

The Supreme Array Scripture: A New Interpretation of the Title “*Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*”

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Abstract This article argues for a new interpretation of the Sanskrit compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha* as it is used in the common title of the Mahāyāna text the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*. The author begins by providing a brief history of the sūtra’s appellations in Chinese and Tibetan sources. Next, the meanings of *gaṇḍa* (the problematic member of the compound) are explored. The author proposes that contemporary scholars have overlooked a meaning of *gaṇḍa* occurring in some compounds, wherein *gaṇḍa* can mean simply “great,” “big” or “massive.” This general sense is particularly common in the compound *gaṇḍa-śaila* (a “massive rock” or “boulder”) and is found in such texts as the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Harṣacarita*. Following the discussion of *gaṇḍa*, the author examines the term *vyūha* (“array”) as it is used in the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*. The article concludes with the suggestion that a more appropriate translation of the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* would be “The Supreme Array Scripture.”

Keywords *Gaṇḍa* · *Vyūha* · *Gaṇḍavyūha* · Mahāyāna · Sūtra

Introduction

In the following pages, I examine in some detail the meanings of and relationship between two Sanskrit words, *gaṇḍa* and *vyūha*. I do this in order to offer a new interpretation of the title of the Indian Mahāyāna narrative commonly referred to as the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*. While my aim is quiet modest, I feel that this title is worthy of more serious investigation, if only to provide an alternative to the existing body of interpretations. For some time

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now, I have been deeply dissatisfied with the attempts to translate *gaṇḍa-vyūha* into English largely because they seem to make little sense when viewed in light of both the general worldview of this Buddhist text and the narrative specifics of the hero sudhana's journey in search of supreme enlightenment. To rectify this situation, I first examine a meaning of *gaṇḍa* generally overlooked by scholars of this Buddhist text. I then investigate aspects of the *sūtra*'s narrative in order to illuminate its conception of *vyūha*. Having done this, I offer a new interpretation of the compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha* that hopefully provides readers with a more satisfying English gloss, which at least attempts to relate the *sūtra*'s title to the general worldview and narrative thrust of the text.¹

When and where the story of Sudhana's quest for enlightenment was first called the "*Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*" is not known. We find our earliest dateable evidence of the narrative in the Chinese catalogues of the Buddhist canon composed in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries CE.² According to these catalogues, the first complete Chinese translation of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* was finished in 420 CE by Buddhahadra, wherein the *Gaṇḍavyūha* forms the final "chapter" of the immense *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 (T 278),³ and is referred to as *Ru fajie pin* 入法界品 (Skt **Dharmadhātu-praveśana-parivarta*).⁴ Śikṣānanda's translation of the *Huayan jing* (T 279) in the late seventh century also uses this title for the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, but Prajñā's independent translation of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (T 293) at the end of the eighth century calls the text *Ru bukesiyi jietuo jingjie Puxian xing yuan* 入不可思議解脫境界普賢行願 (Skt **Acintyavimokṣa-gocara-praveśana-samantabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna*).⁵ Although unknown, the original title of Sudhana's story may have been either of these.⁶ It is widely believed that Fazang 法藏 (643–712 CE) in his commentary on the *Huayan jing* (T 278), the *Huayan jing tan xuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記 (T 1733), was the first in the Chinese tradition to identify the term *Huayan*

¹ Although I refer in the following pages to some Chinese and Tibetan sources, I primarily focus on the Sanskrit texts. I do this in order to understand how the Indic readers of the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* may have understood the compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha*. However, I am not claiming that the Indian interpretation is necessarily the "true" or "correct" reading. Nevertheless, I believe that attempting to reconstruct how Indian Buddhists interpreted this compound is a worthwhile pursuit within a larger agenda aimed at a better understanding of Indian Buddhism.

² The following information on the dates of Chinese sources and translations is from Gómez (1967, pp. xxiii–xxix). The catalogues consulted by Gómez are themselves part of the Chinese Buddhist canon and are numbered Taishō (T) 2145–49, 2151, 2153–54 and 2157.

³ The *Huayan jing* is generally referred to as the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* in Sanskrit. However, there seems to have been some confusion in the Chinese tradition regarding the Sanskrit equivalent of *huayan*. See below.

⁴ This reconstructed Sanskrit may be translated as "The Chapter on Entering the Dharma-realm." See below for a discussion of *dharmadhātu*.

⁵ This may be translated, "The Vow Concerning the Course of Conduct of Samantabhadra and the Entry into the Range of the Inconceivable Liberation."

⁶ Gómez favours **Acintyavimokṣa-sūtra* (1967, p. lxiv); while Afshar (1981, p. 6) suggests **Dharmadhātu-praveśana*. In my opinion, the evidence is not conclusive.

華嚴 with the Sanskrit expression *gaṇḍavyūha*, rather than *avatamsaka*.⁷ However, Ōtake (2007, pp. 88–89) has recently argued persuasively that *Huayan* is the Chinese translation of Sanskrit *avatamsaka* (“garland”), and not of *gaṇḍavyūha*. If Ōtake is correct, this confusion in the Chinese tradition may have misled modern scholars trying to interpret the compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha*. Moreover, Prajñā’s translation was often referred to simply as the forty-fascicle *Huayan jing*, in order to distinguish it from the sixty-fascicle *Huayan jing* (Buddhabhadra’s translation of the entire *Avatamsaka*) and the eighty-fascicle *Huayan jing* (Śikṣānanda’s translation of the entire *Avatamsaka*), thereby further conflating the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and *Avatamsaka* sūtras.

The extant Tibetan *Avatamsaka-sūtra* was translated into Tibetan in the early period of Buddhist transmission (seventh to ninth centuries), possibly during the “Great Revision” sponsored by kings Khri lde srong btsan (reigned c. 800–815 CE) and Khri gtsug lde btsan (reigned c. 815–836 CE).⁸ The *Gaṇḍavyūha* is only found in the Tibetan canon as part of the *Avatamsaka*. Although the date of the Tibetan translation (early ninth century) is about contemporaneous with Prajñā’s Chinese translation (end of the eighth century), the surviving Kanjur versions of the Tibetan correspond closely to the surviving Nepalese Sanskrit versions and not Prajñā’s version. The Tibetan title of the *Avatamsaka* is *Sangs rgyas phal po che* (Skt **Buddhāvataṃsaka*). Here *sangs rgyas* is the common Tibetan word for Sanskrit *buddha*; *phal po che* is a “mass, troop, or host.”⁹ Thus *Sangs rgyas phal po che* means something like “The Host of the Buddha,” or “The Host of Buddhas.” Note that there is no reference to flowers in the Tibetan title of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.¹⁰ Tibetans refer specifically to the *Gaṇḍavyūha* as the *sDong pos bkod pa* or *sDong pos brgyan pa*. Common meanings for *sdong po* are “the trunk of a tree, a stalk, or a stem.”¹¹ Here the word has the ergative particle –s appended, implying an instrumental sense. *Bkod pa* means a “plan, form, shape, figure, building, arrangement, creation,”¹² and *brgyan pa* is “to be adorned, decorated.”¹³ Both *bkod pa* and *brgyan pa* seem to be translating Sanskrit *vyūha*, and *sdong po* appears to be interpreting Sanskrit *gaṇḍa* in its meaning as a “stalk.” Thus the Tibetans translated *gaṇḍavyūha* as either an “arrangement with stalks” (*sDong pos bkod pa*) or “adorned with stalks” (*sDong pos brgyan pa*).

