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Predictions of Women to Buddhahood in Middle-Period Literature

Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā¹

Abstract

This article studies narratives related to the topic of women receiving a prediction or declaration (*vyākaraṇa*) for Buddhahood. The texts in question—in their received form—have their place in the Indian Buddhist traditions of the Middle Period. The first episode taken up is the story of Princess Munī who receives the prediction of becoming the present Buddha Śākyamuni; this is found in the so-called “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool.” The second episode is the story of Yaśomatī who receives the prediction that she will become the Buddha Ratnamati; this is found in the *Avadānaśataka*. When evaluating these comparatively rare instances of predictions received by women, two aspects come up for special consideration: (a) the textual significance of variations regarding the presence or absence of a change of sex, and (b) the epistemological and soteriological consequences for female audiences of

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women's narratives constructed by the third-person perspective of male monastic text transmitters. The variations document that the transmitters did not always perceive the transformation of sex into a male as a categorical necessity. This transformation may not have been integral to these narratives of the bodhisattva path as articulated by the textual communities in which these texts originated and circulated.²

Introduction

This article reviews narrative materials related to the topic of women receiving a prediction or declaration (*vyākaraṇa*) for Buddhahood. From a redactional viewpoint, the received texts I focus on substantially belong to the Indian Buddhist traditions of the Middle Period.³ The excerpts taken up for translation include:

1. The Tibetan version of the so-called “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool” in which Princess Munī receives from the former Buddha Kāśyapa the prediction of becoming the Buddha Śākyamuni.

² Acknowledgements are due to bhikkhu Anālayo, bhikkhu Ānandajoti, Peiying Hung, Petra Kieffer-Pülz, Mauro Maggi, and Peter Skilling for comments, to Stefano Zacchetti for reading my translation of the Chinese *avadāna* of Yaśomatī, and to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz for help with the Mongolian version of the so-called “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool.”

³ On “Middle Period” as a working periodization for Indian Buddhist texts see, e.g., Schopen (“Deaths” 475–476).

2. The *Avadānaśataka*, in which Yaśomatī receives from the present Buddha Śākyamuni the prediction that she will become a future Buddha.

I first translate the relevant passages from the so-called “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool” and the *Avadānaśataka* (sections 1 and 2) and comment on the philological significance of the textual variants concerning a change of sex upon receiving a prediction in the light of the transmission history of these works (section 3). I then discuss how the mode of transmission and fruition of these works (oral/aural) and their third-person narrator or group-narrator (male monastics) may have conditioned the representation of female agency in the narratives and therein the projection of the female audience soteriological agency (section 4), followed by a few concluding remarks.

The selection, which began as a companion reader to the stories of the past life of the Buddha as a princess studied by Bhikkhu Anālayo in this volume (“Princess”), brings together a few more among the widely dispersed voices in the multiplex and multi-vocal gender discourses that emerged in the early and medieval Buddhist communities.⁴ As briefly stated by Dimitrov (17), “[w]e hear different voices, and this multi-vocality . . . is but the normal state of affairs.”

Gender constructs are, by and large, infrastructural components of hierarchical ideologies in social, institutional, as well as religious history. Such constructs are inherently embedded in any narrative in which a woman (that is, her representation), her agency in the story, and the impact of the representation of such agency, specifically on that of the female audience of the narrative, all have a part to play, leaving aside

⁴ Sponberg clarifies well the existence of such a multiplicity of voices, “each expressing a different set of concerns current among the members of the early [and mediaeval] community [communities]” (3).

how they work for the continued maintenance and renewal of the narrator's own ideological discourse and authority. The narratives taken up here are literary articulations of the Buddhist path. Primarily, they serve a pedagogical function. They inculcate moral and soteriological agency towards the attainment of the fruits of the path. Narrative pedagogies are naturally subject to text-historical change; they reflect, build, and formulate soteriological possibilities (or impossibilities) as these undergo readjustment in the course of doctrinal and ideological history. In sum, the transmission of these narratives both accommodates and effects religio-historical change, as shown by even just a handful of readings such as the selection I examine in the following pages.

The texts presuppose the Bodhisattva's gender consistency across the lifetimes of his epochal career.⁵ According to tradition, the Bodhisattva had to traverse an inconceivable range of forms of existence in *saṃsāra*—which must have included female existences, in addition to animal and divine destinies—before his final liberation. Before the first arising of the intention to awaken, over the course of beginningless *saṃsāra*, the Bodhisattva was an ordinary being who would have gone through all forms of life.⁶ The “male only” formulation seems to be a

⁵ Sex consistency across lifetimes is generally presupposed by the Indian religious traditions. Filippi (132 note 9) remarks that “[a]ccording to Indian beliefs, death—which in the large majority of cases conditions one's rebirth in another species—does not facilitate sex changes. Usually a soul is reborn maintaining the same gender.” Doniger (298) notes that the general dearth of gender transformations in Hindu stories of rebirth stands “in strong contrast to the frequent changes of species that take place in reincarnation in texts like *The Laws of Manu*.” For a discussion on the consistency in sex across lives in the *Apadāna* see Appleton (“Footsteps” 43–44) and also the remarks in Anālayo (“Princess” 103).

⁶ E.g., SN 15.3 at SN II 179,1 with its parallels SĀ 938 at T II T 240c25, SĀ² 331 at T II 486a18 and EĀ 51.1 at T II 814a27, and SN 15.13 at SN II 187,6 with its parallels SĀ 937 at T II 240b12, EĀ 51.2 at T II 814b11 and SĀ² 330 at T II 485c5.

dogma, according to which, from a certain point on, a bodhisattva is only born as a male human. That is, the arising of a female Buddha is a dogmatic impossibility.⁷ Needless to say, as commented by Kajiyama (64), before Buddhahood arose as a possible and eventually as a mainstream soteriological goal, “the dictum that a woman cannot become a Buddha . . . did not have a target to which it could have been directed,” given that then “no one, neither man nor woman, aspired to Buddhahood.”⁸

The Middle-Period narratives implicitly or explicitly orient themselves around the fundamental dogma that irreversible investiture as a bodhisattva—the stepping-stone to become a Buddha—necessitates a male gender and leaves womanhood behind for good. It is difficult to pinpoint when the dogma was formulated and when it became universal across the early schools. However, female bodhisattvas did arise and have successful careers.⁹ Whether a prediction for Buddhahood truly dictates a male gender or a change of sex into male is a topic on which the parallel versions of narratives involving a woman’s prediction to Buddhahood (or parallel versions similar narrative tropes) vacillate.

