The Story of the Dīpaṃkara Buddha Prophecy in Northern Buddhist Texts:
An Attempt at Classification

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1. Introduction

The story of the Bodhisattva receiving the prophecy that he would become Śākyamuni Buddha is narrated in both Southern and Northern Buddhist literature. Precisely for the reason that the story explicitly gives clear thematic emphasis to the importance of becoming a Buddha rather than becoming an Arhat, it may be regarded as marking a turning point from early Buddhism to Mahāyāna Buddhism, because in Mahāyāna Buddhism embarking on the ages-long Bodhisattva path is far more highly recommended and praised. However, the story is so popular and important in both Northern and Southern Buddhism that there is a plethora of many different versions, so that, if we were to include short references and mentions of the motif, the number of related texts would be almost uncountable. Although Akanuma, Taga and Lamotte made lists of appearances of the story in Buddhist literature, and the former two scholars tried to classify versions of the story, mainly by comparing the order of occurrence of plot elements, their attempts do not seem very successful. The present author has recently examined Pāli versions of the story, which is usually known as the Sumedhakathā in the Theravāda tradition, and so has traced the relationship of the Apadāna versions (the Dharmarucyapadāna and the Yasodharāpadāna) with Northern Buddhist texts. Following up on that work, the author attempts in this article to list the Northern versions of the story and classify them according to a plausible and rational method, thereby attempting to get a bird’s eye view of the different versions in both Southern and Northern Buddhist literature. However, because of the diversity and complexity of the story-cycle connected to Dīpaṃkara Buddha, the author confines herself to treating only texts containing the main plot elements of the story; i.e., Dīpaṃkara Buddha’s appearance in the world; the Bodhisattva offering him flowers; the Bodhisattva spreading his hair on the mud to stop Dīpaṃkara Buddha’s feet getting soiled; the Bodhisattva making a vow to
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become a Buddha; and Dipāṃkara Buddha giving his prophecy to the Bodhisattva.

2. The Three Types of Dipāṃkara Prophecy Story

When we examine the Northern versions of the story, they can be classified into three types according to the name of the Bodhisattva (the former incarnation of Śākyamuni Buddha): Type 1, in which the Bodhisattva has no proper name; Type 2, in which the Bodhisattva’s name is Megha; and Type 3, in which the Bodhisattva’s name is Sumati. Although Sumati is equivalent to Sumedha in the Theravāda version, so far no evidence has been found to suggest that the name Sumedha existed in the Northern Buddhist versions. 3)

Type 1) in which the Bodhisattva has no proper name:


1c) The Yichu Pusa benqi jing 異出菩薩本起經, translated by Nie Daozhen 聶道真, 280–313 CE, T188: 3.617b18–617c29.

Type 2) in which the Bodhisattva’s name is Megha:


2b) The Zengyi ahan jing 增壹阿含經 (the Ekottarikāgama; hereafter abb. EA), scroll 11, translated by 僧伽提婆 (Sanghadeva) or 僧摩難提 (Dharmanandin) and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念, 5) 384–385 CE, T125: 2.597b15–599b24 6): The Bodhisattva’s name is Yunlei 雲雷 (“cloud-thunder”). Cf. 2b’) EA scroll 13; Dipāṃkara Buddha’s biography is independently narrated in the “Dizhu pin” 地主品: T125: 2.609b24–611a13. 7)

2c) The Vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka, Sifenlü 四分律, translated by 佛陀耶舍 (Buddhabayaśas), Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 and others, 410–412 CE, 8) T1428: 22.782a–785c22 9): The Bodhisattva’s name is Mique 弥却 (*Megha).