Turning to the Sanskrit texts, we witness that the first *Bhāvanākrama*, the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and all extant Sanskrit manuscripts

⁷ See Ōtake (2007, p. 88).

⁸ See Skilling (1997, p. 90); Steinkellner (1995, pp. 14–15); Harrison (1992, pp. 72–73); Gómez (1967, pp. xxx–xxx).

⁹ Jäschke (1995 [1881], p. 342).

¹⁰ This suggests that the Tibetans may have understood *avatamsaka* metaphorically as a garland of buddhas, rather than literally as a garland of flowers.

¹¹ Jäschke (1995 [1881], p. 296).

¹² Jäschke (1995 [1881], p. 96).

¹³ Jäschke (1995 [1881], p. 123).

refer to Sudhana's story as the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*.¹⁴ In classical Sanskrit usage, the word *vyūha* possesses a range of meanings commonly indicating an "arrangement," "array," "military array" or "manifestation."¹⁵ It is found as the final member in the titles of a number of Mahāyāna sūtras.¹⁶ Its specific meaning in the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* will be examined in detail below. While the basic meaning of *vyūha* is fairly straightforward, the interpretation of *gaṇḍa* in this compound is problematic. Common meanings for the word in classical Sanskrit are "cheek, the side of the face, the side, a bubble, boil, pimple or goitre."¹⁷ Using this meaning of *gaṇḍa*, Kern translates *gaṇḍavyūha* as "The structure of the world, which is compared to a bubble."¹⁸ In Buddhist Sanskrit and Pāli sources, it can mean "the stalk of a plant."¹⁹ Edgerton (1953, p. 208) states that in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) it may also mean a "piece, part or portion." Most modern translations of the title usually employ one of these definitions for *gaṇḍa* with somewhat inelegant or even monstrous results. Edgerton (1954, p. 50) suggests "supernal manifestation in (many small) sections." Gómez (1967, p. lxii), generally following Edgerton, offers "[The Sūtra Containing] Manifestations in Sections." Warder (1980, p. 424), understanding *gaṇḍa* as a flower stalk, translates *gaṇḍavyūha* as "array of flowers." Davidson (1995, p. 294) chooses the literal (if enigmatic) "The Stemmy Array Scripture." Some other highly interpretative attempts are "The Sacred Speech which is the display of (the Buddha's Body that is) the trunk (of the Kalpa-Tree, as it is embodied in the Dharma's Body),"²⁰ "The Harmony of the Young Sapling Sutra,"²¹ "Appearance of the *uṣṇīṣa*, the prominence on the Buddha's head"²² and "the imaginary arrangement and purification (or salvation) of the five fold existences of transmigrating sentient beings in all the worlds."²³

Gaṇḍa

All of the above translations ignore another meaning of the word *gaṇḍa* when used in compounds. The standard Sanskrit-English lexicon of Monier-Williams suggests the alternative "the chief, excellent, best" as a meaning for *gaṇḍa* in such compounds as *gaṇḍa-grāma* ("any large village"), *gaṇḍa-*

¹⁴ See Gómez (1967, pp. lxx–lxxvi).

¹⁵ Monier-Williams (1899, p. 1041).

¹⁶ Besides the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, some other examples are the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, and the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* sūtras.

¹⁷ Monier-Williams (1899, p. 344).

¹⁸ See Kern (1882–1884, p. 407) as cited in Fontein (1967, p. 176, n. 13).

¹⁹ See Edgerton (1953, p. 208); Davids and Stede (1921–1925; p. 241).

²⁰ Afshar (1981, p. 6).

²¹ Paul with Wilson (1985, p. 98).

²² Nou and Frédéric (1996, p. 126).

²³ Murakami (2006, p. 147). See also note below.

mūrkhā (“exceedingly foolish”), and *gaṇḍa-sīlā* (“any large rock”).²⁴ Although the first two are only attested in Sanskrit lexicons, the last example and its variant, *gaṇḍa-śaila*, are found in a number of Sanskrit texts.²⁵

The most obvious examples are from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (c. 900 CE),²⁶ which employs this use of *gaṇḍa* twice.²⁷ In the first example, Brahmā says the following about a boar that mysteriously appears from his nose and suddenly grows to the size of an elephant:

dṛṣṭo 'ṅguṣṭaśiromātraḥ kṣaṇād gaṇḍaśīlāsamaḥ /
api svid bhagavān eṣa yajño me khedayan manaḥ // III.13.22 //

He appeared as only the size of the tip of my thumb,
But in an instant he is equal in size to a massive boulder.
Perhaps this is the Lord Yajña disturbing my mind?

Here *gaṇḍa-sīlā* is a *karmadhāraya* compound where *gaṇḍa* (a noun) functions appositionally with the second member and therefore may be rendered in English as an adjective or adverb. In other words, a “rock that is chief” (*gaṇḍa-sīlā*) is “a large rock.” Since the boar was said to have grown to the size of an elephant (*gaja-mātraḥ*) only a few verses earlier,²⁸ we may assume this is a very large rock, a massive boulder, or as Böthlingk and Roth translate “ein ungeheurer Felsblock.”²⁹ The meaning of *gaṇḍa* in this context seems to be an extension of the idea that it is something that sticks out—in this instance the size of the boulder causes it to stick out above other stones within the general category of rocks. This interpretation makes good sense in this verse in which Brahmā is emphatically stressing the size of the rock: it is not an average size stone, but the greatest of stones, that is, an elephant-sized boulder.

Our second example from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a description of the body of the giant Rākṣasi Pūtānā slain by Kṛṣṇa. In this verse we read that the demoness possessed a body that had

iṣāmātrogradamaṣṭrāsyam girikandaranāsikam /
gaṇḍaśailastanam raudraṃ prakīrṇāruṇāmūrdhajam // X.6.15 //

A mouth of huge teeth the size of plough shafts,
Nostrils that were mountain caves,
Fierce breasts like giant boulders, and scattered red hair.