⁷ E.g., *Bodhisattvabhūmi* ed. Wogihara (94,1-9); cf. T 1579 at T XXX 500a20-27, T 1581 at T XXX 902b21-27, T 1582 at T XXX 976b24-c1 and T 1828 at T XLII 525b21-26. For other references see Anālayo (“Princess” 104), and on women’s impossibilities or inabilities see the study by Anālayo (“Bahudhātuka”).

⁸ Cf. also Romberg (164) and Tsai (2).

⁹ E.g. the legends of Rūpyāvātī and Jñānavātī studied by Dimitrov; on Rūpyāvātī cf. also Ohnuma with remarks in Dimitrov (6 note 15). On the career of women disciple *bodhisattas* in Pāli texts see Pruitt and Appleton (“Footsteps”).

1. The Prediction to Princess Munī in the Tibetan Version of the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool”

The episode of the princess who received a prediction to Buddhahood is part of the twentieth story of the Chinese version of the so-called “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool” (賢愚經) discussed by Anālayo (“Princess”)¹⁰ along with its various parallels. The tale is the thirty-seventh in the Tibetan version of the same anthology,¹¹ and the thirty-eighth in the canonical Mongolian version transmitted in the Kanjur, which in turn depends on a Tibetan original.¹²

The story is recounted to the venerable Ānanda by the Buddha Śākyamuni. It contains, consecutively, the accounts of the lives of two women.¹³ The first is the life of a former beggar who receives a prediction to Buddhahood—as the Buddha Dīpaṅkara—by the former Buddha Kāśyapa, after which she goes forth in that former Buddha’s dispensation when still a woman. An excursus within the story of the beggar tells the reasons why, in spite of being a destitute in her present life, she had been able to meet the Buddha and receive her prediction to Bud-

¹⁰ T 202 at T IV 371b13 to 371c22.

¹¹ The Tibetan title of the collection is *mDzangs blun zhes bya ba’i mdo* (also circulating as *’Dzangs blun zhes bya ba’i mdo*, *’Dzangs blun* and *mDzangs blun*). The references for the entire narrative are: D 341, *mdo sde, a*, 265b5–268b1 [= Si-K 361, vol. 74, *mdo sde, a*, 726,13–733,4 with apparatus on p. 959] and P 1008, *mdo sna tshogs, hu*, 270a6–273a3. The text has been edited by Schmidt (I.261,3–266,7) and Moritaka (487) and translated into German by Schmidt (II.327–333) and into Japanese by Moritaka (480–489). For a summary and discussion cf. also Karma (120–125).

¹² The tale is the thirty-seventh in the independently translated version by Darqan Manjusiri Tsulkrims loroī. (Information from Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz.)

¹³ I leave out discussions of the genre boundaries and contaminations between *avadānas*, *jātakas*, *pūrvayogas*, etc. in Buddhist narratives, as they are irrelevant to the purposes of my present discussion; for a recent overview of narrative literatures in Buddhist South Asia see Straube.

dhahood. The second is the life of a princess named Munī, who receives a prediction to Buddhahood by the former Buddha Dīpaṅkara and similarly goes forth in his dispensation while still a woman and becomes the present Buddha Śākyamuni.

This second life story will be my main focus in the following pages, and it unfolds in this way: In times long past, a king had invited the former Buddha and his monks to take up residence for three months. One of the monks had made a vow to offer lamps to the Buddha and the Saṅgha for the three months. Each day he would go into the city to beg for oil so as to fulfill his vow to offer the necessities for the lighting of the oil lamps. The king's daughter, upon seeing the monk's begging in town every day, enquired about the reason of his begging. Delighted to hear about his vow, she offered to provide him daily with all that was needed to make the lamps offering. The monk was thus able to offer his lamps every day, and received a prophecy from that Buddha of the past that once upon a future time, when countless eons would have elapsed, he would become the Buddha Dīpaṅkara.

At that point, the Tibetan version continues,¹⁴

When Princess Munī heard that the good friend (*kalyāṇamitra*), the noble monk, had been the object of such a prediction, she reflected like this: "I have myself supplied the butter lamp that was offered to the Buddha. Although that monk merely stimulated [my action], he is the one who has received the prediction, but a prediction has not been made for me!"

¹⁴ D 341, *mdo sde, a*, 268a2-5 [= Si-K 361, vol. 74, *mdo sde, a*, 732,2-13 with apparatus on p. 959] and P 1008, *mdo sna tshogs, hu*, 272b4-8. The text has been edited by Schmidt (I.265,10-266,18) and Moritaka (487), translated into German by Schmidt (II.332) and into Japanese by Moritaka (487).

With such a thought in mind, she went to the presence of the Blessed One and, just as [that thought was on her mind], she expressed it straight to him. The Blessed One made a prediction. He predicted: “Young lady Munī, in a future time, once ninety-one innumerable eons will have elapsed, you too will become truly awakened, you will bear the name Śākyamuni, and you will become a Buddha endowed with the ten epithets.”¹⁵ Then, as the princess heard the prediction made by the Blessed One, she became extremely happy, paid homage [bowing] with her head at the feet of the Blessed One, and requested the going forth. Accordingly, the Blessed One gave her the permission to go forth, and she put forth relentless energy [in the practice].

