



## Proto-Tantric Elements in The *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*

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The expansive *Gaṇḍavyūha*, although a Māhāyāna sūtra, contains a number of elements that suggest the beginnings of the 'tantric' phase in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. In particular, the sūtra contains four components worthy of note:

1. a soteriology based on absolute faith in the spiritual guides (*kalyāṇamitra*), foreshadowing tantric guru-adoration (we see clear examples of this in Mañjuśrī's statements to Sudhana about worshipping the guides as a means to obtain omniscience (Vaidya 1960: 46.12–15), and also in Sudhana's visits with the Brahman Jayoṣmāyatana (90–95), King Anala (120–123) and the boy and girl, Śrīsaṃbhava and Śrīmatī (363.19–25) where he is told not to doubt the instructions of the spiritual guides);
2. elaborate scenes detailing what can best be understood as *maṇḍalas*, particularly in the Nidāna (1–35) and Sudhana's encounters with the Night Goddesses (171–284);
3. the veneration of Night Goddesses evocative of later Ḍākiṇī worship;
4. and the strong insinuation of sexual yoga when Sudhana meets the courtesan Vasumitra (155).

After examining each aspect in some detail, I discuss the implications of these 'proto-tantric' elements for developing a relative chronology and a set of relations among Mahāyāna sūtras (Silk 2002).

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