²⁴ Monier-Williams (1899, p. 344). See also, Böthlingk and Roth (1856–1858, p. 643), where similar definitions are given for these compounds.

²⁵ Some of those mentioned by Monier-Williams (1899, p. 344) are the *Harivaṃśa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Śiṣupala-vadha* and *Bālarāmāyaṇa*.

²⁶ For this date for the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, see Kinsley (1972, p. 163, n. 43).

²⁷ The following references to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are from the edition by Prabhupāda (2003). All translations of the Sanskrit are my own. Although *gaṇḍa* has this meaning in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is more commonly used in its meaning as “cheek.” For examples, see *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* III.13.32, III.15.41, V.25.4, X.29.39, X.33.7, X.33.21, and X.83.29.

²⁸ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* III.13.19.

²⁹ Böthlingk and Roth (1856–1858, p. 643).

Every line of this verse stresses that Pūtanā is massive in size. Here, as in *Bhāgavata Purāna* III.13.22, *gaṇḍa* appears to mean something like “giant,” “massive” or “great.” Thus once again *gaṇḍa-śaila* is being used to emphasize the exceptional size of rocks.

One might assume that this is a rather idiosyncratic and late use of the word *gaṇḍa*, were it not for the appearance of this same meaning in the much earlier *Harivaṃśa* (c. 300 CE).³⁰ In this self-proclaimed appendix to the *Mahābhārata*, the compound *gaṇḍaśaila* appears on two occasions in lists of weapons carried by the demons (*daitya*, *dānava*) to use in their epic battle against the gods (*sura*, *deva*). The first list mentions such items as “giant rocks” (*gaṇḍaśaila*), rocks (*śaila*), discs (*cakra*) and iron bars (*parigha*).³¹ The second list includes maces (*gadā*), discs (*cakra*), axes (*saparaśvadhā*), stones (*aśma*), massive boulders (*gaṇḍaśaila*), spears (*paṭṭisa*), javelins (*bhīṇḍipāla*), iron bars (*parigha*), clubs (*musala*), slings (*kṣepaṇīya*) and hammers (*mudgara*).³² Notice that in both lists *gaṇḍaśaila* is paired with *śaila* and *aśma*, suggesting that *gaṇḍaśaila* is a particular type of rock to be distinguished from others.³³ In fact, the second list makes clear the manner in which these *gaṇḍaśailas* differ from other stones: they are “like mountains” (*adri-saḍṛśa*),³⁴ and therefore make excellent weapons to use against the *devas*.³⁵

Lest one think that this use of *gaṇḍa* only appears in Vaiṣṇava literature, let me point out yet another example of *gaṇḍaśaila*—this time from the *Harṣacarita* composed by Bāṇa in the 7th century.³⁶ In the relevant passage of the narrative, Bhaṇḍi (King Harṣa’s cousin) displays to the king the spoils of the Mālwa king recently conquered by Harṣa’s brother Rājyavardhana. The passage reads:

*narapatinā sa “evaṃ kriyatām” ity abhyanuñjāto darśayābabhūva /
tadyāthā—anavaratagalitamadamadirāmodamukharamadhukarajūṭajāṭila-*

³⁰ For this date of the *Harivaṃśa*, see Vaidya (1969); Hein (1986).

³¹ The Sanskrit verse in the Vaidya edition (1969) reads *gaṇḍaśailaiś ca śailaiś ca pariḥaiś cottamāyudhaiḥ / cakraiś ca daityapravarāś cakrur ānanditam balam || 33.30 ||*. This corresponds to 43.29 in the Bhumipati and Pūranaprajñā edition (2005).

³² The Sanskrit verses in Vaidya (1969) read *te gadābhiś ca gurvībhiś cakraiś ca saparaśvaghaiḥ / kālakaḥpaiś ca musalaiḥ kṣepaṇīyaiś ca mudgaraiḥ || aśmabhiś cāṭṭa-saḍṛśair gaṇḍaśailaiś ca daṃṣṭitaiḥ / paṭṭisair bhīṇḍipālaiś ca pariḥaiś cottamāyasaiḥ || 37.9–10 ||*. These correspond in the Bhumipati and Pūranaprajñā edition (2005) to *te gadābhiś ca gurvībhiś cakraiś ca saparaśvadhaiḥ / aśmabhiś cādri-saḍṛśair gaṇḍaśailaiś ca daṃṣṭitaiḥ / paṭṭisair bhīṇḍipālaiś ca pariḥaiś cottamāyasaiḥ / ... kālakaḥpaiś ca musalaiḥ kṣepaṇīyaiś ca mudgaraiḥ... || 47.9–11 ||*

³³ A third example of *gaṇḍaśaila* having the same meaning appears between these lists in a description of an illusion (*nirmīta*) created by the demon Māyā as a weapon. The verse reads *sa śilājālavitatām gaṇḍaśailāṭṭahāsinīm / pādapotkataḥkūṭāgrām kandarākīrṇakānanām* (Vaidya 1969, p. 36.22; Bhumipati and Pūranaprajñā 2005, p. 46.22).

³⁴ Here I am following the Bhumipati and Pūranaprajñā edition (2005), which seems to make more sense than *aṭṭa-saḍṛśair* found in the Vaidya edition (1969).

³⁵ Similar to *gaṇḍaśaila*, *mahāśilā* is mentioned in Sanskrit lexicons as a type of weapon. See Monier-Williams (1899, p. 801). See below, for the possible connection between *gaṇḍa* and *mahā-*.

³⁶ For the dates of Bāṇa, see Kane (1918, pp. xiii–xx).

*karatapaṭṭapaṅkilagaṇḍān, gaṇḍaśailān iva jaṅgamān...
anekasahasrasaṃkhyān kariṇaḥ...*³⁷.

Cowell and Thomas (1897, p. 225) translate:

The king consenting to this being done, he displayed the booty, such as elephants in thousands, great as moving **boulders**, with muddy cheeks whose temples were hairy with swarms of bees clamouring about the intoxicating scent of incessantly dripping ichor.

Here we witness the same comparison made in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* III.13.19, but in reverse: rather than a huge boulder (*gaṇḍaśaila*) compared to an elephant (*gaja*), we see elephants (*kariṇaḥ*) compared to moving boulders (*gaṇḍaśailān jaṅgamān*). Thus, yet again, we see a clear indication of *gaṇḍa* used in the sense of big or great.