As in all parallel narratives with the exception of the Pāli *jātaka* tale in which a monk is the mediator with the former Buddha, here the female

¹⁵ My translation follows the reading in the Derge edition, *mtshan bcu dang ldan par*; the Peking and Lhasa editions read *mtshan sum bcu dang ldan par*, and the Yongle edition *mtshan sum bcu dang ldan par*, “endowed with thirty (?) *mtshan* (*nāman* or *lakṣaṇa*?)” (cf. the apparatus in Si-K 361, vol. 74, p. 959). Ed. Schmidt (I.266,15–16) has *mtshan sum bcu rtsa gnyis dang ldan par*, which Schmidt (II.333) interprets with reference to the thirty-two marks of a Buddha (“mit den zwei und dreissig Zeichen versehen seyn”). The reading in Schmidt’s edition is not found in any of the editions collated in the *dpe bsdur ma* edition of the Kanjur, and I have not been able to find information on the origin or source of the main text used in Schmidt’s edition. (The introductions in Schmidt do not provide such information.) The circulation of multiple printed editions of such a popular text makes it very likely that many variant readings would exist between different versions; however, we are not in the position to know with certainty if the reading in Schmidt’s edition reflects a genuine (old) variant reading or results from a relatively recent editorial correction perhaps in (one of?) the editions he consulted. The Chinese version similarly speaks of being endowed with ten epithets, cf. T 202 at T IV 371c15: 十號具足.

protagonist interacts directly with the Buddha. She is portrayed as reasoning to herself why, in spite of her being the original provider of the offering, it should rather be the monk to benefit from a prediction. She is then shown to decide to take her own (present and future) life in her hands, as she approaches and communicates directly with the former Buddha.¹⁶ The need for her to come into primary contact with the Buddha's soteriological agency—his *prāsādika* agency, in the words of Rotman—turns out to be more crucial than the providing for or performing of a meritorious offering in and of itself.

Noticeably, in contrast to the Chinese “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool,” the Tibetan account does not entail any transformation of Princess Munī into a male. Although the Chinese and Tibetan versions agree that she was thrilled upon hearing the prediction, in the Tibetan account she does not mutate into a man then and there. She is able to go forth straight away, while still a woman, whereas in the Chinese counterpart this only occurs after a sex transformation.¹⁷ In both lives told in the Tibetan “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool”—the life of the beggar who becomes the Buddha Dīpaṅkara and the life of the princess who becomes the Buddha Śākyamuni—the protagonists consistently go forth while they are still women.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. also the Chinese version, T 202 at T IV 371c12. The passages in the parallels are *Paḍipadāna-jātaka*, ed. Jaini (399,7), EĀ 43.2 at T II 757c19 translated in Anālayo (“Princess 111) and T 152 at T III 38c15 translated in Chavannes (264) and Shyu (181); cf. also Anālayo (*Foundation*).

¹⁷ T 202 at T IV 371c15-16: 於是王女，聞佛授記，歡喜發中，化成男子，重禮佛足，求為沙門。 See, however, below, for the absence of a change of sex in the story of the beggar woman transmitted as part of the same tale.

¹⁸ For the beggar woman's going forth see D 341, *mdo sde, a*, 266b2-3 [= Si-K 361, vol. 74, *mdo sde, a*, 732] and P 1008, *mdo sna tshogs, hu*, 271a3-4, ed. Schmidt (I.262,14-16) and ed. Moritaka (482): *de'i tshes na bsnyen dga' mos bcom ldan 'das kyis lung bstan pa thos nas rab tu dga' ste. pus mo gnyis sa la btsugs nas rab tu byung bar gsol to. bcom ldan 'das kyis kyang rab tu*

The text does not indicate whether the women simply go forth as homeless ascetics or as fully-fledged *bhikṣuṇīs* in those past Buddhas' respective dispensations. The Chinese parallel, however, states explicitly that the beggar woman falls at the Buddha's feet requesting to go forth, and the Buddha makes her a *bhikṣuṇī*, with no change of sex required.¹⁹ This occurrence is remarkable in that it stands in contrast to the case of the princess who becomes a man before going forth.²⁰ This difference can be explained by taking into account the composite nature of the narrative included in the "Scripture of the Wise and the Fool." Two originally separately transmitted stories were probably juxtaposed without being fully edited for "consistency" with regard to this detail. This situation points to the coexistence in the same Chinese narrative of different doctrinal perspectives on the necessity of a change of sex. The beggar woman's going forth as a *bhikṣuṇī* (比丘尼) without changing into a man and becoming a *bhikṣu* thereby might preserve an earlier career available for women. This variation probably documents the preservation of a differently executed text based on an aural summary as the main means of textual transmission.

I come back to aurally transmitted summaries as a likely mode of transmission of these narratives and their significance for the interpretation of textual variations in the following pages. Whatever the final word on the milieu of formation and the textual vicissitudes of the "Scripture on the Wise and the Fool" might be, the transmission of this collection can be traced back to, broadly speaking, Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda textual as well as geographic contexts. This conclusion can be drawn on the basis of its relationship with the *Avadānaśataka*, in

byung bar gnang ngo. For a translation of the Mongolian version, which simply speaks of receiving ordination, see Frye (197).

¹⁹ T 202 at T IV 371a19-20: 於是難陀，得記歡喜，長跪白佛，求索出家。佛即聽之，作比丘。

²⁰ See note 18 above.

spite of all the caution needed when looking at mediaeval Buddhist narrative anthologies in the light of the affiliation of their reciter tradition.²¹ As regards the transmission lineage of the *Avadānaśataka*, at the very least the received Sanskrit text (Nepalese manuscript tradition, Turfan collection fragments, Schøyen fragments) and the Tibetan translation of the *Avadānaśataka* can be safely considered to be the product of a transmission that took place within Mūlasarvāstivāda communities.²²

Now the Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda traditions do know of fully-fledged *bhikṣuṇīs* in the dispensation of past Buddhas who are held to have established four assemblies just like the present Buddha Śākyamuni.²³ Therefore, from a normative position, the transmitters of

²¹ See Demoto (*Avadānaśataka*) for a discussion of the parallels between the *Avadānaśataka* and the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool,” though she does not analyze the present story. Five texts from the Chinese collection (賢愚經) are mentioned in the bibliography compiled by Daoxuan (道宣) among excerpted texts (別生經), in particular stories which were extracted from some scriptures and then circulated as stand-alone versions, T 2149 at T LV 333b28: 五經出賢愚; cf. Ming Chen (241–242). I come back to the transmission of these works in section 3 below.