2d) The Fo benxing ji jing 佛本行集經, translated by 閻那崛多 (Jñānagupta), 587–591 CE, T190: 3. 664a12–669a3 10): The Bodhisattva’s name is Yun 雲 (“cloud”). 11)


2e’) The Foshuo dasheng pusa zang zhengfa jing 佛說大乘菩薩藏正法經, translated by
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3. Dipamkara Buddha’s Birth, Enlightenment and Visit to the Capital City

In order to establish whether the classification of the Northern versions into the above three
types can be also verified by differences between other elements in the story, we will
examine the first part of the story, i.e., Dipamkara’s birth, his enlightenment, and his visit
to King’s capital city where the Bodhisattva is to receive the prophecy that he will become
Śākyamuni Buddha. The Pāli version of Dipamkara Buddha’s birth story, narrated in Bv-a
78.34–83.18 (Eng. tr.: Horner 115–121), is obviously a later stereotyped fabrication imitating
Gotama Buddha’s birth story. It will therefore not be taken into consideration. In the
following, a summary of each version will be given.

1a) The Xiuxing benqi jing 修行本起經

Long ago, there was a Cakravartin king called Dengsheng 燈盛. His kingdom was called Tiheyi (or
Tihewei) 提和衛 (*Dipavati), and his crown prince was Dengguang 燈光. The king transferred
the kingdom to the crown prince on his demise, but the crown prince, having realized the impermanence
(of the world), handed the kingdom over to his younger brother, renounced the worldly life,
and became Dipamkara Buddha (錫光佛). Having wandered through various countries in the company
of 620,000 monks, he returned once to his homeland to save its people. However, the king of
his homeland (i.e. Dipamkara’s younger brother) thought that his brother would usurp the
kingdom, and so tried to prevent his visit. Dipamkara Buddha then, with supernatural powers, created
a second capital city. Seeing that, the king was terrified and relented, and asked Dipamkara Buddha
to visit his capital seven days later, and to accept offerings from him. (461b16–c16)

In this text the Bodhisattva’s name is introduced as follows: “At that time there was a
Brahman youth called Wugouguang 是時有梵志儒童, 名無垢光” (461c17). However,
the name 無垢光, “pure light,” appears only here, and in the latter part of the story the
Bodhisattva is only mentioned as Rutong 儒童 which corresponds to Skt mānava. Since 無垢光
seems to be unusual as a word translated from Skt, we may suppose that the word
was added by the translators, or later in the Chinese textual transmission.

1b) The Taizi Ruiying benqi jing 太子瑞應本起經

Long ago, when Dipamkara Buddha appeared in the world, the Cakravartin king Zhisheng 制勝
(“victorious”) ruled over a great kingdom called Bomo 銃摩 (*Padma). 16) (472c18–19).

The Bodhisattva is called Rutong 儒童.

1c) The Yichu Pusa benqi jing 異出菩薩本起經: In this text, although the story of Dipamkara’s birth is not related, the following information is important for comparison.

The Bodhisattva met Dipamkara (Tihanjieluo 題懾竭羅) 17) Buddha in the capital city, Bomohe 銃摩訶 (*Padamaka), of the king Qiye 普耶 (*Jaya).

2a) The Mahāvastu:

Dipamkara was born in the capital city, Dipavati, as the son of the Cakravartin King Arcimat and
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His consort Sudipā.

2b) The Zengyi ahan jing 增壹阿含經: In the main story in scroll 11, the biography of Dipamkara is not narrated; Dipamkara Buddha 定光如来 is invited to receive offerings by King Guangming 光明 of the great kingdom Bomo 鉢摩 (*Padma). However, in scroll 13 (2-b'), Dipamkara Buddha’s biography is independently narrated:

Long ago, there was a king named Dizhu 地主 (“lord of the earth”) ruling over Jambudvīpa (閻浮里地 or 閻浮地). The king gave half of his kingdom to his minister, Shanming 善明 (“good-light” *Sudipa). King Shanming’s capital city was called Yuanzhao 遠照 (“far-shine”), his queen’s name was Yueguang 月光 (“moonlight”), and a crown prince was born and named Dengguang 燈光. The crown prince renounced the worldly life at the age of 29, and on the same day he attained Enlightenment and became Dipamkara Buddha (光明如來). When his father, the king, found out that his son had become a Buddha, he visited him with 40 kotis of people; they listened to the Buddha’s sermon and the 40 kotis of people became arhants that very day. The great king, Dizhu, also visited Dipamkara Buddha with 40 kotis of people and listened to the Buddha’s sermon, and the 40 kotis of people likewise became arhants. The great king, Dizhu, invited Dipamkara Buddha and 80 kotis of arhants, decorated the city and made a great offering. The great king, Dizhu, at that time, was I (Śākyamuni) myself. (T125: 2.609b24–611a13)

