The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* as the Prediction of All the Sentient Beings’ Attaining Buddhahood:
With Special Focus on the Sadāparibhūta-parivarta

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1. The Aim of This Paper

While the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (*Lotus Sūtra, SP*) repeatedly teaches that any person who speaks against the SP or against those who keep, read, preach, or explain the SP must experience severe retribution, it also teaches that those who keep, read, preach, or explain the SP shall attain a perfection of the six sense organs, i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These understandings have been considered the basis of the following teaching in Chapter 19 of the SP (*Sadāparibhūta-parivarta, SP* 19):

- There once existed a Bodhisattva named Sadāparibhūta. He did not read or preach any Buddhist scripture at all, but only continued to give prediction of attaining buddhahood to all the Buddhists who held the mistaken idea that they had already attained enlightenment.
- Because of his prediction he was abused by them.
- They went to hell on the grounds of having abused him.

The question now arises:
- Why did they have to experience such severe retribution for abusing Sadāparibhūta who did not read or preach the SP.

To this question the following interpretation has been general:
- The SP is the prediction of all the sentient beings’ attaining buddhahood. Through giving of this prediction to the Buddhists Sadāparibhūta had essentially read and preached the SP.

It is true that Chapter 10 of the SP predicts that all the sentient beings can attain buddhahood. And the present author also agrees that the SP is the prediction of all the
sentient beings' attaining buddhahood. But there still exists the following question:

· Does the SP which repeatedly emphasizes the importance of keeping, reading, preaching, and explaining it really consider the prediction by Sadāparibhūta without reference to the SP equal to the reading or the preaching of it? If so, it means that SP 19 plays a very strange role within the SP.

Seeking an interpretation to this question this paper attempts to elucidate the relationship between the SP and the prediction of attaining buddhahood, and the essential role of SP 19 within the SP.

2. A Survey of SP 19

Here let us take a brief survey of SP 19. (2)

(1) The Buddha Śākyamuni reminds the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta that any person who speaks against the SP or against those who keep, read, preach, or explain the SP must experience severe retribution, and that those who keep, read, preach, or explain the SP shall attain the perfection of the six sense organs. (3)

(2) The Buddha Śākyamuni begins to tell him a story ((2)–(10)): In a past period there appeared a Buddha named Bhīṣmagarjitasvarājā. That Buddha taught the law of cause and effect (pratītyasamutpāda) to his disciples (śrāvaka). And to bodhisattvas that Buddha gave the teaching that leads them to supreme enlightenment. After he had entered into his perfect peacefulness, and when the period of the formal image of his true law (saddharmapratiṇipāṭa) came to an end, there appeared another Buddha who had the same name as Bhīṣmagarjitasvarājā. In this way a lot of Buddhas that had the same name appeared in succession. (4)

(3) After the first Buddha Bhīṣmagarjitasvarājā had entered into his perfect peacefulness, and when the formal image of his true law was fading, there was a monk Bodhisattva who, approaching the Buddhists holding a mistaken idea, always gave this prediction to them: "I do not despise you. You are not despised, for you all perform bodhisattva-practice, and you are to become buddhas." He never did the reading or the explaining of any sutras at all. (5)

(4) Hearing the prediction almost all the Buddhists became angry with him, showed him ill will and displeasure, abused and insulted him: "Why does this monk, unasked, tell us that he feels no contempt for us? He actually despises us by giving
us such an unasked and false prediction of attaining buddhahood.” But that monk never got angry or held malicious thoughts toward anyone. 6)

(5) They sometimes cast a dirt clod or stick at him. In that case he gave them the prediction from afar in a loud voice. 7)

(6) They gave him the name Sadāparībhūta, which means a man who always says, “You are not despised.” 8)

(7) When the end of his life was drawing near the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta through the voice from the sky heard the SP which had been secretly preached by the Buddha Bhīṣmāgārjitaśvararāja before he had entered into his perfect peacefulness. On hearing and obtaining the SP the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta attained the perfection of the six sense organs. He also became able to prolong his life for many aeons, and explained the SP to the Buddhists in the late period of the formal image of the true law. 9)

(8) The Buddhists who held the mistaken idea and once named him Sadāparībhūta realized that he had attained the same power and wisdom as the Buddha. And all of them were converted to become his followers and the hearers of the SP. He led all of them and many other people to supreme enlightenment through the explanation of the SP. 10)

(9) Afterwards he disappeared from that place, and experienced hundreds of thousands of millions of deaths and rebirths. In the course of time, he accumulated religious merits, met Buddhās, obtained the SP, and explained the SP to Buddhists. In every case he attained the perfection of the six sense organs. 11)