²² On the Mūlasarvāstivāda affiliation of the *Avadānaśataka* cf., e.g., Przyluski (486), Waldschmidt (255), Vaudeville (85), Hartmann, Hahn (“Affiliation”), Demoto (*Avadānaśataka* 107–116), Schopen (“Dead Monks”), Hiraoka (152–153), Meisig (33–42, 57–65, 74, 77–79 and 128–154), Durt (71–72), Demoto (“Fragments” 210–211), and the overview in Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 34–37). According to Bagchi (60), who bases himself on a comparison between the Sanskrit and Chinese version, the Sanskrit *Avadānaśataka* did not originally belong to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition but would have been revised by the Mūlasarvāstivādins after the third century AD, adding the formulaic modules so typical of their literature at that time.

²³ This circumstance is found in the account of the first *saṅgīti*, with Ānanda referring to past Buddhas who also had four assemblies; cf. the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 405a3: 又復我聞過去諸佛皆有四眾, and D 6, 'dul ba, da, 307a1 (= P 1035, 'dul ba, ne, 290a8): *gzhan yang sngon gyi dus na yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas rnam la 'khor bzhi yod pa de*; the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 449c10–11: 但以過去諸佛皆有四眾; and also the **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (大智度論), T 1509 at TXXV 68a17–18, translated

the story would have likely conceived the full ordination of a female disciple under the dispensation of a past Buddha. In fact, the woman's acceptance into the Saṅgha as *bhikṣuṇī* would have been only natural in that context. The beggar woman's becoming a *bhikṣuṇī* in the earlier section of the Chinese version further confirms that this option was recognized by the tradition from which the text stems.

Coming back to the storyline, the corresponding passage in the Mongolian version of the "Scripture on the Wise and the Fool," a secondary translation based upon a Tibetan original, appears to depict a similar situation upon receiving the prediction. The Mongolian translation follows closely the Tibetan text. No change of sex seems to be spelled out, and the way of going forth is similarly left unspecified:²⁴

in Lamotte (*Traité* I.95). The parallel versions of this passage are discussed in Anālayo (*Foundation*).

²⁴ Translation by Frye (199). (The entire tale is translated on pp. 196–199.) Frye does not give any bibliographic references for the text he translated; it is uncertain whether this is the version included in the Mongolian canon or else one of the several other Mongolian versions in circulation, although it is quite likely that his translation is based on the Kanjur text. (For a review of Frye see Krueger.) Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz kindly checked for me the following editions of the Mongolian collection (October 7, 2015): (1) the canonical version in the printed edition of the Kanjur; (2) a translation carried out by Siregetü güsi corji (*Silughun onol-tu kemegdekü sudur*) transmitted in a manuscript originating probably before 1628, identical with the Kanjur printed edition; (3) the same translation as (2) but with a different title (*Üliger-ün dalai*) and colophon, as preserved in a block-print edition from Beijing dating from 1714, based on the revised edition from the Ligdan Khan era (1628–1629); (4) an independent translation by Darqan Manjusiri Tsulkrim loroi (*Sayin maghu üile-yin achi üreyi uqaghulqui neretü sudur*), contained in a manuscript with undated colophon. The activity of this translator is usually dated from the first half to the middle of the seventeenth century, but possibly from the end of the sixteenth century (Kollmar-Paulenz) and this version, in general, presents differences in wording. Kollmar-Paulenz informs me that all editions translate fairly accurately the Tibetan text. They render *rab tu byung bar gsol* as *toyin bolghan soyurqa kemen öchibesü* ((1), (2), and (3)) or as *toyin bolghan soyurqaghad* (4). The only dif-

[t]he princess rejoiced, bowed her head at the Buddha's feet, and begged to join the Order,

and then,

[t]he Buddha approved, ordained her, she then refrained from taking life, and exerted herself in the Dharma.

Unless due to an accidental omission that occurred during the transmission or translation, the absence of a change of sex in the Tibetan and Mongolian versions of the "Scripture on the Wise and the Fool" may well represent a genuine difference compared to the situation depicted in the Chinese parallel.

Another explanation why the metamorphosis does not occur in the tale preserved in Tibetan—or, to put it another way, why it does occur elsewhere—could lie in the mode of transmission of this scriptural collection. Works such as the "Scripture of the Wise and the Fool" were often accompanied by oral expansion and supplemented by oral commentary in the course of the exposition. For this reason, certain style and content features that likely result from oral and aural modes of transmission, including the possibility that these texts may have been written down or translated on the basis of summaries,²⁵ sound a note of

ference between the two renderings is that the first renders the Tibetan indirect speech with direct speech, whereas the second is a verbatim translation of the Tibetan. The Mongolian verb is *toyin bolghan*, literally "to make [into] a monk." This terminology may be used for both genders. All versions continue by stating that the Buddha approved (lit., "agreed with her") and after he had made her go forth. . . ." Although the agency in the Mongolian construction changes (the Buddha is the subject of the latter sentence and not the girl), there is no mention of a gender change.

²⁵ This model informs Muldoon-Hules' (*Brides* 53–57) discussion of the transmission of the *Avadānaśataka*. On oral aspects of the transmission of the "Scripture on the Wise and the Fool" see Mair and my discussion below.

caution when we are to place considerable significance on variations found among different incarnations of these intrinsically dynamic and “multiple” texts. For the same reason, postulating direct relationships of textual dependence of one version upon another, or suggesting relative chronologies between the different versions on such a basis, is at times problematic. I come back to the impact of the oral dimension of these narratives in sections 2 and 3 below. To summarize so far: firstly, it is unknown whether, and, if so, when, the idea that the female body must be transformed into a male one was lost in the text reflected by the Tibetan and Mongolian versions of the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool,” or if it was inserted in the received Chinese translation at a later stage; and, secondly, the specific mode of transmission of the textual material in question brings even more complexity into the picture.

While bearing the above caveats in mind, it is a fact that a different voice has been preserved. For its transmitters, the “variant reading,” namely the absence of a sex change prior to going forth and the going forth as a woman upon receiving the prediction to Buddhahood, was held to be at least *conceivable* as an alternative to the necessity of a change of sex. Given the didactic and pedagogical function of these narratives of the Buddhist path, this scenario would have proven especially inspirational to a female audience.