If the above cited references from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Harivaṃśa* and *Harṣacarita* indicate anything, they demonstrate that *gaṇḍa* has been employed in numerous Sanskrit texts across several centuries in appositional compounds (*karmadhāraya*) with the word *śila* or *śaila*, where it clearly functions in a different sense than its meanings as a cheek, bubble, boil or goitre. From these contexts, it is clear that *gaṇḍa* takes on a sense that transforms ordinary rocks into massive boulders. Moreover, this interpretation of *gaṇḍa* is confirmed by the earliest extant Sanskrit lexicon, the *Amarakośa*, wherein Amarasimha states that *gaṇḍaśailas* are “massive stones that have fallen off a mountain” (2.3.6).³⁸ This use suggests an adjectival meaning not dissimilar to the Sanskrit prefix *mahā-*, which can have such meanings as “great,” “big,” “large,” or “massive.” In this context, the meaning of *gaṇḍa* might possibly carry even greater emphasis or a more superlative sense than simply “great,” such as “the greatest or biggest of rocks.”³⁹ Moreover, these examples may provide a key to interpret the compounds *gaṇḍa-grāma*, and *gaṇḍa-mūrka*⁴⁰ mentioned by some Sanskrit lexicographers: a *gaṇḍa-grāma* is a “great (big) village” or “the greatest of villages,” and a *gaṇḍa-mūrka* is the “chief fool” or the “greatest of fools.”

One might protest that these examples are from non-Buddhist sources and therefore cannot be used to interpret *gaṇḍa-vyūha* as the title of a Buddhist sūtra. However, as Edgerton (1953, p. xxi) points out in the preface to his philological opus, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, Buddhist literature generally employs Sanskrit words with their standard Sanskrit meanings. Edgerton makes clear that his dictionary is meant to

³⁷ This passage is from *Ucchavāsa* VII; see Kane (1918, p. 122). Notice Bāṇa’s alliteration of *-gaṇḍān, gaṇḍaśailān*, which plays off the multiple meanings of *gaṇḍa*.

³⁸ *gaṇḍaśailāstu cyutāḥ sthūlopalā gireḥ* (Miśra 1972, p. 137). Miśra (1972, p. vii) supports K. G. Oka’s dating of the *Amarakośa* as a work of the fourth century CE.

³⁹ This interpretation is supported by Kṛṣṇamitra, an eighteenth century commentator on the *Amarakośa*, who writes *śailānām gaṇḍā iva gaṇḍaśailāḥ bhūkampādinā galitāḥ* (Miśra 1972, p. 137), which means something like “massive rocks are similar to the biggest/greatest (*gaṇḍā*) of boulders, which due to such things as earthquakes, have fallen down.”

⁴⁰ See Monier-Williams (1899, p. 344), and Böthlingk and Roth (1856–1858, p. 643).

supplement lexicons of standard Sanskrit such as Böhlingk and Roth's *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. Therefore, when translating Sanskrit Buddhist texts, one should apply the standard Sanskrit meanings of a word unless there is good justification for rejecting the standard Sanskrit meanings for a specifically BHS meaning. The question then arises whether the *gaṇḍa* in *gaṇḍa-vyūha* has a standard Sanskrit meaning or a specifically Buddhist Hybrid meaning.

The most logical place to look to resolve this issue is the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* itself. The word *gaṇḍa* appears three or four times in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. The first occurrence in the Vaidya edition is in the compound *nānābodhi-gaṇḍavyūhān*.⁴¹ However, in the Suzuki and Idzumi edition the text reads *nānābodhimaṇḍavyūhān*.⁴² The oldest surviving Sanskrit manuscript, dated to the twelfth century, supports the Suzuki and Idzumi edition;⁴³ as does the reading in the Derge Kanjur version of the Tibetan,⁴⁴ and the three Chinese translations.⁴⁵ This counter evidence appears significant enough to set aside this passage in favor of a more definitive example.

The second example occurs in compound within a verse that the bodhisattva Maitreya recites to the *Gaṇḍavyūha*'s hero, Sudhana. In fact, Edgerton (1953, p. 208) cites this compound as evidence for *gaṇḍa* used to render the Buddhist hybrid sense of "piece," "part," or "portion." In this verse, Maitreya says to Sudhana:

*Lokacakrabhavacakram āsritaṃ pañcagaṇḍagaticakram ohitam /
Sarvasattvadukha*⁴⁶ *cakracchedanaṃ dharmacakrataru vartayiṣyasi //*⁴⁷

⁴¹ See Vaidya's edition (1960b, 214.1) of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. Henceforth, references to this edition are abbreviated V followed by the page and line number. The full passage reads: *nānāvūhameghaparisaṃchannān, nānākalpanāmasaṃkhyeyān, nānātathāgatavaṃśanirdeśān, nānātryadhvanayāvātārān, nānādīkprasaraṃpraveśān, nānādharmadhātuprasaraṃparyāpannān nānādharmadhātūtalapraveśān, nānākāśatalavyavasthānān, nānābodhigaṇḍavyūhān, nānātathāgatavikurvitaprabhān, nānābuddhasiṃhāsanaṃvyūhān, nānātathāgataparśanmaṇḍalasamudrān nānātathāgataparśanmaṇḍalaparivartān nānātathāgatopāyakausalyaparīdīpanān, nānātathāgatadharmacakrapravartananayān, nānātathāgatatarāṅgarutanirghoṣamuktān nānāmantranayasāgaranirdeśān nānāsūtrāntameghānuravamānānādrākṣī.*

⁴² Suzuki and Idzumi (1949, 278.11). Henceforth, references to his edition are abbreviated SI followed by the page and line number.

⁴³ This manuscript, now in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society (London), is catalogued as Hodgson 2. Based on my reading of a microfilm copy, on folio 146.5v (Newari numbering), the manuscript clearly reads *bodhimaṇḍa*.

⁴⁴ The relevant passage reads: *snying po byang chub sna tshogs kyiṣ bryān pa* (**nānābodhimaṇḍavyūha*). Citations of the Tibetan are from the Derge Kanjur version. For this passage, see *The Tibetan Tripitaka: Taipei Edition* (1991, A126v.4). Henceforth, references to the Derge are abbreviated D and are followed by the Tibetan volume, folio number (Tibetan numbering system), r or v (for recto or verso) and the line number.

⁴⁵ The three Chinese translations also support the reading *bodhimaṇḍa* rather than *bodhigaṇḍa*; see 種種道場 (T. 278.732b3); 種種如來菩提場 (T. 279.381c13); and 種種如來菩提場 (T. 293.752c7). I would like to thank Hudaya Kandahjaya for these references.

⁴⁶ SI 484.10 reads *duḥkha*.

⁴⁷ V 384.29–385.2 = SI 484.9–10

Inhabiting the wheel of becoming, the wheel of the worlds,
 Having laid down the wheel of the five-fold states of existence,
 Cutting off the wheel of suffering of all beings,
 You will turn the supreme wheel of Dharma.