(10) Those religious merits gained through meeting and honoring the Buddhās and obtaining the SP having fully ripened, the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta attained supreme enlightenment and became a Buddha. 12)

(11) It is myself, Śākyamuni, who at that time was the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta. Had I not formerly obtained and kept the SP, I should not so soon have attained supreme enlightenment. It is because I have kept, read, and preached the SP from the teaching of the former Buddhās that I have so soon attained supreme enlightenment. 13)

(12) Under the teaching of the Buddha who had already entered into his perfect peacefulness the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta preached the SP to Buddhists, and
predicted their buddhahood by saying: “I do not despise you. You all perform bodhisattva-practice, and you are to become buddhas.” Among them, those who held malicious thoughts toward him once became untouched by the Three Treasures, and for ten thousand aeons they suffered terrible pain in the great hell, Avīci. Having purified their evil karma by themselves they met the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta again. All of them were taught the SP by him and led to supreme enlightenment.  

(13) It is five hundred bodhisattvas, five hundred nuns, and five hundred lay women among this assembly that suffered terrible pain in the great hell, Avīci, on account of having hooted and laughed at the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta. But all of them had been rendered steadfast in supreme enlightenment through his teaching the SP.  

(14) So the keeping, the reading, and the preaching of the SP bring bodhisattvas supreme enlightenment. Therefore after the Buddha had entered into his perfect peacefulness bodhisattvas must constantly keep, read, preach, and explain the SP.  

(15) Then the Buddha Śākyamuni uttered 12 verses.  

3. An Examination of SP 19

It has been widely accepted that the SP is the Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture that predicts that all sentient beings will attain buddhahood. As to the reason why the SP advocates the possibility of all the sentient beings’ attaining buddhahood, there have been three major interpretations. First, all the sentient beings have the essence of the buddha (buddhādhatu). This interpretation was presented by Vasubandhu, one of the greatest Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers, but this first interpretation has already become unacceptable in the light of the history of the Buddhist theory. Second, the wish of all the Buddhas that all the sentient beings shall attain supreme enlightenment has already been accomplished. We can say this second one is the fundamental grounds that enables the SP to advocate such a possibility. Third, all the sentient beings are given by the Buddha the prediction of attaining supreme enlightenment. This third one is the most direct grounds. The Buddha has become able to make a prediction that all the sentient beings will attain buddhahood on the grounds that the wish of all
the Buddhas has already been accomplished. And it is the SP that makes the prediction of all the sentient beings’ attaining buddhahood.

The question may now arise: Seeing that the SP is the Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture that makes the prediction that all the sentient beings will attain buddhahood, can we say that the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta essentially preached the SP in (3)(4)(5) even if he had not obtained the SP? The answer is no. His addresses to the Buddhists in (3)(4)(5) are not the prediction of all the sentient beings’ attaining buddhahood because only buddhas can make the prediction of attaining buddhahood. After he had obtained the Buddha’s words, i.e., the SP, his addresses became the prediction of attaining buddhahood. We can say that the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta for the first time obtained the SP at (7) for the following two reasons: First, because he, for the first time, attained the perfection of the six sense of organs at (7). Attaining the perfection of the six sense of organs through obtaining the SP is one of the major premises of this SP 19 (see (1)). At the same time it serves in SP 19 as the marker or the sign of whether one has obtained the SP or not since whenever he obtained the SP during his cycle of death and rebirth, he, without any exception, attained the perfection of the six sense of organs (see (9)). Secondly, because the first Buddha Bhīṣmagarjitasvararāja did not teach the SP in his life time. He divided his hearers into two classes as his disciples and bodhisattvas, and only to the bodhisattvas did he give the teaching leading them to supreme enlightenment (see (2)). This selection of the hearers shows that the Buddha in public did not teach the SP which gives the prediction of attaining buddhahood to all the sentient beings. Since the Buddha did not teach the SP in his life time, there seems no reason to enable the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta to preach the SP in (3)(4)(5).

The Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta who wished to give the prediction of attaining buddhahood to all the sentient beings had to do so without any of Buddha’s words (see (3)). Since his addresses could not have been the Buddha’s words, the Buddhists who heard his addresses had to become angry with him, show him ill will and displeasure, abuse and insult him: “He actually despises us by giving us such false prediction of attaining buddhahood” (see (4)). Sometimes they cast a dirt clod or stick at him (see (5)). Those Buddhists insultingly named him Sadāparibhūta (see (6)). But after he had obtained the SP at (7) even such Buddhists came to realize that the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta who preached the Buddha’s words had attained the same power and
wisdom as the Buddha. And all of them were converted to become the hearers of the SP and led to supreme enlightenment by him (see (8)).