2. The Story of Yaśomatī in the *Avadānaśataka*

A narrative comparable to the story of Princess Munī who received a prediction to Buddhahood in the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool” is included in the *Avadānaśataka*. This collection is in fact closely connected to the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool,” and its mode of transmission may have been based on summaries.

The story is the second *avadāna* in the first chapter of the *Avadānaśataka* collection, which contains predictions of becoming a *saṃyaksambuddha* in the future after having performed acts of worship or service in relation to the present Buddha Śākyamuni. This time the woman protagonist is the lovely daughter-in-law of a general, and she is named Yaśomatī. The male character whose presence is functional to the coming into being of the prediction is a layperson, her father-in-law, rather than a monk as in the tale of Princess Munī. In this case, the man does not obtain any prediction for himself. The meritorious offering consists of a meal prepared for the Buddha and his monks rather than oil and lamp wicks as in the stories featuring a princess.

Although the stories of Munī and that of Yaśomatī both result in a prediction to Buddhahood, the most substantial structural difference between them is that while Munī is a past life of the Buddha Śākyamuni as a bodhisattva under the dispensation of a past Buddha, Yaśomatī makes a vow in the presence of the present Buddha Śākyamuni and will become a future Buddha. Munī was *the* Bodhisattva, while Yaśomatī embarks on the bodhisattva path in the present Buddha's dispensation, which in turn follows the prototypical schema set forth by the Buddha Śākyamuni's own course of practice. Moreover, no mention is made in the *Avadānaśataka* of the girl's going forth, either as a woman or as a man. Thus the *Avadānaśataka* narrative is fairly similar to the story of Princess Munī in basic trope and typology but it cannot be classified as a parallel in the strict sense.

The *Avadānaśataka* is presently extant in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese translations. Here I render into English first the Sanskrit and then the Chinese version. The Tibetan translation of the *Avadānaśataka*

shows large agreement with the Sanskrit version.²⁶ Since no significant differences between the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of Yaśomatī's *avadāna* are worth being noted, here I treat them together.²⁷

²⁶ The Tibetan translation was carried out at the beginning of the ninth century and is presently included in the Kanjur (D 343 [= Si-K 363] and P 1012). Demoto ("Fragments" 208) notes that the Tibetan translation, based on a manuscript much older and better than the one used as the basis of Feer's translation, agrees quite closely with the Sanskrit Nepalese recension witnessed by the main manuscript used in Speyer's edition. For instance, the opening description that introduces the Buddha which is translated below occurs in an expanded form both in the Sanskrit version and in the Tibetan translation, whereas it is absent in the Chinese translation which simply provides information about the Buddha's whereabouts, cf. ed. Speyer (I.8,2) and D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 5a6 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 11,19] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u* 5b3. Interestingly, the *Avadānaśataka* fragmentary manuscript in the Schøyen collection edited by Demoto ("Fragments"), which she attributes to a revised version of the *Avadānaśataka*, does not have the elaborated description of the Buddha found in the Nepalese tradition and in the Tibetan translation. However, other formulaic modules such as the cosmic effects of the smile manifested by the Buddha etc. are also found in the extant Sanskrit *Avadānaśataka*, cf. Demoto ("Fragments" 212), but not in the recension witnessed by the extant Chinese version (T 200), as can be seen in the excerpts translated below. For a new hypothesis on the vicissitudes of the transmission of this work, see the already quoted dissertation by Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 53–57). I discuss its significance from the viewpoint of gender soteriology (sex change and female agency in general) in sections 3 and 4 below.

²⁷ Stanzas in the Sanskrit *Kalpādrumāvadānamālā* (also known as *Kalpādrumāvadāna*), a metrical retelling of stories extracted from the *Avadānaśataka*, are presently available to me only in a partial edition that contains a thirty-four verse laudatory invocation with which Yaśomatī praises the Buddha using comparisons with mythological and divine beings. The content of these stanzas, in Speyer (II.xxx–xxxv), has no direct relevance to the soteriological implications under discussion. On this collection see the overview in Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 60–70 and 404–407 [= Appendix I]) with references to earlier literature.

2.1 The Story of Yaśomatī in the Sanskrit and Tibetan Avadānaśataka²⁸

The Buddha, the Blessed One, was honoured, praised, respected and worshipped by kings, ministers, the wealthy, city dwellers, merchants, caravan leaders, *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinnaras* and *mahoragas*—that is to say, revered by *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinnaras* and *mahoragas*—the Buddha, the Blessed One, the Illustrious One (*jñāto*),²⁹ the Greatly Meritorious One,

²⁸ Ed. Speyer (I.8–12) [= ed. Vaidya (4,15–7,4)]. The story is the second *avadāna* also in the Tibetan collection, D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 5a6–8a2 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 11,19–18,11] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u*, 5b3–8b4; cf. also Karma (115–120). Due to space constrictions, I leave out the formulaic section on the Buddha smile, on which see note 32 below. This *avadāna* has been edited and studied in Collett (*Two Stories*), which I have not been able to consult. The text was first translated into French by Feer (27–30) (to be integrated with his translations of the relevant formulaic modules on pp. 2–13). Speyer (I.8,1) records the title of the *avadāna* (the proper name of the princess) as Yaśomatīti in lieu of the expected Yaśomatīḥ as per the main manuscript used in his edition (ms. Cambridge University Add. 1611), and in note 1 (*ibid.*) he indicates that this may point to some Prakrit source, whereas his ms. D (the India Office manuscript of the *Avadānaśataka*) writes Yaśivatī; cf. also Feer 1891: 29 note 11. The Tibetan version, D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 5a6 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 11,19] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u*, 5b3, has *grags ldan ma*, which is a literal rendering of Yaśomatī. I am unable to see how Yaśomatīti (the proper name attached to the enclitic quotative *iti* to mark the title) could betray a Prakrit origin. The only possibly Middle Indic trait I am able to envisage is *yaśomatīti* < *yaśomati iti* instead of < *yaśomatir iti*; however, the latter (here feminine gender) is not possible since the noun is not a compound of *yaśas* + *mati*, but the feminine of the possessive adjective *yaśo-mant-*, as indicated by Yaśomatī, the name of the third lunar night in traditional lexicography (e.g., Böhtlingk and Roth [VI.93, s.v. Yaśomatī] and Monier-Williams [848, s.v. Yaśo°]), and confirmed by the Tibetan translation *grags ldan ma* with *ldan* representing *-mant-* and *ma* representing *-ī*. Therefore, an alternation Yaśomati/*-ī* is out of the question.

