“Qizui biyi” Having Atoned for His Sin: Nichiren and Sadāparibhūta

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1. The Aim of This Paper

The Saddharmapuṇḍarīka (Lotus Sutra, SP) is one of the most influential sutras in the Mahayana Sutra literature. In Eastern Asia, especially, the Lotus Sutra Cult (Fahua xinyang  法華信仰), based on the second Chinese version of the SP (Miaofa lianhua jing  妙法蓮華經, SPC2) rendered by Kumārajīva, is very popular.

The Sadāparibhūta-parivarta (SP 19) which is Chapter 19 of the Sanskrit text (SP3) of the SP, and the corresponding two Chinese versions, that is, Changbuqing pusa pin 常不輕菩薩品 which is Chapter 20 of the SPC2 and Changbeijingman pin 常被輕慢品 which is Chapter 19 of the Zheng fahua jing 正法華經 (SPC1) (rendered by Zhu Fahu 竺法護) tell the story of a Bodhisattva called Sadāparibhūta.

• There once existed a Bodhisattva called Sadāparibhūta. He continued to give a 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 persecuted by them.
• They went to hell on the grounds of having persecuted him.
• 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.

Three related accounts are Account 1 (SP3 382.3–10, SPC2 51a26–51b1, SPC1 123b13–20, (12)), Account 2 (SP3 379.5–13, SPC2 51a3–7, SPC1 123a12–18, (7)), and Account 3 (SP3 384.1–4, SPC2 51b17–20, SPC1 123c8–13, (7)).

Account 1 tells that the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta preached the SP to Buddhists and predicted their attaining buddhahood. Among them, those who persecuted him
suffered terrible pain in the great hell, Avīci. Having purified their evil karma by themselves, they met the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta again and were taught the SP by him and led to supreme enlightenment. What draws our attention is that the \( \text{SP}_{c_2} \) lacks the description that the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta preached the SP. This point has a close relationship to the theme of this study. In any case, the \( \text{SP}_s \), the \( \text{SP}_{c_2} \), and the \( \text{SP}_{c_1} \) unanimously tell that it is those Buddhists who persecuted the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta that had to atone for their sin.

**Account 2** tells that when the end of his life was drawing near, the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta through a voice from the sky heard the SP. The \( \text{SP}_s \), the \( \text{SP}_{c_2} \), and the \( \text{SP}_{c_1} \) share the same content.

Although **Account 3** is the fourth verse in \( \text{SP} \) 19, which corresponds to **Account 2** in the prose, only \( \text{SP}_{c_2} \) tells that it is the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta that atoned for his sin (qizui biyi 其罪畢已) when he neared the time of his death. However, either the nature of the sin he committed or the reason for him committing the sin has remained unsolved to date.

This paper attempts to elucidate the reason why only the \( \text{SP}_{c_2} \) tells it is the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta who atoned for his sin, and how the phrase “qizui biyi” in the \( \text{SP}_{c_2} \) affected Japanese Buddhist history.

### 2. A Premise of This Study: The SP as the Prediction of All Sentient Beings’ Attaining Buddhahood

As a premise of this study, we should here grasp the discussion in the previous studies 3) that the SP was compiled as the Buddha’s words predicting all the sentient beings attaining buddhahood after the Buddha had entered into his perfect peacefulness. The SP asserts this as follows:

Only the Buddha can predict all the sentient beings attaining buddhahood. However hard one may strive for attaining buddhahood, he cannot accomplish it unless he is given a prediction (vyākarana) by the Buddha of his attaining buddhahood. After the Buddha had entered into his perfect peacefulness, Buddhists were instructed to take over the role of the Buddha Śākyamuni (tathāgataśrṣṭakāra, \( \text{SP} \), 227.1) through the preaching of the Buddha’s word, namely, the SP, predicting that all sentient beings will attain buddhahood. As long as this role, that is, the function of the tathāgata, is performed, the Buddha Śākyamuni eternally stays in this world and keeps carrying out the function of benefiting all sentient beings by predicting their attainment of buddhahood.
3. Why Does Only the $SP_{C2}$ Have the Phrase “Qizui biyi”?

