

The Vyaghri-jataka in the Extant Versions of the Suvarnabhasottamasutra

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Introduction

The “Vyāghrī-jātaka” or “Brāhmaṇa (or Prince)-jātaka” is a well-known story in the tradition of Northern Buddhism. Its several extant versions share a frame story in which a *bodhisattva*, viz. Śākyamuni in his former life, sacrifices his body to feed a starving mother tigress. Of these versions, that which features Prince Mahāsattva and a tigress with seven cubs has been embedded and represented in many Buddhist texts and artworks, and its original source is usually thought to be attested in the *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*. However, this story appears in the Chinese translations of this *sūtra* and the corresponding story in the existing Sanskrit version is somewhat different.

The *Vyāghrī-parivarta* in the Versions of the *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*

Below is a summary of the *Vyāghrī-parivarta* found in *SuvS*¹⁾ (Ch. 18, pp. 201–240):

[Prose] When Śākyamuni-buddha was in Pāñcāla he made manifested a *stūpa* up from the earth and showed the bones laid in seven jewel-ornamented boxes. He then related a story about them: “Once there were a king Mahāratha, and his sons, Mahāpraṇāda, Mahādeva and Mahāsattva. The three princes encountered a tigress with her [A five cubs] in the forest. She seemed to have delivered the cubs just seven days before and be so starving enough to eat them. Mahāsattva [B threw himself] to her but she did nothing, so he [B stabbed his throat with a bamboo-stick]. The tigress looking at his blood ate him. At that moment in the palace, [C the mother queen had a nightmare in which her breasts were cut, all of her teeth were wrenched out and an eagle killed the youngest of the three doves she kept]. Then the king and the queen were told of Mahāsattva’s death, went to where he was killed and held memorial service for his relics.” Śākyamuni repeated this story in verse.

[Verses] (Identical parts omitted) “. . . [D Mahāsattva jumped down from a cliff], . . . [E the mother queen had milk overflowing from her breasts and pain throughout her whole body, and had a nightmare in which an eagle killed the youngest of the three doves she kept]. The king searched

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for them and found the two and heard that the youngest had [D jumped down from a cliff]. The king brought the two back.” Having told this, Śākyamuni revealed that in his past life, he was Mahāsattva, Śuddhodana was Mahāratha, Māyā was the queen, Maitreya and Mañjuśrī was the two brothers, Mahāprajāpatī was the tigress and [F five bhikṣus were the cubs].

[Prose] “The king and the queen made a *stūpa* there and laid Mahāsattva’s relics in it.” After Śākyamuni told this story, the *stūpa* returned into the earth.

We find that in this Sanskrit text, the number of cubs is five ([A] [F]). The Tibetan version is the same in this regard (*SuvT*²): p. 157, l. 15, p. 174, verse 79). However, in the Chinese versions, the number is seven (*SuvCI*³): 354b2, 355a2; *SuvC3*⁴): 451b16), and they are said to be the five *bhikṣus* with Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana (*SuvCI*: 356c11; *SuvC3*: 454b12). This discrepancy cannot be regarded as arising from later mistranslations or interpolations by the Chinese translators: out of all the versions of *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* the shortest and the most simple—and therefore most likely the closest to the ur-text—is *SuvCI*. *SuvS* is an extended and partly summarized⁵ version of the original text of *SuvCI*. Moreover, *SuvS* has an incomplete sentence written below, which implies the passage [F] might have had seven cubs.