²⁹ On the epithet *jñāto* (a Prakrit form, nominative singular of a past participle based on the transitive theme *jñā-*), which I understand in the passive sense as meaning “renowned,” “illustrious”, as in Feer (3): “illustre”); cf. also Appleton (“Avadānaśataka” 4

[while] residing in the Kūṭāgāra Hall by the shore of the Markaṭahradatīra, in dependence [for alms] on [the city of] Vaiśālī, together with his community of disciples, obtained supplies of robes, alms bowls, beds, seats and medicines for the sick.

Then in the morning [the Blessed One] got dressed, took the bowl and the [upper] robe and, surrounded by a group of monks, at the head of the community of monks entered Vaiśālī for alms. Having walked for some time around Vaiśālī in the proper order for alms he approached the residence of the General Siṃha. Once arrived, he sat on the seat that had been arranged.

Now General Siṃha had a beautiful, charming, lovely daughter-in-law named Yaśomatī. Upon seeing the body of the Blessed One, effulgent with diverse marks, she felt an absolutely inspired confidence (*prasāda*), and questioned her father-in-law: “Is there any way whereby I may also become endowed with such qualities?”

Then this thought occurred to General Siṃha: “Oh, generous and confident indeed is this young daughter. If she should again come close to such an opportunity, she should make a resolution towards Supreme Right Full Awakening.” Knowing thus he said: “Young daughter, if you carry on with the cause, you too will become such as the Blessed One.” Thereafter, for the sake of increasing

with note 12), who opts for the rendering “knowing,” whereas Collett (“List-based Formulae” 160) freely renders *jñāto mahāpunyo* as “of great merit and fortune.” The Tibetan translators understood the Sanskrit in the same way as I do, cf. *ldan pa na* in D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 5b1 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 12,6] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo*, u, 5b3.

Yaśomatī's inspired confidence, General Siṃha made very large donations of silver and gold, as well as of jewels.

At that point the young daughter Yaśomatī invited the Blessed One together with the assembly of his disciples to [have] food within the house on the following day, and the Blessed One consented in order to show his kindness to her. Then the young daughter Yaśomatī had flowers prepared made of gold, made of silver, and made of jewels, collected an abundance of perfumes, garlands, and ointments, prepared foods of a hundred flavours, and informed the Blessed One by messenger that it was time [for the meal, saying]: "It is the time, venerable Sir, the food is ready, if the Blessed One deems it is the time now."

Then the Blessed One, surrounded by a group of monks, at the head of the community of monks, approached the residence of General Siṃha. Once arrived, he sat in front of the assembly of monks on the seat that had been arranged.

Then the young daughter Yaśomatī knowing that the assembly of monks, headed by the Buddha, ought to be well attended to, satisfied them with food of a hundred flavours with her own hands, and started to cast flowers over the Blessed One. Then those flowers stood over the Blessed One like a bejeweled peaked building (*kūṭāgāra*), or a bejeweled parasol, or a bejeweled canopy, such as a well-trained artisan or artisan's apprentice is not able to build, but only the Buddha-power of Buddhas and the divine power of *devas*.

Then the young daughter Yaśomatī, seeing such a superb marvel and miracle impressive to *devas* and men,³⁰ fell at the feet of the Blessed One with her whole body, just like a tree with the roots severed, and began making an aspiration (*praṇidhāna*): “By this arising of the thought [of awakening] with its wholesome root, and by the donation of a gift,³¹ in a blind world bereft of a leader, bereft of a guide, may I become a Buddha, a saviour of unsaved beings, a deliverer of the undelivered, a consoler of the unconsoled, the one who leads to *parinirvāṇa* those who have not yet attained *parinirvāṇa*.”

Then the Blessed One, knowing the sequence of causes and the sequence of actions with regard to the

³⁰ Ed. Speyer (I.9,12): *tad atyadbhutaṃ devamaṇuṣyāvarjanakaraṃ prātihāryaṃ dṛṣṭvā*. The Tibetan version, D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 6a5 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 14,2] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u*, 6b3, has *lha dang mi dad par byed pa'i cho 'phrul shin tu rmad du byung ba de mthong nas*, with *dad par byed ba* rendered as “qui force a croire” in Feer (28 note 1). On the term *āvarjana* cf., e.g., Fiordalis (390 note 22) and Gómez (531).

³¹ Ed. Speyer (I.10,1): *anenāhaṃ kuśalamūlena cittotpādena deyadharmaparityāgena ca*. This string compound could be analyzed as formed by two members (the first member *kuśalamūla cittotpāda* and the second *deyadharmaparityāga*) or three independent members, as understood by the Tibetan translation, which has the instrumental of the demonstrative pronoun, 'dis, corresponding to *anena*, in the last position. Grammatically, this construction may be intended to refer to all of the three terms or else only to the last one, cf. D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 6a5 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 14,5] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u*, 6b4: *dge ba'i rtsa ba dang sems bskyed pa dang sbyin par bya ba'i chos yongs su gtong ba 'dis*. On account of the rule of the waxing syllables, probably the analysis into three parts is the most plausible. Feer (13) has “*par cette racine de vertu, par cette production de pensée, par ce renoncement conforme à la loi du sacrifice*”; Collett (“List-based Formulae” 165) renders this sentence as “[w]ith this good root, arisen intention and the giving of meritorious gifts.” On p. 159 note 11, she remarks that the formulaic list of epithets *kuśalamūla—cittotpāda—deyadharmaparityāga* does not accord with the waxing syllable principle.

young lady Yaśomatī, manifested a smile. . . .³² The Blessed One said: “It is so, Ānanda, it is so. It is not without a reason, not without a cause, Ānanda, that the Tathāgatas, Arhats, Rightly Fully Awakened Ones manifest a smile. Do you, Ānanda, see the honour paid to me in this way by this young daughter Yaśomatī?” [Ānanda said:] “Yes, Venerable sir.” [The Buddha said:] “Ānanda, this young daughter Yaśomatī, by this arising of the thought [of awakening] with its wholesome root, and by the donation of a gift, having attained awakening developed in the course of three incalculable eons and having fulfilled the six perfections fully cultivated on the basis of great compassion, will become a Rightly Fully Awakened One named Ratnamati,³³ endowed with the ten powers, the four confidences, the three special establishments of mindfulness and great compassion. Such is the gift (*deyadharmā*) of one whose mind has become pervaded with utmost inspired confidence (*abhiprasāda*) in my presence.” Thus spoke the Blessed One.