3.1. Two Kinds of Persecutors Expressed in $SP_{19}$ (Suzuki [2016])

It has long been overlooked that two kinds of persecutors (Persecutors 1 and Persecutors 2) are expressed in $SP_{19}$, and the present author elucidated it in Suzuki [2016].

- **Persecutors 1** are those Buddhists who persecuted the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta (Sadāparībhūta 1), who gave them an invalid prediction of their attaining buddhahood, as Sadāparībhūta 1 had not yet obtained the Buddha’s words, namely, the $SP$.

- **Persecutors 2** are those Buddhists who persecuted the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta (Sadāparībhūta 2), who gave them valid predictions of their attaining buddhahood, as Sadāparībhūta 2 had already obtained the Buddha’s words, namely, the $SP$.

**Persecutors 1** are the Buddhists in (4), (5), and (6), who do not suffer terrible pain in the great hell.

**Sadāparībhūta 1**, who wished to give the prediction of attaining buddhahood to all sentient beings, had to do so without any of the Buddha’s words (See (3)). Because his addresses could not have been the Buddha’s words, the Buddhists who heard his teachings had to persecute him: “He actually despises us by giving us such a false prediction of attaining buddhahood (See (4)).” Sometimes they cast a dirt clod or stick at him for the purpose of preventing his approach (See (5)). Those Buddhists insultingly named him Sadāparībhūta (See (6)). Yet after he had obtained the $SP$ at (7), even these Buddhists came to realize that Sadāparībhūta 2, who preached the Buddha’s words, had performed the same function as the Buddha. All of them were converted to become hearers of the $SP$ and led to supreme enlightenment by him (See (8)).

**Persecutors 2** are the Buddhists in (12) and (13), who had to suffer terrible pain in the great hell.

3.2. Particularities of the $SP_{C2}$

**Particularity 1**: In Account 1, only the $SP_{C2}$ lacks the description that the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta preached the $SP$. Therefore, in the $SP_{C2}$ it is difficult to distinguish
Sadāparībhūta 1 from Sadāparībhūta 2. In the SP, and the $SP_C$, we can clearly see the reason why Persecutors 1 did not have to suffer terrible pain in the great hell because Sadāparībhūta 1 did not preach the $SP$. However, in the $SP_C$, it is difficult to distinguish Persecutors 1 from Persecutors 2 as Sadāparībhūta 1 and Sadāparībhūta 2 are indistinguishable. In consequence, we cannot see in the $SP_C$ the reason why Persecutors 1 did not have to suffer while Persecutors 2 had to do so.

**Particularity 2:** The $SP_2$ 379.2–3 and the $SP_C$, 123a7–9 tell that Persecutors 1 did no direct harm to Sadāparībhūta 1. Seeing Sadāparībhūta 1 from afar, Persecutors 1 cast a dirt clod or stick at him for the purpose of preventing his approach since they did not want to hear his false and invalid prediction of their attaining buddhahood. Then Sadāparībhūta 1, who was not able to approach them, made them hear his prediction from a distance. However, the $SP_C$, 50c28–51a1 describes Persecutors 1 as very evil persons who struck Sadāparībhūta 1. Having been struck, Sadāparībhūta 1 had to escape from them and ensure they heard his prediction from a distance. In the $SP_C$ it is not clear why Persecutors 2 had to suffer terrible pain in the great hell while Persecutors 1, who were possibly more evil than Persecutors 2, did not have to do so. It is possible that in order to answer this question the $SP_C$ has come to have the phrase “qizui biyi.”

