

# On the Legend of the Dharmarājikāpratiṣṭhā

YAMASAKI Kazuho

## 1. Introduction

The *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* (Av-klp) by the Kashmirian poet Kṣemendra (ca. the eleventh century CE) is an enormous collection of one hundred and eight Buddhist legends in verse. Chapters fifty-nine and sixty-nine through seventy-four of this work are devoted to the legend of King Aśoka. All these chapters, except the sixty-ninth one named Dharmarājikāpratiṣṭhā (DhPr), have complete parallels either in the *Divyāvadāna* or in the Tibetan and Chinese canons.

There is an attempt by PRZYLUSKI 1923: 100–101 to investigate the source of the Aśoka legend in the Av-klp. PRZYLUSKI 1923, however, leaves the sixty-ninth chapter out of consideration. The aim of this paper is to examine to what source Kṣemendra's version of the DhPr can be traced.

## 2. The Structure of the DhPr in the Av-klp

Before moving to the central argument, it is useful to give an outline of the sixty-ninth chapter of the Av-klp.<sup>1)</sup> This chapter is comprised of three stories: (A) the story of the construction of eighty-four thousand *stūpas*, (B) the story of the preaching of the Dharma by an old and ignorant monk, and (C) the story of a novice whose robe has a divine fragrance. The outlines of these stories are summarized as follows:<sup>2)</sup>

King Aśoka, born in the city of Pāṭaliputra, saved the world from sorrow. (v. 2) He offered gold to the Bodhi Tree and presented three robes to the assembly of monks.<sup>3)</sup> (v. 3) Having collected the relics of past Buddhas and having built a *stūpa* at the advice of the abbot Yaśas, King Aśoka came in person to the *nāga* world. Eighty-four thousand *stūpas* were, in the twinkling of an eye, constructed for the enshrinement of the relics of the Buddha that were offered to King Aśoka by *nāgas*. (vv. 4–8)

After constructing eighty-four thousand *stūpas*, King Aśoka provided meals for the assembly of

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monks. At that time, an old monk, suffering from hunger, arrived. (v. 9) Having devoured a luxurious meal that was offered by King Aśoka, he was informed by another monk that King Aśoka expected him to preach the Dharma in exchange for food. (vv. 10–12) This confused the old monk, for he was so ignorant that he could not remember even half of a verse. (vv. 13–16) Having seen what was going on, a female deity appeared and advised him to say, “Greed for wealth, power, food, and ease should be given up, Your Majesty.” (vv. 17–20) The monk’s speech made so great an impression on King Aśoka that he presented the monk with a robe decorated with gold. (vv. 21–24) Then the ignorant monk attained arhatship with the aid of deities. (vv. 25–26)

While King Aśoka was providing a feast for the assembly of monks, a novice whose robe had a divine odor arrived. (v. 27) King Aśoka asked him why his robe had such an extraordinary fragrance. (v. 28) The novice explained that because he spent the rainy season at the foot of the Pārijāta tree, the scent of its blossoms lingered on his body. (v. 29) Having heard this, King Aśoka adored his majesty, devoted himself to worshipping the Three Jewels, and took delight in performing meritorious deeds. (v. 30)

### 3. The Story of the Construction of Eighty-four Thousand stūpas

Four parallel versions of this story that belong to the Northern Buddhist tradition have come down to us: <sup>4)</sup>

- *Divyāvadāna* (Divy), 380.17–382.3.
- *Ayuwang chuan* 阿育王伝 (Chuan), T no. 2042, vol. 50, 102a8–102b8.
- *Ayuwang jing* 阿育王經 (Jing), T no. 2043, vol. 50, 135a3–135b3.
- *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經 (Za), T no. 99, vol. 2, 165a13–165b18. <sup>5)</sup>

There are a few significant differences between the Av-klp version and the Divy, the Chuan, the Jing, and the Za versions.

#### 3.1. The Visit of King Aśoka to the nāga World

Let us look at the account of the visit of King Aśoka to the nāga world. The texts run as follows:

Av-klp 69.6: *nāgalokaṃ*<sup>6)</sup> *svayaṃ gatvā saugataṃ dhātusaṃcayam* |  
*sa nāgāhṛtam ādāya ratnastūpāvalīm*<sup>7)</sup> *vyadhāt* ||

He (i.e., Aśoka), having come in person to the nāga world and having received a mass of the relics of the Buddha that had been procured by nāgas, built a series of stūpas of precious substances.