³² Due to space constraints, I leave out the long formulaic module with a description of the cosmic manifestation of the Buddha smile, with colored rays of light manifesting from the Buddha’s mouth, some travelling to the lower region and some to the upper region of the world etc., and re-entering the Buddha’s body at different places depending on the type of prediction (the *uṣṇīṣa* when a prediction is made to Buddhahood). In addition to the French translation in Feer (10–12), among recently published English renderings are Collett (“List-based Formulae” 160–163) and Appleton (“Avadānaśataka” 32–34). The *tòpos* of the Buddha’s smile has been read by Mus (“Le sourire” and “Où finit”) as the reworking of Vedic cosmological and sacrificial schemes; on the Buddha’s smile see also Balbir (91–97).

³³ Ed. Speyer (I.12,18): *ratnamatir nāma samyaksambuddho bhaviṣyati*, and D 343, *mdo sde, am, 8a1* [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am, 18,8*] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u, 8b2*: *sangs rgyas rin chen ldan zhes bya bar ’gyur*.

Those monks rejoiced in their hearts at the Blessed One's words.

2.2 *The Story of Yaśomatī in the Chinese Avadānaśataka*

I now translate in full the version of Yaśomatī's *avadāna* included in the Chinese *Avadānaśataka* collection. Though it is a much shorter tale, it is in agreement with the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions as far as the storyline goes.³⁴

The Buddha was staying at Vaiśālī, by the edge of the Mar-kaṭāhrada, in the Kūṭāgāra Hall. At that time the World Honoured One put on his robes, took the alms bowl, and in the company of the monks entered the town for almsfood, arriving at the house of Siṃha.

Now, that respectable householder had a daughter-in-law called Yaśomatī.³⁵ She saw the Buddha's awesome appearance, his body adorned with all the various [major and minor] marks. Being in front of her father-in-law, she asked him: "Is it possible to gain a body like this?" The father-in-law answered: "Now, if you are able to cultivate all the meritorious virtues and produce the unsurpassed excellent thought [of awakening], you will also be able to acquire such [major and minor] marks."

³⁴ T 200 at T IV 203c2 to 204a5. The general's name is rendered literally as "Lion," 師子, in T 200 at T IV 203c3, corresponding to Siṃha in the Sanskrit text, ed. Speyer (I.8,8), and to *dmag dpon seng ge* in the Tibetan translation at D 343, *mdo sde, am*, 5b3 [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am*, 12,13] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u*, 5b8.

³⁵ The daughter-in-law's name is rendered literally as "[Endowed with] Fame," 名稱, T 200 at T IV 203c1ult.

At that time the daughter-in-law, having heard these words, sought some riches from her mother-in-law,³⁶ so as to be able to make an invitation to the Buddha. Once they had finished their meal, she scattered all sorts of flowers over the head of the Buddha, [flowers] that in mid-air were transformed into flower-canopies that followed the Buddha as he would move or stand still. Having seen this transformation, she was taken by an overwhelming happiness, fully prostrated herself [at the Buddha's feet] and uttered this great resolution:

“By virtue of the merit produced by this offering, [may it be] so, that in a future time for beings blind and in darkness may I produce eyes, for those who lack protection may I provide protection, for those who are unassisted and unprotected may I make them assisted and protected, for those who are unliberated may I make them liberated, for those who have no security may I make

³⁶ The translation is based on the reading in the Shōsō-in shōgozō edition (聖) as collated in a note to the CBETA edition which has 來 for 妯 in 便從姑妯, “sought some riches from the mother-in-law,” T 200 at T IV 203c8 rather than from the mother-in-law and father-in-law as in the Taishō and other editions. In the Sanskrit and Tibetan version, the general provides himself large donations for the sake of increasing the daughter-in-law's confidence, and no mention is made of her seeking riches from others, ed. Speyer (I.9,1): *tataḥ siṃhena senāpatinā yaśomatyāḥ prasādābhivṛddhyarthaṃ prabhūtaṃ hiraṇyasuvārṇaṃ ratnāni ca dattāni* and D 343, *mdo sde, am, 5b6* [= Si-K 363, vol. 75, *mdo sde, am, 13,4*] and P 1012, *mdo sna tshogs, mdo, u, 6a4: de nas dmag dpon seng ges grags ldan ma'i dad pa 'phel bar bya ba'i phyir dbyigs dang gser dang rin po che mang du byin no*. The reading in the Shōsō-in shōgozō edition makes good sense within the narrative economy of the Chinese version, where, at this point, the interaction with the father-in-law (妯, Sanskrit *śvaśura*) is concluded and the daughter-in-law seems to have departed. The storyline would flow smoothly with the daughter-in-law resorting to the mother-in-law (姑, Sanskrit *śvaśu*) for help to make offerings.

them secure, for those who have not yet attained *nirvāṇa* may I make them attain *nirvāṇa*.”³⁷

At that time the World Honoured One examined that woman’s utterance of this great resolution, and smiled thereupon. From his mouth he emitted five colored lights which shone through in the entire world, took variegated shapes circumambulated the Buddha three times, and then returned by entering the top of his head.

At that time Ānanda came forward and said to the Buddha: “The Tathāgata is highly venerable and it is not in vain that he smiles. What is the cause, what is the reason that he now smiles? May the Blessed One explain it in detail.”

The Buddha told Ānanda: “Now, did you see this girl named Yaśomatī making offerings to me?” Ānanda replied: “Surely I saw her.”