It is obvious that the story in the scroll 13 has a different source from the one in the scroll 11, and the fact that the Chinese words for Dipamkara Buddha are also different may indicate that the present Chinese EA was not translated at one time by one translator. In scrolls 38 and 40, too, there are stories connecting to Dipamkara Buddha.18) This means that these stories were originally related independently, and were later compiled into one integrated story.

2c), 2d), 2e) and 2e’): Although there are some important differences among these versions, the main plot runs similarly to 1a and 2b’. Because of limitations of space, the corresponding proper names only will be given in the synoptic table below.

3a) The Divyāvadāna: Dipamkara’s biography is not narrated. He came to King Dīpa’s capital, Dīpavatī, to receive offerings.19) King Dīpa also invited the king of the neighboring country, Vāsava.

3b) The Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā: Since the text’s main source is 3a, its content is essentially same. However, Vāsava is the king of Kāśi.

3c) The Guoqu xianzai yingwu jing 過去現在因果經:

Many innumerable ages ago, there was a king called Dengzhao 燈照 (*Dīpa), and his capital city was called Tībopodi 提播婆底 (*Dīpavatī). The crown prince was born to the king, and given the
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name Puguang 普光. The crown prince renounced the world when he turned 29,000 years old, and after 6,000 years of ascetic practice, he became a Buddha called Puguang Rulai 普光如來. His father, the king, rejoiced at his son’s achievement, had the roads repaired and decorated, and sent his ministers to invite him to visit. (621a14–b26)

3d) The Fo benxing jing 佛本行經: Dipamkara’s biography is not narrated. Dipamkara’s name is Dingguang 定光, and he enters the capital city Huayan 華嚴 out of mercy for living beings. (92a18–b5)

4. Synoptic Table of Proper Names

In order to show the relationships between the various versions, the proper names featuring in each are shown in the table below. In Type 2 versions, Dipamkara Buddha’s father was originally a minister (Brahman) of a powerful king, and was himself made a king by being given a half (in 2e, one fourth) of the kingdom. Therefore, the king who gave half of his kingdom to his minister (Dipamkara’s Father) is, for convenience, given as ‘suzerain king’ in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dipamkara’s name</th>
<th>Father’s name</th>
<th>Mother’s name</th>
<th>Father’s Capital City</th>
<th>Suzerain King’s name</th>
<th>Suzerain King’s Capital City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a 錫光 20)</td>
<td>燈盛 (Cakravartin)</td>
<td>提和衛 *Dipavati?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b 定光</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>制勝 *Jaya? (Cakravartin)</td>
<td>鉢摩 *Padma?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c 題想跋羅</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>菩耶 *Jaya?</td>
<td>鉢摩訶 *Padmaka?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Dipamkara Arcimat</td>
<td>Sudipā</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b 定光</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>光明</td>
<td>鉢摩 *Padma?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b’ 燈光</td>
<td>善明 (地主’s minister)</td>
<td>月光</td>
<td>遠照</td>
<td>地主 (King of Jambudvipa)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c 定光</td>
<td>提婆提提 (*Dipavati? 胜怨’s minister)</td>
<td>提婆跋提提 (*Dipavati?)</td>
<td>勝怨 (King of Jambudvipa)</td>
<td>蓮花 (*Padma?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d 然燈</td>
<td>日主 (降怨’s minister)</td>
<td>月上</td>
<td>墾主 21)</td>
<td>降怨</td>
<td>蓮華 (*Padma?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2e 放光</td>
<td>光主 (勝怨’s minister)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>勝怨</td>
<td>蓮華 (*Padmaka or *Padmavati?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2e*</th>
<th>然燈</th>
<th>具足燈 (*Dipavat)</th>
<th>阿闍世</th>
<th>蓮華具足 (*Padmaka or *Padmavati?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Dipamkara</td>
<td>(Dipa; not mentioned as father)</td>
<td>(Dipavati)</td>
<td>(Vāsava, King of a neighboring kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Dipamkara</td>
<td>(Dipa; not mentioned as father)</td>
<td>(Dipavati)</td>
<td>(Vāsava, King of Kāśi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c</td>
<td>普光</td>
<td>燈照 (*Dipa?)</td>
<td>提播婆底 (*Dipavati?)</td>
<td>華嚴大城</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3d</td>
<td>定光</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. Remarks on the version in the Bodhisattvapitaka