Here I am using the definition of *gaṇḍa* as “part,” following Edgerton’s (ibid.) translation of the compound *pañca-gaṇḍa-gati-cakra* as “the wheel of the five-partite (five-fold) states of existence.” Unfortunately, all three Chinese translations of this verse gloss the compound without offering a specific term for *gaṇḍa* or even mentioning the five states of existence.⁴⁸ The Tibet (D A 301v.2) translates this compound with *shu ba’i lam rgyud lnga yi ’khor lo*, which renders into English as something like “the wheel of the five states of existence that is [painful like] a boil.” Murakami (2006, p. 147), influenced by the Tibetan, translates this compound as “the wheel of the five boils of transmigrating existences.”⁴⁹ However, the compound *pañca-gaṇḍa-gati-cakra* is not a common Buddhist expression, and it seems that the Tibetans were at a loss to understand its meaning, and therefore opted for *gaṇḍa* as a boil (*shu ba*), rather than stalk (*sdong po*). Tibetan translators used this same term (*shu ba*) for the Sanskrit *gaṇḍa* in the following verse from Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

gaṇḍo ’yaṃ pratimākāro grhīto ghaṭṭanāsahaḥ /
*tr̥ṣṇāndhena mayā tatra vyathāyāṃ kutra kupyate // 6.44 //*⁵⁰

I, blind with craving, have seized upon this boil in my image,
 Which cannot bear to be touched.
 Since this is the case, when I am in pain,
 What reason is there to be angry?

Whereas this Tibetan term makes good sense in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* verse in which Śāntideva compares his body to a boil, it does not fit as nicely with our verse from the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.

⁴⁸ Buddhahadra glosses with 一切眾生輪 迴流生死輪 爲轉淨法輪 除滅眾苦輪 (T. 278.775. a14–15); while Śikṣānanda and Prajñā both translate 一切眾生輪 沈迷諸有輪 汝當轉法輪 令其斷苦輪 (T. 279.426.c11–12; T. 293.821.c28–29). Interestingly, in an earlier verse in the same set of verses by Maitreya the compound *pañca-gati-cakra-maṇḍale* occurs (V 381.10 = SI 482.5), which Buddhahadra translates as 見五道輪轉 (T. 278.774.b16), and Śikṣānanda and Prajñā both translate as 五趣常流轉 (T. 279.426a15; T. 293.821.b1). Why the Chinese would provide a more literal translation in this case and not in our verse is a mystery to me. Typical of their translation style, the Tibetans provide a close rendering: *’gro rgyud lnga yi ’khor lo’i dkyil ’khor* (D A 300r.3).

⁴⁹ Murakami (2006, p. 147) uses this passage as a key to interpret *gaṇḍa-vyūha* as “the **imaginary arrangement and purification** (or salvation) of the five fold existences of transmigrating sentient beings in all the worlds.” I am at a loss to understand how *gaṇḍa* as boil becomes “purification” when compounded with *vyūha*. A more accurate translation based on Murakami’s interpretation would have to be the “arrangement of boils,” which to me seems highly unlikely.

⁵⁰ See Vaidya (1960a). For Tibetan *shu ba* used to translate Sanskrit *gaṇḍa*, see Chandra (1959, p. 2359). Chandra specifically refers to this passage from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

Related to the compound *pañca-gaṇḍa-gati-cakram* is the phrase *pañcagaṇḍakam saṃsāracakram calācalaṃ* that is found at least four times in the *Divyāvadāna*,⁵¹ which Rotman has recently translated as “the ever-turning five-spoked wheel of saṃsāra” (2008, p. 306). Edgerton (1953, p. 208), however, cites this phrase as evidence for his BHS interpretation of *gaṇḍa* as “part.” Reading *pañca-gaṇḍakam* as an exocentric (*bahuvrīhi*) compound, we can translate the phrase as “the ever-turning wheel of saṃsāra of which the *gaṇḍaka* are five.” The question here is whether *gaṇḍaka* refers to the spokes of the wheel (are the “stalks” of the wheel its spokes?), or to the spaces in-between the spokes. It seems clear that the authors (or editors) of our *Gaṇḍavyūha* and *Divyāvadāna* passages are referring to the famous Buddhist graphic illustration of the universe commonly known as the “Wheel of Existence” that depicts the five states (*gati*) of existence—the gods (*deva*), men, animals, hungry ghosts (*preta*), and hells—as separate sections or portions inside a wheel.⁵² This view is supported by the *Gaṇḍavyūha* passage, wherein *gati-cakra* appears to be a synonym for the two preceding compounds, *loka-cakra* and *bhava-cakra*. Thus all three compounds would also be synonyms for the *Divyāvadāna*’s *saṃsāra-cakra*. If this is the case, *gaṇḍa* and *gaṇḍaka* in the compounds *pañca-gaṇḍa* and *pañca-gaṇḍaka* would be referring to the portions between the spokes of the wheel and not the spokes themselves. Therefore, *gaṇḍa* could very likely have the BHS meaning that Edgerton suggests as simply “part,” “piece,” or “portion.”⁵³ This sense seems to be an extension of the meaning of *gaṇḍa* as something that sticks out or is separated from others of its class.

The word *gaṇḍa* appears only twice more in the text. Both are in compound with *vyūha* in the concluding sentence of the narrative referring to the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* itself:

*aryāgaṇḍavyūhān mahādharmaparyāyād yathālabdhah
sudhanakalyāṇamitraparyupāsana-caryaikedeśaḥ āryagaṇḍavyūho
mahāyānasūtraratnarājaḥ samāptaḥ.*⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Vaidya (1959, 112.6–7; 174.20–22; 468.31–32; 480.17–18). This expression appears as a part of a stock formula describing the attainment of sainthood (*arhātva*) by a disciple of the Buddha. The first example in the *Divyāvadāna* occurs in the story about Svāgāta. The passage reads *bhagavatā pravrajīta upasampādīto manasikāraśca dattaḥ / tena yujyamānena ghaṭamānena vyāyacchamānena idameva pañcagaṇḍakam saṃsāracakram calācalaṃ viditvā sarvasaṃskāragatīḥ śatanapatanavikiraṇavidhvansanadharmatayā parāhatya sarvakleśaprahāṇād arhattvaṃ sāksātkṛtam* / (Vaidya 1959, 112.6–7). Unfortunately, the story of Svāgāta in the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya contains a different stock formula: *de de ltaṅ rab tu byung nas gcig pu dben par bag yod pa rtun pa dang ldan pa bdag nyid btang bar gnas pa na rigs kyi bu dag gang gi phyir skra dang kha spu bregs te gos ngur smrig dag bgos nas yang dag pa kho nar dad bas khyim nas khyim med par rab tu 'byung bar byed pa / tshangs par spyod pa'i mtha' bla na med pa de tshes de nyid la rang gi mngon par shes pas mngon sum du byas te bsgrubs nas bdag gi skye ba zad do // tshangs par spyod pa spyad do //* (D nya 26r.3–4).