Mahādeva āsīd atha rājaputro Mañjuśrīr abhūt sa ca kumārabhūtaḥ /

vyāghrī abhūt tatra Mahāprajāpatī [F vyāghristā pañcaka āsi bhikṣavaḥ] // 79

[dvayo suto viṣyati āsīt]

Atha mahārāja mahādevī ca bahuvīdhakarūṇāparidevanam kṛtvā (*SuvS*, p. 239, ll. 7–11)

The sentence in brackets is omitted in Nobel’s edition and Nanjio and Izumi [1931]⁶, and *SuvT*. However it is attested, with some variation,⁷ in all Sanskrit Mss. While Skjærvø [2004]⁸ edits the text to appear exactly as it does above, this passage is still hard to interpret. Izumi [1940]⁹ suggests that it should be read as “*dvayo suto Koly’ Upasiṣya āsīt*” (the two cubs are Maudgalyāyana and Śāriputra) and that [A] should be corrected to read “seven cubs” in order to match to the Chinese versions. Yet, if we postulate that the editors of *SuvS* changed the original “seven” to “five,” it would become incomprehensible as to why in all Sanskrit Mss. the sentence “*dvayo suto . . .*” was preserved and [A] was kept as five.

Other Versions of the Vyāghrī-jātaka

In order to investigate the original form of this text, let us consider parallel stories in other texts.¹⁰ Below we will show summaries of these stories and classify them based on

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the number of cubs that appear—seven or two.

1. Versions with Seven Cubs

Púsà běnshēngmán jīng 菩薩本生鬘經 (T. no. 160, vol. 3, 332b): Prince Mahāsattva | jumped down from a cliff | for a tigress with seven cubs | and stabbed his throat with a bamboo-stick | A *stūpa* was built | The two brothers are Maitreya and Mañjuśrī | the tigress is Mahāprajāpatī and the cubs are Maudgalyāyana, Śāriputra and five *bhikṣus* in their former life. (This text took this passage from *SuvC3*.¹¹)

Púsà tóushēn shèhǔ qǐtǎ yīnyuán jīng 菩薩投身餓餓虎起塔因緣經 (T. no. 172, vol. 3, 424b): Prince *Candanamati (Zhāntánmóti 梅檀摩提) | jumped down to the bottom of the gorge | for a tigress with seven cubs | A *stūpa* was built.

Yàoxíng shěshēn jīng 要行捨身經 (T. no. 2895, vol. 85, 1415b): Prince Mahāsattva | had himself eaten | by a tigress with seven cubs.

2. Versions with Two Cubs

Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā*, 91 Vyāghryavadāna (*Avadāna-kalpalatā of kṣemendra (Volume II)* P. L. Vaidya ed. Darbanga: Mithila Institute, 1989, II 537–538): Prince Karuṇareṇu¹² | had himself eaten by | a tigress with two cubs | The two cubs and the tigress are respectively the two thieves and their mother (who are saved by Śākyamuni) in their former lives.

Divyāvadāna, 32 Rūpāvatyavadāna (Vaidya ed., 310–313): An ascetic *brāhmaṇa* Brahmaṇa | threw himself to | a tigress with two cubs | and cut his head off with a sword that had a bamboo-sheath¹³ | His two teachers are Maitreya and Suprabha-buddha | the tigress is Kauṇḍinya and the cubs are Nanda and Rāhla in their former lives. (Chinese translations: *Qiánshì sānzhuǎn jīng* 前世三轉經 T. no. 178, vol. 3, 449a25 [In this version, he cuts himself at seven points, and the teachers are Kāśyapa and Maitreya], *Yínsènnǚ jīng* 銀色女經 T. no. 179, vol. 3, 451b [In this version, the ascetic was *Mānava (Mónàpó 摩那婆), the teachers are the *bhikṣus* and the cubs are delivered seven days before])

Xiányú jīng 賢愚經 (T. no. 202, vol. 4, 352b): Prince Mahāsattva | threw himself to | a tigress with two cubs | and stabbed himself with sharp wood (limù 利木) | A *stūpa* was built | The two brothers are Maitreya and *Vasumitra (Póxūmìduōluó 婆須蜜多羅) | the two cubs and a tigress are respectively the two thieves and their mother (who are saved by Śākyamuni) in their former lives.