Of the two Chinese versions of the Bodhisattvapitaka, Dharmapāla 法護’s (T316) is closer to the Tibetan translation. In Tib., as in T316, there is no break between chapter 11 and 12, and chap 12 has no title, in contrast to Xuanzang’s translation (T310), which gives the title: 大自在天授記品. The king’s name, dgra thul (*Jītaśatru?; Lokeshchandra s.v. jītāri), corresponds to Chinese 勝怨 or 降怨, but it is natural enough that Dharmapāla would have understood the word to mean Ajātaśatru 阿闍世. The capital city’s name, padma can, corresponds to 盛蓮華 (T310) and 蓮華具足 (T316), which may be a translation of Skt Padmaka or Padmavati. According to the Tibetan translation, the King’s Brahman minister was called mar me bdag (*Dipavat?), and was “as rich as a large Śāla tree” (shing sā la chen po lta bu). shing sā la chen po (mahāśāla, or mahāśāla) corresponds exactly to Dharmapāla’s 大婆羅 (according to v.r. Ming; in T, 大婆羅). 23) Dharmapāla, however, understood incorrectly that Mahāśāla was the name of the king, and therefore he translated mar me bdag as the king’s son, 具足燈. In T310, the king gives his minister only one fourth of his kingdom, but this is a unique reading, and this author surmises that it is an embellishment by Xuanzang.

(703,4) ... sā ri'i bu 'di lta ste/ dkon mchog yan lag tshun chad bskal pa (5) grangs med pa na/ de bzhin gshegs pa mar me mzdad ces bya ba 'jig rten du byung ngo// yang dc'i tshe rgyal po dgra thul zhes bya ba zhiq byung ste/ sā ri'i *bu rgyal po dgra thul gyi grong khyer padma can (6) zhes bya ba 'byor pa/ bde ba/ rgyas pa/ lo legs pa/ dga' ba/ skye bo mang po dang/ mis gang ba zhiq mod do// sā ri'i bu rgyal po dgra thul gyi bram ze mar me bdag ces bya ba shing sā la (7) chen po lta bu phyug pa/ nor mang ba/ longs spyad che pa nas/ mzdod dang bang ba'i bar du yongs su gang ba zhiq byung ba de/ rgyal po dgra thul la dben cing 'phangs/ sdug cing yid du 'jong (704,1) ste/

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mthong na mi mthun pa med de/ šā rī’i bu bram ze mar me bdag shing sā la chen po lta bu la rgyal srid phyed byin no/ šā rī’i bu `di lta ste/ rgyal po mar me’i bdag po rgyal po’i (2) phyed byed pa chos kyis byad de/ chos ma yin pas ni ma yin no/ yang šā rī’i bu dus gzhan zhig na/ rgyal po mar me’i bdag po las bu gzugs bzang po/ mdzes pa/... (Tog ed, Vol.37; Cf. P. Vol.37, 90,3–4)

