



The Evolution of the Story of Sadāprarudita in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra

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In the prajñāpāramitā sūtras of 8,000, 18,000, 25,000 and 100,000 lines, and their respective translations in Chinese and Tibetan, there is a story about Sadāprarudita's search for prajñāpāramitā (perfection of wisdom). This story teaches bodhisattvas to learn from his diligent spirit. In this story the doctrine of prajñāpāramitā, which is said to be vast and deep, is taught through many interesting and impressive episodes. However, some versions of the sūtra do not contain the story. This suggests that the story is not part of the original version of the prajñāpāramitā sūtra. This raises the question of when and why the story was added to the prajñāpāramitā sūtras. In addition, there are two main different versions of the story in those sūtras. One is found only in two Chinese translations of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra (Aṣṭa), while the other is found in various versions of the Aṣṭa and its Chinese translations except the previous two. This other version is also found in the Chinese translations of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra and the Śatasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra. In this paper, the former version is called version I and the other is called version II. The focus of this paper is on the relationship of the two versions, in particular, the evolution of the story of Sadāprarudita.

In terms of the main incidents in the body of the story, the two versions exhibit both areas of similarity and diversion. There are two significant segments in version I, which are the incidents before Sadāprarudita hears a voice in the air while in the wilderness and the segment after the event where he enters into various samādhis, entirely nonexistent in version II. The common part which can be found in both versions of the story comprises of two divisions: the journey to the city of Gandhavaṭī and the meeting with Dharmodgata. Remarkably, these two divisions, including the incidents they contain, are very similar. This consistency in the overall structure makes it possible to sketch the contours of a synoptic chart of parallel passages between the two versions. In other words, both version I and version II have the same structure.

There are generally three possibilities when considering the issue of how the story developed through time.

- One hypothesis is that the two segments could have been omitted or excised from version I, leading to the formation of version II.
- Another hypothesis is that the two could have been interpolations or new additions to version I, even though it was translated earlier than version II. In other words, version I is in fact a later rendition while version II is actually an earlier version.
- The third hypothesis is that there was an earlier version which did not have the two segments initially and the renditions of this version developed in two independent ways. One path of development saw the two segments added into the story, forming version I. Somehow, this version was not available to those who collected and translated the text at a later period. The other development path was that the earlier version evolved into version II and the two segments were never added through the process of development.

So the question is: which of these hypotheses is supported by the facts? Based on the available evidence, the third hypothesis is the more likely case. The strongest evidence is in the entirely different contents



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of the series of samādhis. It seems that in both paths of development, under the third hypothesis, the content of various samādhis were added according to the tradition, regarding various samādhis, in different areas.

In addition to these two versions, the story of Sadāprarudita also exists in a jātaka version recorded in the Liùdùjīng 六度集經 (Sūtra on the Collection of Six Pāramitās). Generally speaking, the Sadāprarudita jātaka may be divided into three parts: the introductory account of the jātaka, the body of the jātaka and the conclusive account of the jātaka. With regard to the body of the jātaka, it consists of the stage before setting off on the journey to seek prajñāpāramitā, leaving for the wilderness and setting off on the journey to Gandhavaṭī. In this jātaka version, the part 'before setting off on the journey to seek prajñāpāramitā' corresponds to one of the unique plots found in version I. This indicates that the Sadāprarudita jātaka has a close relationship with version I of the story.

In relation to the evolution of the story regarding the three versions, a probable path of development is likely to be that after version I was formed, it was transmitted to China and translated into Chinese between the 2nd and 3rd century C.E. However, version I seemed to have been unavailable at a later period, as evidenced by its disappearance in later translations or in the Aṣṭa dated between 1000 and 1150 C.E. Interestingly, a jātaka version, which looks like an abbreviated work of version I, is found in the Sūtra on the Collection of Six Pāramitās translated by Kāngsēnghuì 康僧會 (ca. 251 C.E.). There is even some evidence that suggests that Kāngsēnghuì was the compiler who adapted the story from version I into a jātaka of Śākyamuni Buddha and added it to the Sūtra on the Collection of Six Pāramitās. On the other hand, after version II was formed, it continued to grow, until at least the 11th century..