, is to be declared.
Śrī Mahādevī will give watch over the beings (who perform this ritual),
and she will produce great abundance for them.

suvarṇaprabhāsottamasya sūtrendrarājasya nāmadheyam uccārayitavyam / tān sattvāñ chrīr mahādevī samanvāhariṣyati / teṣāṃ ca mahatīṃ śriyaṃ kariṣyati //[142]

As the goddess's name in translation suggests, Śrī (i.e., "prosperity") produces great abundance for those who propitiate her by first performing *pūjā* to the Tathāgata. While Śrī is the central subject of this ritual, her propitiation in this ritual schema can never be entered into without first paying obeisance to both the Buddha Ratnakusumaguṇasāgara and the text, underscoring her relationship to the power of the sutra itself.

A second ritual *vidhi* then ensues. It bears commonalities with the structure of those in the Sta, as it has two parts: the preliminary *pūjā* rites that confer benefits of their own, and the subsequent goddess invocation ritual that confers an additional set of benefits. The first, the preliminary *pūjā* rites, are almost identical to Śrī's preceding ritual *vidhi*, the only exception being that it is aimed at either a layperson or a

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141. Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 60.
142. Ibid., 61.

monastic. One should "thoroughly purify his house, bathe well, clothe himself in pure white garments and wear well-perfumed clothing."[143] After performing rites akin to those above, by the power of the Buddha and the power of the text, Śrī Mahādevī will fulfill her vow to protect and increase the propitiant's house.

Then, if one wishes to invoke the goddess's presence, a more elaborate ritual must be performed, based in the recitation of a *vidyā*. The mantra begins with a section paying homage to all buddhas "past, present, and future," as well as all bodhisattvas "beginning with Maitreya." After the "*vidyāpadas*" are given, the text states:

> These are the magic words [*mantrapadas*] for the lawful consecration of the head, the words for constant success, the words whose meaning cannot deceive. When those who in the midst of beings pursue their careers with blameless merit-roots, uttering and maintaining (the magic spells) for seven years … hav[ing] done worship morning and evening to all the Lord Buddhas … in order to fulfill the omniscience of oneself and of all beings, may all … wishes succeed, may they quickly succeed.[144]

This passage states that one should live correctly, laying down meritorious roots and reciting the *vidyāpadas* regularly for seven years while worshiping all buddhas for soteriological progression, that is, in order to fulfill the attainment of omniscience (buddhahood) for himself and all beings. Only then will Śrī Mahādevī produce worldly benefits, fulfilling all wishes. The ritual apparatus for invoking Śrī's presence immediately follows:

> Having made pure that house, monastery, or forest dwelling, and having made a sacred circle with cow dung, one must offer fragrance, flowers, and incense (to the goddess). Summoning (her, i.e., by reciting the *vidyāpadas*) to a pure seat bestrewn with flowers, one must then go from that place.[145]

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143. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 49; Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 116.
144. Ibid., 50. Nobel's edition states: *ime mūrdhābhiṣekadharmatāmantrapadā / ekā saṃsiddhipadā avisaṃvādanārthapadā / sattvamadhye caribhir anavadyakuśalamūlaiḥ prāvaktadhārayamāṇaḥ sa saptavarṣā aṣṭāṅgopetopavāsopavāsinā pūrvāhṇe aparāhne / sarvabuddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ puṣpagandhadhūpaiḥ pūjāṃ kṛtvātmanaś ca sarvasattvānāṃ ca sarvajñajñānasya paripūraṇāya tena sarve cābhiprāyāḥ samṛdhyantu / kṣipraṃ samṛdhyantu /* (Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 117–118).
145. The placement of the *daṇḍas* in the last two instances of the Sanskrit text is problematic in both Nobel and Bagchi. For one, *tatas* is best taken with

Emmerick's translation continues with:

> Then at that moment, the great goddess Śrī will enter and stay there.
> Thereafter in that house, village, city, settlement, or forest retreat,
> no one at all will cause deficiency ... [the propitiant] will be replete
> with all equipment, gold, jewels, wealth, or grain, blessed with the
> supply of every blessing. Whatever merit roots are performed, the
> great goddess Śrī must be given the chief share of them all. As long as
> [the propitiant] lives, she will remain there. She will not hesitate and
> all ... desires will be fulfilled.[146]

To invoke the goddess's presence, the "*vidyāpadas*" must then be re-
cited over the "pure seat" made for her within the mandala. Śrī's ritual
therefore utilizes modalities somewhat similar to Sarasvatī's invoca-
tion *vidhi* in that it incorporates the demarcation of a mandala with
cow dung but does not include bathing with herbs. Further, unlike
Sarasvatī's bathing ritual, here there is no discussion of a goddess
image. Śrī's presence, like Sarasvatī's, appears to be a disembodied
one, taking the form of her beneficent power as there is no mention
made of her form (*rūpa*). The sutra states: "Then, having entered at
that moment [i.e., of mantra recitation], Śrī Mahādevī will be estab-
lished there" (*tat kṣaṇaṃ srīr mahādevī praviśitvā tatra sthāsyat*). As this
ritual is without an image and invokes the deity via a mandala and

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gamitavyam (in the sense of "from that place" or even "afterward"). Nobel
makes extensive notes on this passage, describing it as a "corrupt sentence,"
with views on the translation quite different from my own currently (see
Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra, 118 n24). Nobel's edition reads: *tadgṛhaṃ saṃcaukṣam
kṛtvā vihāraṃ vā cāraṇyāyatanaṃ vā gomayamaṇḍalaṃ kṛtvā gandhapuṣpadhūpaṃ
ca dātavyam / caukṣam āsanaṃ prajñapayitavyam / puṣpāvakīrṇaṃ tu gamitavyam
/ tatas...* (ibid.).

146. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light,* 50. Nobel's edition reads: *...tatkṣaṇaṃ Śrīr
mahādevī praviśitvā tatra sthāsyati / tadupādāya tatra gṛhe vā grāme vā nagare vā
nigame vā vihāre vā araṇyāyatane vā na jātu kenacid vaikalpaṃ kariṣyati / hiraṇyena
vā suvarṇena vā ratnena vā dhanena vā dhānyena va sarvopakaraṇasamṛddhāni
sarvasukhopadhānena sukhitāni bhaviṣyanti / kuśalamūlaś ca ye kriyante tebhyaḥ
sarvebhyaḥ Śriyā mahādevyā agrabhāgapratyaṃśaṃ dātavyaṃ yāvaj jīvaṃ
tatropasthāsyati na vilambiṣyati / sarvābhiprāyāṃś caiṣāṃ paripūrayiṣyatīti //*
(Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, 118–119).

a "pure seat," it is—according to Shinohara[147]—an earlier stratum of ritual practice than that focused on images.

Here we also see an ordered hierarchy of ritual propitiation. In Śrī's first *vidhi*, for example, her benefits are available only to those who worship the Tathāgata in her name and, just as significantly, who uphold the name of the "excellent *Suvarṇabhāsa*, king of *sutras*."[148] The goddess therefore functionally responds to the devotee's ritual propitiation of three powerful entities in tandem: the Tathāgata, the text, and her own inherent divine power.

Yet, if the devotee propitiates her properly, the text tells us that Śrī will be established in that place "for the extent of the propitiant's life" where she will "be of service without hesitation."[149] That said, once Śrī's presence is invoked, she must be continuously offered "the chief share" of all reward she draws to the propitiant. These sustained benefits depend wholly upon the continuous worship of the goddess. And, as per the text, the roots of merit gained through this process must benefit Śrī soteriologically. Thus, as a Buddhist practitioner, the aid she offers to the propitiant in turn aids the goddess herself in attaining progressively higher levels of bodhisattvahood.[150] Śrī's *vidyā*-based ritual fulfills both the propitiant's desires for worldly benefits and the goddess's own soteriological goals by increasing her roots of merit.

CONCLUSION

The goddesses discussed in the *Sutra of Golden Light* do not have inherently Buddhist identities, as is the case for buddhas or male bodhisattvas who are rarely described in terms of being either human or deity. Yet, as I have shown, the Suv's author(s) very much consider goddesses and other divinities to be part of the Buddhist fold as implied bodhisattvas. These findings give credence to David Seyfort Ruegg's "substratum model." Ruegg theorizes the presence of a substratum

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147. Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Mandalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

148. Emmerick, *Sūtra of Golden Light*, 49.

149. *yāvaj jīvaṃ tatropasthāsyati na vilambiṣyati* / (Bagchi, *Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*, 62).

150. Yet another text among the Gilgit cache is entitled *Śrīmahādevīvyākaraṇa*, denoting a concern on the part of Buddhist practitioners with the the goddess's progression toward buddhahood.

of Indic deities—including those that scholars typically identify as Brahmāṇical—from which the major Indic religious traditions draw.[151] Yet, as Glenn Wallis has stated of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*,[152] the assembly of beings in this text is "totalizing." In other words, the ritual hierarchy constructed in the sutra is an effective way for the author(s) to navigate the competitive religious landscape of ancient India.

In the Suv, we encounter female deities who are pan-Indian (even at points pan-Asian) and still widely popular today. Sarasvatī bestows *dhāraṇī* in the mode of an advanced bodhisattva. I further suggest that the context-sensitive term *dhāraṇī* be understand in this text as a mode of "complete retention" for recollection of the Dharma, its exegesis, and its powerful and eloquent explanation (as opposed to a form of mantra that invokes deities). Thus, there is a marked differentiation between mantra/*vidyā* and *dhāraṇī* in this text. Moreover, Śrī and Sarasvatī are both implicitly characterized as bodhisattva practitioners and granters of boons to Mahāyānist preachers. Nonetheless, while the text's author(s) do not equate Śrī's bestowal of powerful oratorical abilities with *dhāraṇī*, she vows to impart learned eloquence upon the preaching monk who expounds the Suv, as well as enhanced facility with the text.

In sum, Sarasvatī and Śrī offer benefits, provide advanced instruction, and aid in roles that are implicitly bodhisattva-like, yet only very rarely do we encounter female deities who are explicitly described as "bodhisattvas" in Middle Period Mahāyāna texts. Nonetheless, the goddesses clearly demonstrate agency in the Suv as Mahāyāna practitioners who work on behalf of the Dharma. They vow to compassionately aid beings as bodhisattvas through the format of mantra-based rituals, providing almost completely mundane benefits for ritual practitioners. That said, the gift of *dhāraṇī* imparts eloquence and even soteriological benefits to the preaching monk. Overall, Sarasvatī and Śrī work in tandem with, and bolster, the inherent power of the sutra and all buddhas.

151. David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism/Hinduism in South Asia and of Buddhism with "Local Cults" in Tibet and the Himalayan Region* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008). This is a topic for further investigation and beyond the scope of the present study.
152. Wallis, *Mediating the Power of Buddhas*, 163–164.

Finally, in both goddess narratives, we see mantras used together with other ritual forms to physically invoke the female deities' disembodied presence. Through the gifts they offer to practitioners, the narratives of these two goddesses introduce tantric ritual practices into a Mahāyāna sutra. Their propitiation in the text through mantra-based rituals demonstrates that the connection of female deities to mantra recitation is starting to gain higher visibility across the Indian traditions in the fifth to sixth centuries CE. What's more, these invocation rituals are, in turn, central to the increasing importance of female deity reverence in Mahāyāna Indian Buddhism during this period.