⁵² Often a sixth state, the *asura* is included. See Edgerton (1953, pp. 208–209).

⁵³ Here one might even speculate that the Buddhists developed this particular meaning of *pañca-gaṇḍa* on analogy with the common Buddhist compound *pañca-skandha*.

⁵⁴ V 436.27–28 = SI 548.10–11.

The noble *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the royal gem of Mahāyāna sūtras, a single portion of Sudhana's course of conduct to serve the good friends as obtained from the great Dharma discourse [known as] the noble *Gaṇḍavyūha*, is concluded.

Unfortunately, this statement is not particularly useful for figuring out the meaning of the compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha*. Interestingly, this passage seems to suggest that there are two texts called *Gaṇḍavyūha*: the sūtra just concluded, and another *dharmaparyāya* of which the sūtra is only a single part. Perhaps this reference to two texts is an allusion to the Mahāyāna notion that many sūtras are only shorter versions of longer discourses hidden from mortals in heavenly abodes or under the sea protected by the Nāgas.⁵⁵ Regardless of its deeper significance, this concluding passage does provide us with one useful piece of information—it tells us that the compound *gaṇḍavyūha* was understood (here at least) as a singular, masculine noun. This reading would rule out Gómez's interpretation of *vyūha* in the plural as “manifestations.”

In summary, although *gaṇḍa* commonly occurs in Sanskrit literature meaning a cheek, bubble, boil, or goitre, it also appears to possess an extended semantic range that includes distinctiveness in size (huge, great, massive, or large) and category (main, chief, or primary). As mentioned above, in the compounds *gaṇḍa-śaila*, *gaṇḍa-grāma* and *gaṇḍa-mūrkha*, *gaṇḍa*'s meaning could be said to approximate the Sanskrit prefix *mahā-*. Just as in English “great” and “big” often semantically blur into each other, such as “a great man” and a “big chief,” likewise the Sanskrit prefix *mahā-* carries both senses. Moreover, *gaṇḍa* might in this sense carry even stronger force than “great” and mean something like “the greatest” or “the biggest.” Alternatively, in Buddhist sources *gaṇḍa* can occur meaning the stalk of a plant or a portion or part of something. Unfortunately, the word *gaṇḍa* (apart from its double occurrence in the compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha* at the conclusion of the text), appears in the entire *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* only once in the compound *pañca-gaṇḍa-gati-cakra*. Although Edgerton's BHS meaning of “part” seems to fit aptly in this compound, is he justified in translating *Gaṇḍavyūha* as “supernal manifestation in (many small) sections”? Before I attempt to answer this question, let us investigate the use of the word *vyūha* in the sūtra.

Vyūha

Common classical Sanskrit meanings of *vyūha* include an “orderly arrangement,” “military array,” “a section,” “division,” or “manifestation.”⁵⁶ In the Vaiṣṇava context, the term *vyūha* takes on cosmological significance within the Pañcarātra tradition, which refers to the four divine emanations of Puruṣa-Nārāyaṇa (Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) as his

⁵⁵ For a specific reference to a Chinese version of this myth in relation to longer versions of the *Avatamsaka* possessed by the Nāgas, see Hamar (2007, pp. 139–140).

⁵⁶ See Monier-Williams (1899, p. 1041).

“manifestations” (*vyūha*). Edgerton (1953, p. 520) points out that in Mahāyāna sources, *vyūha* often indicates a “marvelous, supernatural, or magical arrangement” particularly of Buddha-fields.⁵⁷ The word *vyūha* is an extremely common term in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, and often occurs in descriptions of mystical visions and in the names of the liberations attained by the good friends (*kalyāṇamitra*).⁵⁸ Mark Ehman (1977, p. 105) has aptly highlighted that *vyūhas* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* appear as orderly patterned visionary experiences. With this in mind, I think “array” captures the generally sense of the word, as long as one recognizes the magical and supernatural connotations associated with the term when used in this specific Mahāyāna context.

Two particularly important descriptions of arrays occur at the beginning of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and in the Maitreya section of the text. In the opening scene of the sūtra, the Buddha Vairocana resides at Śrāvastī in the park of Anāthapiṇḍada in the Jeta Grove within a peaked dwelling (*kūṭāgāra*) called the “Great Array” (*mahāvvyūha*) surrounded by 5000 bodhisattvas (V 1–4). Having discerned the thoughts of his followers and seen that they desired to know of his past attainments and current powers, the Buddha enters into a trance (*samādhi*) called the “Lion’s Yawn” (*siṃhavijrmbhita*) that magically transforms his peaked dwelling into an infinitely vast array (*vyūha*) filled with countless parasols, banners, flags, diamonds, jewels and gems of all varieties (V 5.1–8). The Jeta Grove also expands infinitely and the ground and sky become adorned with priceless substances (V 5.8–6.15).

At the climax of the narrative, Sudhana travels to a park called the “Great Array” (*mahāvvyūha*) in the region of Samudrakaccha in search of the bodhisattva Maitreya. There he finds a great peaked dwelling containing the ornaments of Vairocana’s array.⁵⁹ After prostrating himself before the jewel-encrusted building and circumambulating it hundreds of thousands of times, Sudhana speaks aloud a long list of its inhabitants’ spiritual qualities. A number of these are worth special mention. Sudhana states that this *kūṭāgāra* is the residence “of those who dwell in the undivided abode of the *dharmadhātu*,”⁶⁰ and it is a place in which “there is the means to pervade the *dharmadhātu* in all its aspects.”⁶¹ He declares that this abode’s inhabitants dwell where “one eon enters into all eons, and all eons enter into one eon”,⁶²

⁵⁷ See also Murakami’s (2006) recent article on the concept of *vyūha* in Mahāyāna sūtras.

⁵⁸ See Vaidya (1960b, pp. xxiv–xxix), for a list of these attainments. For example, the Muktaka, the merchant-banker, has acquired a liberation (*vimokṣa*) known as “Unobstructed Array” (*asaṅgavyūha*); the monk Sāradhvaja has attained a meditative trance (*samādhi*) called the “Purified Array of Universal Entrances” (*samantamukhaviśuddhivyūha*); and Muktāsāra, the goldsmith, has achieved the liberation “Array of Unobstructed Recollections” (*asaṅgasmṛtivyūha*). See also Murakami (2006), who translates several passages from the *Gaṇḍavyūha* relating to *vyūhas*.