Divy 380.22–25: *tato rājā nāgair nāgabhavanam avatāritaḥ vijñaptas ca* | *vayam asyātraiva pūjāṃ karisyāma iti* | *yāvad rājñābhyanujñātam* | *tato nāgaiḥ rājā punar api nāgabhavanād uttārīto . . .*

Then *nāgas* caused King [Aśoka] to descend into the home of *nāgas* and said, “We will pay worship to these (i.e., the relics of the Buddha) right here.” The king, meanwhile, gave them permission to do so. Then *nāgas* caused the king to ascend from the home of *nāgas* again . . .

Chuan 102a11–14: «Alors le roi-dragon se manifesta et invita le roi à entrer dans son palais. Le roi descendit donc de bateau et entra dans le palais du roi-dragon. Le dragon dit au roi: «Je désire garder ces reliques. Laisse-moi leur faire des offrandes et ne me les retirez pas.» Le roi voyant que le roi-dragon vénérât (les reliques) et leur présentait des offrandes deux fois plus importantes qu’on ne le fait chez les hommes, les laissa et s’abstint de les emporter.» (PRZYLUKSI 1923: 242)

Jing 135a7–9: “The Nāga king then invited Aśoka to the Nāga palace and said to him, ‘This is the stupa to which I always make offerings. May Your Majesty preserve it.’ King Aśoka consented . . .” (LI 1993: 19)

Za 165a16–18: Then *nāga* kings took King [Aśoka] to the home of *nāgas*. The king demanded permission to pay worship to the relics of the Buddha. Then the *nāgas* gave them to him.

While the Av-klp and the Za versions tell us that King Aśoka received the relics of the Buddha from *nāgas*, the Divy, the Chuan, and the Jing versions relate that he could not procure the relics from them. As far as the account of the visit of King Aśoka to the *nāga* world is concerned, the Av-klp version strikes us as being akin to the Za version.

### 3.2. The Construction of Eighty-four Thousand *stūpas*

The evidence adduced below, however, excludes the possibility that the Av-klp version can be traced back to the original text of the Za version. Let us look at the account of the construction of eighty-four thousand *stūpas*, to which parallels are found in the Divy, the Chuan, and the Za versions. The texts go as follows:

Av-klp 69.8: *ekakṣaṇapraṭiṣṭhāsu pṛthivyāṃ sthāviras tadā |  
kham utpatyārkaṃ ācchādyā chāyāsaṃjñāṃ akalpayat ||*

When [eighty-four thousand Dharmarāja *stūpas*] were instantly built on the ground, the abbot [Yaśas], having risen into the sky and having concealed the sun, caused one to recognize that a shadow appeared. «[Yaśas] gave birth to Saṃjñā in the form of Chāyā.»<sup>8)</sup>

Divy 381.16–18: *yāvat tasmin divase sthāvirayaśasā pāṇinā sūryamaṇḍalaṃ praticchāditam | ekasmin divase ekamuhūrte caturaśītidharmarājikāsahasraṃ pratiṣṭhāpitam |*

Meanwhile, when the day came, the abbot Yaśas covered the disk of the sun with his hand. Eighty-four thousand Dharmarāja *stūpas* were built on the same day and at the same time.

Chuan 102b4–5: «Plus tard, il cacha le soleil avec la main. Dans le Jambudvīpa on construisit en même temps (tous) les *stūpa*.» (PRZYLUKSI 1923: 244)

Za 165b10–12: Hereafter, on the fifteenth day when a lunar eclipse occurred, he (i.e., Aśoka) ordered the building of *stūpas* in this Jambudvīpa.

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In the Av-klp, the Divy, and the Chuan versions, eighty-four thousand *stūpas* are constructed at the moment when the abbot Yaśas covers the sun with his hand. In the Za version, on the other hand, eighty-four thousand *stūpas* are built on the day when a lunar eclipse occurs. It is to be noted, in passing, that the accounts of Aśoka's offering of gold to the Bodhi Tree and his donation of robes to monks, which are narrated in verse three of the Av-klp version, are found in neither the Divy version nor the Chinese versions. All of the examples given above make it reasonable to suppose that the Av-klp version can be traced to neither the Divy version nor the original texts of the Chinese versions.