**3.3. At What Level Did the Phrase Corresponding to “Qizui biyi” Appear in the SP?**

Is it possible that the phrase corresponding to “qizui biyi” appears in the original text of the $SP$? We cannot find any clue in the extant Sanskrit manuscripts as no manuscript has the corresponding phrase. Seeing that the introduction of the Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing 添品妙法蓮華經 says that the reading of the $SP_C$ accords with that of the manuscript in Guizi 龜茲 (T. vol. 9, 134c4–5), it is possible that the $SP_C$ was based on some particular texts. However particular the text the $SP_C$ was based on, it is difficult to suppose that the phrase corresponding to “qizui biyi” already existed in any Sanskrit text because the difference between Sadāparībhūta 1 and Sadāparībhūta 2 is essential to the $SP$, which asserts this as we saw in Chapter 2.

Did Kumārajīva (344–413) from Guizi intentionally interpolate the phrase “qizui biyi” when translating the $SP$ into Chinese? We will be examining this later.

**3.4. For What Kind of Sin Did the Bodhisattva Sadāparībhūta Atone?**

We cannot find any clue in the $SP_C$ in which the phrase “qizui biyi” unexpectedly
appears without any context. In the $SP_s$ and the $SP_c$, we naturally cannot find any clue as they do not have a phrase corresponding to “qizui biyi.” We now try to examine this question from a different point of view.

4. Nichiren and Sadāparibhūta

4.1. The Kaimokushō (Open Your Eyes to the Lotus Teaching)

The Kaimokushō 開目抄 (2 vols.) is said to be one of the chief writings of Japanese monk Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) as well as the Risshō ankokuron 立正安國論 and the Kanjin honzonshō 観心本尊抄. He wrote this Kaimokushō in 1272, ten years before entering into his perfect peacefulness. In his life, Nichiren had to experience the Four Great Persecutions (Matsubagayatsu hōnan 松葉ヶ谷法難, 1260; Izu hōnan 伊豆法難, 1261; Komatsubara hōnan 小松原法難, 1264; Ryūkō hōnan 龍口法難, 1271). After Ryūkō hōnan Nichiren was exiled to Sadogashima 佐渡島 (Sado Island), which is an island of severe cold, and at a dilapidated house called Tsukahara sanmaidō 塚原三味堂 in Sadogashima, Nichiren wrote the Kaimokushō in order to answer the question his disciples, his followers, and even he himself had about the severe persecutions they had to suffer.

4.2. Nichiren’s Question and Its Solution Expressed in the Kaimokushō

While the $SP$ repeatedly teaches that those who keep, read, preach, or explain the $SP$ (practicers of the $SP$, Hokekyō no gyōja 法華経の行者) must experience severe persecution ($SP_s$, 230.9–10, 236.11–12, 271.7–274.10, 382.3–9, and so on), it also repeatedly teaches that practicers of the $SP$ shall receive heavenly protection ($SP_s$, 230.11–231.6, 237.1–6, 286.5–10, 287.9–10, 395.2–403.8, 474.3–477.6, and so on), and that those who persecute practicers of the $SP$ must experience severe retribution ($SP_s$, 93.11–97.4, 229.7–10, and so on).

Nichiren realized the repeated persecutions he and his disciples had to suffer included the Four Great Persecutions as the evidence that they were the practicers of the $SP$. However, the persecutors experienced no retribution at all and Nichiren and his disciples received no heavenly protection. “Am I really one who practices the $SP$?” This is the serious question Nichiren had to face. We will now look at how Nichiren found his answer to this question by quoting several accounts in the Kaimokushō.
Here we consider the following passage from the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā (VjP):

api tu ye te subhūte kulaputrā vā kuladuhitaro vā imān evamṛपन sūtrāntān udgrahisyānti dhārayisyānti vṛcayisyānti paryāvāpyisyānti yoniśāś ca manasikāvāpyisyānti paraḥbhavāś ca vistarena samprakāśayisyānti te paribhūtā bhaviśisyānti supariṣṭhūtāś ca bhaviśisyānti/ tat kasya hetoh/ — 1152 —
This passage says that those who preach the Buddha’s words may suffer persecution because of sins in their past lives. It also says that through suffering they can destroy their sins and attain buddhahood. However, what kinds of sins they have committed are untold even in this VjP.