⁵⁹ *mahākūṭāgāra vairocanavyūhālaṅkāragarbhā* (V 369.4).

⁶⁰ *dharmadhātvasambhedavihāravihāriṇāṃ* (V 370.6).

⁶¹ *samantamukhadharmadhātuspharaṇopāya-* (V 370.11).

⁶² *ekakalpasarvakalpasarvakalpaikakalpānupraveśavihāravihāriṇaḥ* (V 370.15).

“in which there is no division between one field and all fields, or [between all fields] and one field”;⁶³ and where there is “no impediment between one element and all elements, or between all elements and one element.”⁶⁴ Then Sudhana recites verses wherein he proclaims that the *kūṭāgāra*’s residents “roam the *dharmadhātu* unattached,”⁶⁵ “move in the sky of the *dharmadhātu* like the sun and moon,”⁶⁶ and “course the unobstructed *dharmadhātu* with thoughts unattached.”⁶⁷

Sudhana’s words, by associating the inhabitants of the *kūṭāgāra* with those that travel within the *dharmadhātu*, explicitly connect Maitreya’s dwelling with the *dharmadhātu*.⁶⁸ His statements about all eons, lands and objects entering each other without division or impediment within the *kūṭāgāra* signify what the Chinese masters called the “interpenetration”⁶⁹ of the *dharmadhātu*. Since this bodhisattva’s peaked dwelling is said to contain the ornaments of Vairocana’s array and is associated with the *dharmadhātu*, we may assume that the Buddha Vairocana’s *kūṭāgāra* in the opening scene of the sūtra also represents the *dharmadhātu*. The connection between Maitreya’s peaked dwelling and Vairocana’s is further strengthened by the narrator’s assigning the same name, “Great Array” (*mahāvvyūha*), to Vairocana’s *kūṭāgāra* and to the park in which Maitreya’s *kūṭāgāra* is located.

When Sudhana asks Maitreya about the course of conduct of a bodhisattva, Maitreya tells him that to obtain his answer he should enter the *kūṭāgāra*. Our hero respectfully asks to enter and with a snap of Maitreya’s fingers the gates to the peaked dwelling open. Once inside, Sudhana sees that its interior is many hundreds of thousands of leagues (*yojana*) wide and as vast as the realm of space (*ākāśadhātu-vipulam*). Within this space, hundreds of thousands of other peaked dwellings are arrayed in the same manner spread out in all directions. Miraculously, each dwelling remains distinct while simultaneously reflecting (*pratibhāsa-yoga*) every other one and all of its objects.⁷⁰ The inter-reflection of the thousands of peaked dwellings within Maitreya’s great *kūṭāgāra* and the inter-reflection of each and every object within each dwelling represents the complete interpenetration and non-obstruction of all phenomena within the *dharmadhātu*.

Both Suzuki and Gómez⁷¹ have discussed the importance of the concept of *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. The term *dharmadhātu* may be understood as the “Dharma-element” or the “Dharma-realm.” The *Gaṇḍavyūha* employs the second meaning of Dharma-realm to identify a special locus of enlightened

⁶³ *ekaḥṣetra[sarvaḥṣetra[sarvaḥṣetra]kaḥṣetrāsambhedavihāravihāriṇaḥ* (V 370.15–16).

⁶⁴ *ekadharmasarvadharmasarvadharmaikadharmāvirodhavihāravihāriṇaḥ* (V 370.16).

⁶⁵ *dharmadhātu vicaranti asajjamānā* (V 372.5).

⁶⁶ *dharmadhātugane śāsīsūryabhūtā vicaranti* (V 374.1-2).

⁶⁷ *eṣo asaṅgamatinām anāvāraṇadharmadhātucaraṇānam... viharu* (V 375.25).

⁶⁸ This association was previously noticed by Suzuki and Gómez (see below).

⁶⁹ See Suzuki (1953, p. 87).

⁷⁰ V 408.5–8.

⁷¹ See Suzuki (1953, p. 78); Gómez (1967); Gómez (1977, pp. 221–261).

activity that both simultaneously encompasses all the infinite *loka-dhātus* (world-realms) and transcends them. Gómez has pointed out that the *Gaṇḍavyūha* refers to the “*dharmadhātu* divided into levels” (*dharmadhātutalā-bheda*) and an “undivided *dharmadhātu*” (*asambhinna-dharmadhātu*).⁷² Although these terms occur in a number of places,⁷³ *dharmadhātu* appears more often without special qualifiers or with other qualifiers such as “unobstructed *dharmadhātu*” (*anāvāraṇa-dharmadhātu*)⁷⁴ and the “*dharmadhātu* of unobstructed space” (*asaṅga-vara-dharmadhātu*).⁷⁵ Therefore, while *dharmadhātutalābheda* and *asambhinna-dharmadhātu* are aspects of the *dharmadhātu*, a clearly defined division between only these two types of *dharmadhātu* is not apparent from a close reading of the text.

The most significant description of the Dharma-realm’s qualities occurs when the night goddess Sarvanagararakṣāsambhavatejaḥśrī tells Sudhana about her bodhisattva-liberation (*bodhisattva-vimokṣa*).⁷⁶ During her description, the goddess says that she sees and advances toward the *dharmadhātu* by means of ten aspects (*ākara*). These aspects of the Dharma-realm are that it is immeasurable (*aprameya*), infinite (*anantamadhya*), boundless (*aparyanta*), unlimited (*asīmāprāpta*), uninterrupted (*avyavacchinna*), a single unity (*ekotībhāvagata*), inherently pure (*svabhāva-vimala*), the same in all worlds (*sarvajagat-samatānugata*), a single ornament (*ekālaṃkāra*) and indestructible (*avināśana*).⁷⁷ This list is the most detailed direct reference to qualities of the *dharmadhātu*, and provides us with some insight into the religious significance of the term in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. To borrow terminology from Christian theology, these aspects demonstrate both the “immanence” and “transcendence” of the Dharma-realm. As a locus that is immeasurable, infinite, boundless and unlimited, it is always present, yet always more than what is present. As an indestructible, single, uninterrupted, pure unity that is the same in all worlds, it functions as the “ground”⁷⁸ of all the multiplicity of realms and worlds. It represents both the ultimate nature of reality behind and beyond all illusory phenomena, and the ultimate goal of the religious quest. As such, the *dharmadhātu* represents the unifying principle behind both the worldview and narrative of the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*.

Not only is the *dharmadhātu* represented by buildings in the narrative, but also by bodies. An example is found early in the text when Sudhana meets the monk Sāradhvaja from Milaspharaṇa.⁷⁹ Sudhana finds the monk seated in a

⁷² Gómez (1977).