Here some may present such a refutation as this: The Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūṭa essentially obtained the SP in (3)(4)(5) because the Buddhists in (4)(5)(6) went to hell by having abused and insulted him (see (12)(13)). If attaining the perfection of the six sense of organs through obtaining the SP is the premise of this SP 19, experiencing severe retribution through abusing or insulting the preacher of the SP has to be also the premise of this SP 19 (see (1)).

The present author perfectly agrees with this refutation as to the point that experiencing severe retribution through abusing or insulting the preacher of the SP is the premise of this SP 19. But it is not the Buddhists in (4)(5)(6) that suffered terrible pain in the great hell, Avīci, through having abused or insulted the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūṭa preaching the SP. The Buddhists who suffered terrible pain in the hell were those who held malicious thoughts toward him, and hooted and laughed at him after he had obtained the SP at (7). There are three reasons for this. First, the Buddhist who went to the hell, Avīci, held malicious thoughts toward the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūṭa who preached the SP (see (12)). This expression “the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūṭa who preached the SP” cannot be found in (3)(4)(5). On the contrary it is clearly expressed that he never did the reading or the explaining of any sutras including the SP (see (3)). Secondly, the Buddhists had to experience the severe retribution since they held malicious thoughts toward him, and hooted and laughed at him (see (12)(13)). It is true that the Buddhists in (4)(5)(6) became angry with him, showed him ill will and displeasure, abused and insulted him (see (4)), sometimes cast a dirt clod or stick at him (see (5)), and gave him the name Sadāparībhūṭa (see (6)). But we cannot find the expression “They held malicious thoughts toward him, and hooted and laughed at him” in (4)(5)(6). Thirdly, after the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūṭa had obtained the SP at (7), the Buddhists in (4)(5)(6) were converted by him to become the hearers of the SP in their lives and led to supreme enlightenment (see (8)). This is irreconcilable with the description at (12) that those who suffered terrible pain in the hell once became untouched by the Three Treasures, and that having purified their evil karma by themselves they met the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūṭa again and were led to supreme enlightenment by his preaching the SP.
All these things considered here we can present the theme of SP 19 as follows: After the Buddha had entered into his perfect peacefulness the SP should be kept, read, preached and explained for the sake of all the sentient beings' attaining buddhahood (see (11)(14)). After the Buddha had entered into his perfect peacefulness, through the preaching of the Buddha's words, i.e., the SP, one should take over the role of the Buddha Śākyamuni predicting that all the sentient beings will attain buddhahood. After the Buddha's entering into his perfect peacefulness there is no other way than this to lead them to supreme enlightenment through the prediction of attaining buddhahood. This practice for the benefit of other people also brings benefit to oneself to attain supreme enlightenment soon (see (11)). The keeping, the reading, the preaching, and the explaining of the SP bring benefit both to others and to oneself.

4. Conclusion

Chapter 10 (Dharmabhāṇaka-parivarta) of the SP shows that after the Buddha entered into his perfect peacefulness (tathāgataśya parinirvṛtasya) a preacher (dharmabhāṇaka) of the SP, which is the Buddha's words, predicting that all the sentient beings will attain buddhahood is a messenger of the Buddha (tathāgatadūta) and an agent of the Buddha (tathāgatakṛtyakara), and should be recognized as the Buddha (tathāgato veditavyah). Under the strong awareness that the Buddha has already entered into his perfect peacefulness, the compilers of the SP found what the Buddha really is in the actual function of benefiting the sentient beings realized by preaching the SP. From Chapter 11 (Stūpasāṃdṛśana-parivarta) to Chapter 14 (Bodhisattvapṛthivivivarasamudgama-parivarta) it is continuously asked who and how the SP should be kept and preached after the Buddha's entering into his perfect peacefulness. And the following Chapters 15 (Tathāgatāyuspramāṇa-parivarta) and 16 (Punyaparyāya-parivarta) declare that even after the Buddha has entered into his perfect peacefulness the Buddha Śākyamuni eternally stays in this world and keeps carrying out the function of benefiting all the sentient beings as long as the SP is preached. Chapter 16, Chapter 17 (Anumodanāpunyanirdeśa-parivarta), and Chapter 18 (Dharmabhāṇakānuśamsā-parivarta) describe various kinds of religious merits brought by the keeping and the preaching of the SP and encourage bodhisattvas to keep and preach the SP in order to more easily realize the function of benefiting all the sentient beings after the Buddha's entering.
into his perfect peacefulness. Having these chapters as its premises SP 19, which begins with the re-illustration of the perfection of the six sense organs through the keeping or the preaching of the SP, emphasizes that after the Buddha has entered into his perfect peacefulness only by the preaching of the SP, which is the Buddha's words predicting that all the sentient beings will attain buddhahood, thus taking over the Buddha's role, i.e., the actual function of benefiting the sentient beings is realized. And through this realization of the function of benefiting others, the preacher of the SP himself soon attains supreme enlightenment. The preaching of the SP brings about the benefit both to oneself and to others. This context from Chapter 10 to Chapter 19 naturally leads to the following Chapter 20 (Tathāgatārddhyabhisamkāra-parivarta) in which the SP, which brings about the benefit both to oneself and to others, is entrusted to the Bodhisattvas from the earth which had appeared in Chapter 14, and they are instructed to keep and preach the SP after the Buddha has entered into his perfect peacefulness.