6. Conclusion

The above comparison of versions of the story of the prophecy of Dipamkara Buddha shows that between the three types classified according to the Bodhisattva’s name, there are also clear differences in the story’s plot. In Type 2 versions, in which the Bodhisattva’s name is Megha, the story-flow can be summarized as follows: a Cakravartin king (i.e. King of Jambudvipa) gives half of his kingdom to his minister and makes him a king; the latter’s son becomes Dipamkara Buddha; when the Cakravartin king finds out about this, he requests his former minister to send Dipamkara Buddha to his capital, Padma(ka), accompanying the request with a threat; and Dipamkara Buddha, out of mercy, goes to the capital city, Padma(ka). Type 1 versions, judging from the story-flow (1a) or the correspondence of proper names (1b and 1c), may represent an early stage of Type 2 versions. On the other hand, Type 3 versions, in which the Bodhisattva’s name is Sumati, show a clear contrast with the other two types; the detailed story of Dipamkara’s birth is not related. However, from the fact that in 3a and 3b Sumati’s 10 miraculous dreams are narrated, and in 3c, in a similar manner, the Bodhisattva’s 5 dreams, we can also see close affinities among these three versions. Thus, the above examination has at least succeeded in vindicating the classification into three recensions. In future publications, the present author will further continue to examine other plot-elements of the story, and thereby elucidate the formation and relation of various versions of the Dipamkara Prophecy Story.

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Hayashi Gohō, *ibid.*, 214–220.

10) [Jp, tr.] Tokiwa Daizō 常盤 大定 and Mino Kōjun 美濃 昭順. 1931. 國一 本総部 23–46; [Eng, tr.] Beal 1873 and 1875. For detailed analysis of T190, see Tokiwa and Mino 國一 本総部 3: 1–14: They exemplify that T 190 belongs to the Dharmaguptaka, but it also use material from the Kāśyapiya, the Mahāśāṅghika, the Mahiśāsaka and the Sarvāstivāda.
11) Abridged version is cited in 金剛經纂要 刻定記 (T1702: 33.216a18–b) and 註華嚴經題法界觀門領 (T1885: 45.694b24–c14). There, however, both Megha 雲童 and Sumati 聖慧 are given.

16) The punctuation of the text should be: 至於昔者，定光佛在世，有聖王名曰制勝，治在鉾摩大國 instead of "...名曰制勝，治在鉾摩大國" in T. 17) Similar phonetic translation for Dipamkara Buddha are, 提和竭羅佛 in the 殿舟三昧經 (T418: 13.915c10); 提恱潑 in the 佛說阿闍世王經 (T626: 15.0405a18). Many other instances of similar transcriptions also exist, and include 提和竭羅佛 T125, 2.768c22 (This is very interesting! In EA elsewhere there is a translation name,); 提恱潑, T154: 3.107a24; 提和竭羅佛 T171: 3.422c14; 提和竭羅佛 T169: 3.411c20–21; 提恱潑/提和竭羅佛 T195: 4.147a5–6; T221: 8.43b5, 94a12–20; 提恱潑 T362: 12.300b21; 提恱潑佛 T632: 15.463c23; 提恱潑/提和竭羅佛 T1013: 19.686b19, 687b22 (and parallels in T1015); and so on.
18) EA scroll 38: T125: 2.756c16–758c11: When Dipamkara Buddha 灑光佛 visited a big country, Padma 須摩拝佛, the king of Jambudvipa was 提波延那 (*Dipayāna*?); the Bodhisattva’s name is 滿勒 (v.r. 滿始 in 〈三〉 may be right). Dipamkara Buddha received the prophecy from 寶藏如來 in his former life; Scroll 40, “若我昔日不與善知識從事，終不為燈光佛所授決也。以與善知識從事故，得為提和竭羅佛所授決。以此方便知善知識者，即是全梵行之人也。” (T125: 2.768c20–c24)
19) In Vaidya’s edition, the king’s name is sometimes misprinted as Dvipa, and the capital city’s name, Dvipavatī (152, 5–7).
20) The name as crown prince is Deng-guang 燈光.
21) At T1428: 22.782b5 appears the word, 提閣浮婆提, which is, however, an unique reading only found here in the whole Taisho.
22) “粛主: 以巋反八啚之主也漢書音義曰八啚地之八際也” in 一切經音義 (T2128: 54.678b18). So, 廟主 may mean ‘lord of eight boundaries,’ i.e. Cakravartin king.
23) “大婆羅; 樹名也是大富貴家義也東西國大官貴大富兄弟呼為娑羅也” in 一切經音義 (T2128: 54.766c24). See also MW s.v. *mahāśālā.*

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〈Key words〉 Dipamkara, Megha, Sumati, Bodhisattvapitaka

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