3. Versions That Do Not Mention Number of Cubs

Āryasūra's *Jātakamālā*, 1 Vyāghrījātaka (*The Jātaka-Mālā or Bodhisattvāvadāna-Mālā by Ārya-Çūra* Hendrick Kern ed. Boston: Harvard University, 1891, 1–6): An ascetic *brāhmaṇa* | threw himself to | a tigress with cubs.

Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā*, 51 Rukmavatyavadāna (Vaidya ed., II 316–319): An ascetic *brāhmaṇa* Satyavrata | threw himself to | a tigress with cubs (delivered seven days earlier) | and stabbed his throat with a bamboo-stick |

Rāṣṭrapālapariṣchā (Finot ed., 22): Śākyamuni in former life | threw himself to | a tigress with cubs. (Chinese translations: *Dà bǎojī jīng* 大宝積經 Hùguó púsà huì 護國菩薩會 T. no. 310, vol.

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11, 461c [In this version, tigers are eight], *Hùguó zūnzhě suǒwèn dàchéng jīng* 護国尊者所問大乘經 T. no. 321, vol. 12, 5b [In this version *Sattva (Sàduǒ 薩埵) jumped down from a cliff.]

Liùdùjí jīng 六度集經 (T. no. 152, vol. 3, 2b): An ascetic *bodhisattva* | had his head eaten by | a mother tigress.

Púsà běnxíng jīng 菩薩本行經 (T. no. 155, vol. 3, 119a): Prince Mahāsattva | threw himself to | a tiger.

Fēnbié gōngdé lùn 分別功德論 (T. no. 1507, vol. 25, 35a): A *bodhisattva* | had himself eaten by | a tigress with cubs.

Dà zhìdù lùn 大智度論 (T. no. 1509, vol. 25, 179b25): A *bodhisattva* | threw himself to | a tigress with cubs.¹⁴⁾

We find many elements here that coincide with the version of the story found in *Suv*. But the exact source of this story remains unclear. However, it is noteworthy that no version includes five cubs.

Conclusion

If we reconstruct the transformation of the version of this story found in the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* based on the existence of certain elements in its parallel versions, it can be argued that it was not something borrowed from another text, but rather a story that originated in this *sūtra*. This means that the version with seven cubs and several contradictions (such as [B] and [D], [C] and [E]) was the original form of the story. Thus, the version in *SuvS* may have existed in isolation from the other versions, even the Chinese rendering of the *sūtra*. Two transmission lines can be posited: one to which the original texts of *SuvC1* and *SuvC3* belong, which kept the number of cubs to seven and corrected the contradictions found in the urtext, and another to which *SuvS* belongs, which did not correct the contradictions of the urtext and left the sentence “*dvayo suto . . .*” corrupt, only changing [A] from seven to five. The question remains as to why only [A] was modified, however this remains the most plausible view at this point.

Notes

1) *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra: Das Goldglanz-sūtra, Ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-buddhismus, nach den Handschriften und mit Hilfe der tibetischen und chinesischen Übertragungen*, herausgegeben von Johannes Nobel (Leipzig: Otto Harrasowitz, 1937).

2) *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra: Das Goldglanz-sūtra; Ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-buddhismus*, Bd. 1, *Die Tibetischen Übersetzungen*; Bd. 2, *Wörterbuch Tibetisch-Deutsch-Sanskrit*, herausgegeben von Johannes Nobel (Leiden: E. J.