Therefore SP 19 does not play any strange role within the SP, but can suitably be focused on the main theme of the SP, which is presented through the context from Chapter 10 to Chapter 20, that even after the Buddha has entered into his perfect peacefulness, the function of the Buddha Śākyamuni which benefits all the sentient beings can be eternally realized through the keeping and the preaching of the SP.

Notes

1) SPs 375.1–385.7, SPt 159a8–163b8, SPc2 50b24–51c7, SCt 122b29–124a2. 2) In translating the SPs in this paper, Kern [1884] was referred to. 3) SPs 375.1–8, SPt 159a8–b3, SCt 50b24–28, SCt 122b29–c5. 4) SPs 375.9–377.6, SPt 159b3–160a8, SCt 50b28–c14, SCt 122c5–20. 5) SPs 377.6–378.7, SPt 160a8–161a1, SCt 50c14–23, SCt 122c20–123a1. 6) SPs 378.8–379.1, SPt 161a1–4, SCt 50c23–28, SCt 123a1–7. 7) SPs 379.2–3, SPt 161a5, SCt 50c28–51a1, SCt 123a7–9. 8) SPs 379.3–4, SPt 161a5–6, SCt 51a1–3, SCt 123a9–12. 9) SPs 379.5–13, SPt 161a6–b3, SCt 51a3–7, SCt 123a12–18. 10) SPs 379.13–380.5, SPt 161b4–6, SCt 51a8–12, SCt 123a18–22. 11) SPs 380.6–381.3, SPt 161b6–162a4, SCt 51a12–17, SCt 123a23–b3. 12) SPs 381.4–8, SPt 162a4–7, SCt 51a17–21, SCt 123b4–7. 13) SPs 381.8–382.3, SPt 162a7–b4, SCt 51a21–26, SCt 123b7–13. 14) SPs 382.3–10, SPt 162b4–8, SCt 51a26–b1, SCt 123b13–20. 15) SPs 382.10–383.3, SPt 163a1–3, SCt 51b1–5, SCt 123b20–25. 16) SPs 383.3–6, SPt 163a3–5, SCt 51b5–9, SCt 123b25–28. 17) SPs 383.7–385.6, SPt 163a5–b7, SCt 51b9–c7, SCt 123b28–124a2. 18) Shixian zhongsheng jieyou foxing gu 示現衆生皆有佛性故 (T. no. 1519, vol. 26, 9a14), shizhu zhongsheng jieyou foxing gu 示諸衆生皆有佛性故 (T. no. 1520, vol. 26, 18b8). 19) See Hirakawa [1989: 447] and Suzuki [2015: 172–173]. 20) See Okada [2013: 276] and Suzuki [2014: 37–38]. 21) See
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Suzuki [2006].

Texts and Abbreviations

SP  Saddharmapundarika.


SP1  Tibetan version of the SP. P no. 781 (Dam pa’i chos pad ma dkar po).


(T. Taisho Tripitaka; P Peking Kanjur)

Bibliography


Key words  Miaofa lianhua jing, 妙法蓮華經, Fahu jing, 法華経, Saddharmapundarika, Changbuqing pusa pin, 常不軽菩薩品, Sadāparībhūta-parivarta, shouji, 授記, vyākaraṇa, the eternal Buddha Śākyamuni realized through the keeping and the preaching of the Saddharmapundarika

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