⁷³ For *dharmadhātutalābheda* see V 368.31 and 384.1 (at V 353.11, there is “*dharmadhātutalāsaṃbheda*”). For *asambhinna-dharmadhātu* see V 272.20. At V 370.6, Maitreya’s dwelling is called the “undivided abode of the *dharmadhātu*” (*dharmadhātvasaṃbhedavihāra*).

⁷⁴ V 375.25.

⁷⁵ V 288.6.

⁷⁶ For other recent discussions of this passage, see Osto (2004, p. 83) and Thakur (2006, pp. 10–13). See also Osto (forthcoming).

⁷⁷ For the list of ten see V 234.10–18.

⁷⁸ I am borrowing this term from Gómez (1967).

⁷⁹ V 68–78.

deep meditative trance with countless miraculous projections emanating from every pore in his body and pervading the entire Dharma-realm. Later in the text the night goddess Sarvajagadrakṣāpraṇidhānavīryaprabhā states that a bodhisattva has a “body that is the undivided Dharma-realm.”⁸⁰ In the imagined universe of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) is viewed as coextensive with the Dharma-realm. This identity is best illustrated in the description of Samantabhadra’s body in the final section of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.

At the conclusion of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, Sudhana has his final encounter with the supreme bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Here Samantabhadra declares the purity of his Dharma-body and the omnipresence of his form body:

I have obtained the Dharma-body that is absolutely pure and non-differentiated within the three times. I also purified a supreme form body, which is conformable everywhere, is intent upon all buddha-fields, has a universal basis, makes visible all miracles in every direction, and may be seen in all worlds.⁸¹

Following this, Samantabhadra tells Sudhana, “Those beings that see the purity of my body are reborn within my body. Son of Good Family, see the purity of my body!”⁸² Upon beholding the bodhisattva, Sudhana sees all bodhisattvas, buddhas and realms, and penetrates all world realms inside the body of Samantabhadra. By entering into the body of Samantabhadra, Sudhana attains equality (*samatā*) with him and all buddhas. This equality is none other than the acquisition of the purified Dharma-body, entry into the Dharma-realm and the realization of supreme enlightenment.

Conclusion: Visions of Reality, Not Flowers...

In our present discussion, we have seen that *gaṇḍa* possesses a wide range of meanings in both classical and Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit literature. Our dilemma is of course how we understand its meaning in compound with *vyūha*. A number of English translations (and the Tibetan translation) of *gaṇḍavyūha* employ the BHS meaning of stalk. However, there is no particular significance attributed to stalks, stems or flowers in the sūtra. Other attempts use the BHS meaning of “part” or “section” to translate *gaṇḍa*. While it is true that the sūtra is divided into a number of sections, calling the text “The Array in Sections,” seems rather less dramatic than the earliest Chinese title, “Entering

⁸⁰ *asaṃbhinnadharmadhātukāya* (V 272.20).

⁸¹ ...*atyantapariśuddho dharmakāyaḥ pratilabdhaḥ sarvatryadhvāsaṃbhinnah. anuttaraś ca rūpakāyaḥ pariśodhitaḥ sarvalokābhyudgataḥ sarvajagadyathāśayavijñāpanaḥ sarvatrānugataḥ sarvabuddhakṣetraprasṛtaḥ samantapraṭiṣṭhānaḥ sarvataḥ sarvavikurvitasamdarśanaḥ sarvajagadabhilakṣaṇīyaḥ* (V 426.31–427.2).

⁸² *ye mamātmabhavapariśuddhim paśyanti, te mamātmabhāve upapadyante. paśya kulaputra imāṃ mamātmabhāvapariśuddhim* (V 427.16–17).

the Dharma-realm” (**Dharmadhātu-praveśana*), or Prajñā’s “Entry Into the Range of the Inconceivable Liberation” (**Acintyavimokṣa-gocara-praveśana*). Based on the Chinese evidence, it seems that “*gaṇḍavyūha*” was not the original or earliest title of the narrative. Why then would later Buddhist interpreters and/or redactors refer to the sūtra by this new name?

I would like to suggest that at some point in time, in some locations at least, the term *vyūha* gained cosmological and religious significance both within Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism and wider Indian religion (the Pañcarātra tradition). This is clearly evidenced in the Mahāyāna context by the titles of a number of important Mahāyāna works such as the *Akṣobhya-vyūha*, the *Kāraṇḍa-vyūha*, and the larger and smaller *Sukhāvati-vyūha* sūtras. I think it not unlikely that the new title for Sudhana’s story emerged from this particular understanding of *vyūha*, and that the term “*gaṇḍavyūha*” was employed by the promoters of the sūtra as an advertisement to its readers offering them access to the most important, most exalted, supernal *vyūha*.

As I mentioned above, in both the introductory scene of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and in Sudhana’s encounter with Maitreya, the narrator describes visionary experiences of limitless inter-reflecting space referred to as *vyūhas*. These arrays present the ultimate vision of reality expressed in the sūtra as the *dharmadhātu*. Moreover, in the sūtra the Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) is identified with the *dharmadhātu* as exemplified by Sudhana’s final visionary experience of and merger with the universe inside the body of Samantabhadra. Thus, I think it likely that the referent to *vyūha* in the sūtra’s title is the *dharmadhātu*. This idea is supported by the earliest Chinese title of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, “Entering the Dharma-realm.”

If the *vyūha* in the title *gaṇḍavyūha* is a reference to the *dharmadhātu*, what kind of *vyūha* is it? As we have seen, based on its use in several Sanskrit texts across centuries, *gaṇḍa* may be employed as the first member of a *karmadhāraya* compound such as *gaṇḍa-śaila*, *gaṇḍa-grāma* and *gaṇḍa-mūrkhā*, approximating the meaning of the Sanskrit prefix *mahā-*. In this sense, *gaṇḍa* may possess an even stronger meaning than *mahā-*, implying a superlative degree of something. Thus a *gaṇḍa-śaila* would be “the largest of stones,” and a *gaṇḍa-mūrkhā*, the “greatest of fools.” I would like to suggest that this is the sense of *gaṇḍa* in the title *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*. If this interpretation is correct, the *gaṇḍa* in the compound *gaṇḍa-vyūha* has nothing to do with stalks, trunks, stems, flowers, parts, portions or sections of anything. Rather *gaṇḍa-vyūha* means the greatest or supreme array, which is the ultimate visionary experience of the *dharmadhātu*. Following this interpretation, I propose the following new translation of the title *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*: “The Scripture on the Supreme Array,” or simply “The Supreme Array Scripture.”

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