4.4. The VjP₁ and the SP₂
Since both the VjP₁ and the SP₂ were rendered by Kumārajīva in 402 and 406 respectively, it is obvious that Kumārajīva already knew the VjP when translating the SP into the SP₂. Therefore, there is every possibility that it is Kumārajīva himself who inserted the phrase “qizui biyi” in the SP₂ because the text he referred to was so specific that he was not able to distinguish Sadāparibhūta 2 from Sadāparibhūta 1.

4.5. Why Did Nichiren Consider the Sins Sadāparibhūta Committed as Slander of the SP in His Past Lives?
To this question Okada B. [2016: 21, 104] points out that Nichiren himself was once a proponent of Pure Land Buddhism and Shingon Buddhism, and that repenting this he might consider the sins Sadāparibhūta committed as the slander of the SP in his past lives (Sado gosho 佐渡御書, STN 615).

Through identifying himself with the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta, Nichiren established his self-awakening as a practicer of the SP and even deepened it.

5. Conclusion
As the SP asserts, “After the Buddha had entered into his perfect peacefulness, through the preaching of the Buddha’s words, namely, the SP, Buddhists should take over the role of the Buddha Śākyamuni predicting that all sentient beings will attain buddhahood,” the difference between Sadāparibhūta 1, who did not preach the SP, and Sadāparibhūta 2, who preached the SP, is essential to the SP. Therefore, it cannot be supposed that the phrase corresponding to “qizui biyi” already existed in any Sanskrit text. There is every possibility that Kumārajīva, who already knew the VjP before he
translated the SP into the $SP_{cz}$, inserted the phrase “qizui biyi” in the $SP_{cz}$ because the text he referred to was so specific that he found it difficult to distinguish Sadāparibhūta 2 from Sadāparibhūta 1.

This phrase “qizui biyi” greatly influenced one Japanese monk, Nichiren, who founded the Nichiren School. Nichiren, who was the leader of a strong Lotus Sutra Cult, repeatedly faced severe persecution. In the course of his suffering due to the persecutions, he, who was once a proponent of Pure Land Buddhism and Shingon Buddhism, began to identify himself with Sadāparibhūta and finally reached a stage in which he took delight in being persecuted as he realized that this could help him atone for his sin.

If it were not for the phrase “qizui biyi” in the $SP_{cz}$, Nichiren would have failed in establishing his self-awakening as a practitioner of the SP and would have changed his faith in the SP. Moreover, he might have abandoned his faith in the SP because there is no other key to the answer than the phrase “qizui biyi” as to why he could not receive heavenly protection or was a practitioner of the SP.

Therefore, if it were not for the phrase “qizui biyi” in the $SP_{cz}$, the Japanese religious world and society would have been greatly different from what it is today. We can say that the phrase “qizui biyi” in the $SP_{cz}$ is a good example of how a “Mahayana sutra can create the outer world.”

Notes
1) The reading of the $SP_{cz}$ well accords with that of the $SP_{cz}$.
2) Numbers in parenthesis correspond to the numbers shown in Chapter 2 of Suzuki [2016].
3) Okada Y. [2013] is the representative in this respect.
4) The 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. ($SP_{cz}$ 93.11–97.4, 229.7–10)
5) The difference of reading in Account 1 cannot be found either in the extant manuscripts.
6) The phrase “senshō no hōbō no toga 先生の護法の失, sin against the True Law in the past lives” in the Sainan taijishō 災難対治錦 (STN 170) gives us another clue to this question.

Texts and Abbreviations

$SP$ Saddharmapundarīka.

“Qizui biyi” Having Atoned for His Sin (SUZUKI) (117)

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

Bibliography


Key words  Miaofa lianhua jing, 妙法蓮華経, Fahua jing, 法華経, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka, Changbuqing pusa, 常不輕菩薩, Sadāparībhūta, qizui biyi, 其罪畢已, Nichiren, 日蓮, Kaimokushō, 開目抄, Hokekyō no gyōja, 法華経の行者

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