#### 4. The Story of the Preaching of the Dharma by an Old and Ignorant Monk

Verses nine through thirty of Kṣemendra's version of the DhPr tell the story of the preaching of the Dharma by an old and ignorant monk and that of a novice whose robe has a divine fragrance. Parallels to these stories are found in a historical work written by Tāranātha, a Tibetan historian of the seventeenth century CE. It seems probable that Tāranātha writes the stories in question based on Kṣemendra's version of the DhPr, for he explicitly states, at the end of the sixth chapter, that he uses the Av-klp as one of the textual sources of his version of the Aśoka legend. We should, however, bear in mind that there Tāranātha makes reference to the work bearing the title *mChod rten gyi rtogs pa brjod pa* (\**Caityāvadāna*), whose original text is no longer extant. This may point to two possibilities: either Tāranātha's version is based on Kṣemendra's version, or both Kṣemendra and Tāranātha take the stories from the same source, i.e., the \**Caityāvadāna*.

The old and ignorant monk and the goddess who helps him are anonymous in Kṣemendra's version (vv. 9, 17), and the same is true of Tāranātha's version (30.3, 13). This seems to make the first possibility likely. We can, nevertheless, adduce strong evidence in support of the second possibility. Let us look at a few of the examples where this evidence is clear.

##### 4.1. An Old Monk's Perplexity

An old monk, being informed that King Aśoka expects him to preach the Dharma, is at a loss about what to do. The texts run as follows:

Av-klp 69.14: *lajjāyai kim idaṃ bhuktaṃ duḥkhāntaṃ aśanaṃ mayā |*  
*api gāthācaturbhāgaṃ na jānāmi nirakṣaraḥ ||*

The food enjoyed [by me] should remove the pain of hunger; why does it bring shame on me? I do not know even a quarter of a stanza, because I am illiterate.

Tāranātha 30.10–11: *bdag ni bsnyen par rdzogs nas* <sup>(a)</sup>*lo drug cu lon* kyang tshig su bcad pa gcig kyang mi shes pas . . .

“I received ordination <sup>(a)</sup>**sixty years back**. Yet I do not know even a single *śloka*.” (CHATTOPADHYAYA 1970: 64; emphasis mine)

It should be noted that Tāranātha’s version tells us that it has been sixty years (*lo drug cu lon*) since the ignorant monk received ordination. If the assumption is correct that Tāranātha bases his version on that of Kṣemendra, then the question arises of why Tāranātha knows that sixty years have passed since the ignorant monk received ordination.

#### 4.2. The Story of a Novice Whose Robe Has a Divine Fragrance

Let us look at another example. King Aśoka has a visit from a novice who spent the rainy season in heaven. The texts go as follows:

Av-klp 69.27–29: *kadācid atha bhūbhartur vipule saṃghabhojane |*

<sup>(a)</sup>*navah samāyayau bhikṣur divyasaurabhacīvaraḥ ||*

*apūrvagandhalubdhālimālāvalayitaṃ* <sup>(b)</sup>*nṛpaḥ |*

*tam aprcchat kutas tāvad ayaṃ te saurabhodbhavaḥ ||*

*so 'vadaḥ devaloke 'haṃ pārijātataros tale |*

*uṣīto vārṣikaṃ kālāṃ tatpuṣpair adhvāsitaḥ ||*

[27] On a certain occasion, while King [Aśoka] was busily serving food to the assembly of monks, <sup>(a)</sup>**a novice** whose robe had a divine odor arrived. [28] <sup>(b)</sup>**The king** asked him, who was surrounded by a swarm of bees attracted by the extraordinary fragrance, “Where, indeed, is your fragrance here emitted from?” [29] He replied, “Because I spent the rainy season at the foot of the Pārijāta tree rooted in heaven, the scent of its blossoms still lingers on my body.”