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Brill, 1944–50). (Based on *SuvT2* [trans. Jinamitra, Śilendrabodhi, Ye-śes sde, Peking No. 175, sDe dGe No. 556] and *SuvT3* [Peking No. 176, sDe dGe No. 557]). 3) *Jinguāngmíng jīng* 金光明經, T. no. 663, vol. 16, trans. Tánwúchèn 曇無讖. 4) *Jinguāngmíng zuìshèngwáng jīng* 金光明最勝王經, T. no. 665, vol. 16, trans. Yìjìng 義淨. *SuvC2* (*Hébù Jinguāngmíng jīng* 合部金光明經, T. no. 664, vol. 16, ed. Bǎoguì 寶貴), and *SuvT1* (trans. Chos-grub [Fǎchéng 法成] from *SuvC3*, Peking No. 174, sDe dGe No. 555) fall outside the scope of this paper. 5) This can be determined by looking at *Daśadevaputrasahasra-vyākaraṇa-parivarta*, see Tsuchida Ryūtarō 土田龍太郎, “Bonbun *Konkōmyōkyō* Juki-bon no kōsei” 梵文金光明經授記品の構成, *Shūkyō kenkyū* 宗教研究 260 (1984): pp. 49–64. 6) Bunyiu Nanjio and Hokei Idzumi, *The Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra: A Mahayana Text called “The Golden Splendour”* (Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society, 1931). 7) See *SuvS*, p. 239, n. 21, Skjærvø, *This Most Excellent Shine of Gold, King of Kings of Sutras: The Khotanese Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, ([Cambridge, Mass.]: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 2004), p. 358 18.233^a. 8) Skjærvø, [2004]. 9) Izumi Hōkei 泉芳璟 “Bonbun *Konkōmyōkyō* no kōtei ni tsukite” 梵文金光明經の校訂に就きて, *Ōtani gakuhō* 大谷学報 21, no. 1 (1940): pp. 1–19. 10) For detailed information, see Hikata Ryūshō 干潟龍祥, *Honshōkyō-rui no shisōshi-teki kenkyū* 本生經類の思想史的研究, revised and enlarged ed. (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1978), esp. Addendum 35; Hikata, *Jātaka gaikan* ジャータカ概観, 3rd revised and enlarged ed. (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1981), esp. p. 102, n. 67, plates 21, 22, 37, 67; Sugimoto Takushū 杉本卓洲, “Shashin bosatsu no sharitō” 捨身菩薩の舍利塔, in *Hokekyō no juyō to tenkai* 法華經の受容と展開, ed. Taga Ryūgen 田賀龍彦, *Hokekyō kenkyū* 12 (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1993), pp. 451–474; Matsumura Junko “The Vyāghrī-Jātaka Known to Sri Lankan Buddhists and Its Relation to the Northern Buddhist Versions,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究 58, no. 3 (2010): pp. 1164–1172 (48–56). 11) See John Brough, “The Chinese Pseudo-translation of Āryasūra’s Jātakamālā,” *Asian Major*, n.s. 11, no. 1 (1964): pp. 27–53. 12) Following the reading of Okano Kiyoshi 岡野潔, “Avadānakalpalatā 94–97 shō to SMRAM 23 shō: Yaśomitra, Vyāghrī, Hastin, Kacchapa no kōtei, wayaku” Avadānakalpalatā 94–97 章と SMRAM 23 章: Yaśomitra, Vyāghrī, Hastin, Kacchapa の校訂・和訳, *Minami Ajia kotengaku* 南アジア古典学 4 (2009): pp. 95–177. 13) Following the reading of Hiraoka Satoshi 平岡聡, *Budda ga nazo toku sanze no monogatari: Diviya-avadāna zen’yaku* ブツダが謎説く三世の物語: 『デイヴィヤ・アヴァターナ』全訳 (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 2007). 14) In addition, *Gāosēng Fǎxiǎn zhuàn* 高僧法顯伝 (T. no. 2085, vol. 51, 858b), *Dàtáng xīyù jì* 大唐西域記 (T. no. 2087, vol. 51, 885c) and *Luòyáng qiélán jì* 洛陽伽藍記 (T. no. 2092, vol. 51, 1019c) mention this story and *Jīnglǜ yìxiàng* 經律異相 (T. no. 2121, vol. 53, 162a–) quotes the latter part of T. no. 172.

〈Key words〉 Suvarṇa (pra) bhāsottamasūtra, Vyāghrī-jātaka

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