Tāranātha 30.21–31.5: <sup>(a)</sup>*des* kyang slob dpon la gdams ngag zhus te rtse gcig tu bsgoms pas zla ba gsum nas dgra bcom pa thob ste sum cu rtsa gsum gyi gnas yongs 'dus brtol gyi tshal du dbyar gnas par byas te | slar pa ṭa li pu trar dge 'dun dang skye bo'i tshogs mang po'i dbus su 'ongs pas rgyal pos byin pa'i gos la shing yongs 'du'i dri bzang po chags pas sa phyogs de thams cad dri bsung gis khyab bo | der <sup>(b)</sup>*dge slong* gzhan rnams kyis rgyu dris pas des kyang sngar gyi lo rgyus bshad pas thams cad ngo mtshar du gyur cing | rim gyis gtam de rgyal pos kyang thos pa na . . .

“So <sup>(a)</sup>**he [the aged monk]** took instructions from an *ācarya* and, concentrating intensely on it, attained *arhat*-hood in three months. He spent the rainy season in the Pārijāta-vana of the Tuṣita [lit. the region of the 33 gods] and returned again to the *saṃgha*-s and to the people of Pāṭaliputra. The robes which he received from the king were fragrant with the scent of Pārijāta

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and it spread all around. On being asked by the other <sup>(b)</sup>monks, he said all that had happened and this astonished all. The king also eventually heard all these.” (CHATTOPADHYAYA 1970: 64; emphasis mine)

There are two clear differences between the two texts: in Kṣemendra’s version, King Aśoka asks a novice why a divine fragrance lingers on his body, whereas in Tāranātha’s version, monks (*dge slong*) ask about the divine odor of the old monk, who preaches the Dharma in response to a request from King Aśoka. The fact that one can recognize two points of disagreement between the two parallel passages reduces the possibility that Tāranātha, who uses the Av-klp as the source for his version of the DhPr, misinterprets the text of Kṣemendra’s version. Consideration of the differences between the two texts is sufficient for convincing us that Tāranātha’s version is not based on Kṣemendra’s version.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion:

- (1) The material for Kṣemendra’s version of the story of eighty-four thousand *stūpas* is taken from neither the Divy version nor the original texts of the Chinese versions.
- (2) Kṣemendra’s version of the story of the preaching of the Dharma and that of a novice is traced back to the *\*Caityāvadāna*, whose text is now lost to us.

Regarding the story of eighty-four thousand *stūpas*, two possibilities are left open: either Kṣemendra incorporates the story in his version of the DhPr, or he bases his version on the version of the DhPr that contains that story.

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## Notes

1) For Kṣemendra’s version of the DhPr, I have used the following manuscripts: A = Bendall Add. 1306, 286b4–288b3; E = NGMPP reel no. B95/5, E67b1–68b6; D = Derge edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Khe, 151a3–154a3; Z = Tōhoku Cat. no. 7034, 465b1–468a3. I have also consulted the earliest edition: Sarat Chandra DĀS and Hari Mohan VIDYĀBHŪṢAṆA, eds., *Avadāna Kalpalatā* (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1918), II, pp. 544–553. Cf. DE JONG 1979: 152–153.

- 2) The beginning and ending verses of the chapter, which cannot be considered as essential to the plot of the DhPr, are removed from our present consideration.
- 3) For three robes, see SATŌ 1993: 679–692.
- 4) Although a comparative study of the versions of this story is conducted by OKAMOTO 2003, Kṣemendra's version is left out of consideration.
- 5) It has been shown that the legend of King Aśoka in the Za is a later interpolation added by Chinese recomplier[s]. See HANAYAMA 1954 and ENOMOTO 1984.
- 6) *nāgalokaṃ* ] AEDZ (DE JONG), confirmed by Tib. *klu yi 'jig rten du; nāgālokam*. Ed.
- 7) *\*stūpāvalīm* ] AEDZ (DE JONG); *\*stūpāvalīn* Ed.
- 8) There is a pun on the last line of the verse, which means both “[Yaśas] caused one to recognize that a shadow appeared” and “[Yaśas] gave birth to Saṃjñā in the form of Chāyā.” For the story of Saṃjñā, who fashions her body in shadow-form (Chāyā), preserved in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, see PARGITER 1904: 455–458.

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(JSPS Research Fellow, PhD)