[Then the Buddha told Ānanda:] “Now, this Yaśomatī has uttered this great resolution. By the merit of her virtuous roots, once three incalculable eons have elapsed, being possessed of the conduct of a bodhisattva, having cultivated great compassion, having fulfilled the six perfections, she will become a Buddha by the name Ratnamatī³⁸ and will widely save the multitude of beings to an immeasurable extent. Just this is the reason for my smile.”

³⁷ The *Avadānaśataka*’s wording of this fourfold set of vows belongs to one out of two main groupings of what became a formalized set of bodhisattva vows, as has been shown by Kagawa; cf. also Nattier (147–151). I study the canonical prototypes and evolutions of these formulations in more detail in *Dhammadinnā* (in preparation).

³⁸ T 200 at T IV 204a1; 寶意.

When the Buddha expounded this *avadāna* of Yaśomatī, there were some who attained the state of a stream-enterer, some that of a once returner, some that of a non-returner, some that of an arhat; there were some who generated the intention [to become] a Pratyekabuddha, and there were some who generated the intention of Unsurpassed Awakening.

At that time the monks who had heard what the Buddha had said were delighted and put it to practice.

3. The Stories of Munī and Yaśomatī: Change of Sex and the Mode of Transmission of *Avadāna* Collections

The most salient feature shared by all versions of the *avadāna* of Yaśomatī is the absence of any sign of sex transformation upon receiving the prediction to Buddhahood. The question posed by the variant readings in the different versions of the “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool,” with respect to this detail, comes up again: What to make of such an absence from the perspectives of the textual transmission and gender-related soteriological agency?

Although strictly speaking the story of Yaśomatī is not a parallel to the story in the “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool,” it is nonetheless remarkable that, within the frame of a by and large equivalent narrative trope, a need for a sex transformation does not seem to have made itself felt. That is, we are not to imagine that a necessity for a sex transformation was taken for granted, implicitly inferred by the audience. This alternative can safely be put aside, at least as regards the comparatively early stages of transmission of the text, since we know that this is not an early Buddhist doctrine and only came into existence gradually. Thus at

the time these stories came into being, and in the first period of their circulation, this doctrine must have been novel instead of being taken for granted. To summarize, the situation found in the narratives examined so far is as follows:³⁹

| Text | Sex Change |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Avadānaśataka</i> (Sanskrit & Tibetan) | No |
| <i>Avadānaśataka</i> (Chinese) | No |
| “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool” (Chinese) | Yes |
| “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool” (Tibetan & Mongolian) | No |

I think that the significance of the absence (or else presence) of sex transformations in these and comparable narratives is best evaluated against the general backdrop of the peculiarities of the mode of transmission of the scriptural collections in question, in this case the *Avadānaśataka* and the so-called “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool.”⁴⁰

The textual history of the *Avadānaśataka* recensions—(a) Sanskrit (Nepalese)/Tibetan “mainstream” manuscript tradition, (b) the versions attested in the Schøyen fragments, (c) the abridged Central Asian summary in the Turfan collection, and (d) the received Chinese translation (T 200)—is quite intricate and debated.⁴¹

³⁹ To the table can be added the complete absence of a change of sex in all versions of the life of the beggar woman who received a prediction in the “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool,” mentioned above in section 1.

⁴⁰ On women and nuns in the *Avadānaśataka*, especially the tension between marriage and renunciation and the role of Brahmanical marriage, see Muldoon-Hules (*Brides*) and Muldoon-Hules (“Brahminical Marriage”); another study dedicated to female imagery in the same work is a master’s thesis by Green.

⁴¹ Early studies by Pachow (2) and Bagchi concluded that the Chinese version of the *Avadānaśataka* is, in general, based on a tradition earlier than that of the extant Sanskrit recension. Demoto (“Fragments”) dates the Sanskrit text that formed the basis of the

Suffice it to remark that the Chinese version of Yaśomatī's story examined above appears more archaic in that it lacks the formulaic modules the Sanskrit and Tibetan *Avadānaśatakas* share with parallels in other Mūlasarvāstivāda works.

Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 53–57) has recently put forward the hypothesis that the transmission of the *Avadānaśataka* through Central Asia would have occurred via a set of summaries rather than as a complete text/manuscript. This modeling would explain the absence of formulaic modules—such as, for example, the earlier mentioned case of the Buddha's smile—from a, to my mind, sensible and organic perspective. To summarize, the framing proposed by Muldoon-Hules may successfully explain (a) the summary format of a Sanskrit fragment in the Turfan collection which allows for direct comparison with the Nepalese recension (SHT 1318a); (b) possibly, the agreement of Sanskrit fragment SHT 1186 with peculiarities attested exclusively in materials of Central Asian circulation; (c) the absence or truncation of the formulaic passages in the received Chinese text (T 200); and (d) the apparent presence of certain typologies of alterations and omissions in the received Chinese text (T 200).

The positing of a Central Asian medium of transmission of the collection to China based on a set of summaries finds an antecedent in similar types of digests that are attested in the same area, in Gandharan

Chinese *Avadānaśataka* to no later than the first half of the fifth century as *terminus post quem*, and thereby places the original redaction of the Sanskrit *Avadānaśataka* between the second and the beginning of the early sixth century. The mention of the *dīnāra* in the eighty-third story in the collection is taken by Speyer (I.xv) to suggest a *terminus ante quem* of the second century. Meisig attempts to prove the existence of different layers in the Chinese *Avadānaśataka*; for a critical appraisal of her methodology and findings cf. Demoto ("Fragments" 213). An extended survey and discussion of the history of the studies on the *Avadānaśataka*, including the problem of the dating, is available in Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 18–70, esp. 48–60). On the Mūlasarvāstivāda affiliation of the *Avadānaśataka* see note 22 above.

and Khotanese Buddhist literature.⁴² In view of such a probable medium of transmission, it seems best to avoid drawing doctrinal and soteriological conclusions solely on the basis of variations such as the one with which we are concerned.

Demoto (*Avadānaśataka* 17, 19–26 and 136) considers the transmitted Chinese *Avadānaśataka*, overall, later than the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool,” and she detects a relationship of textual dependence of the former upon the latter. Earlier Japanese scholarship had already assumed that this translation had been made later than the fifth century and that the traditional ascription to the third-century translator Zhi Qian (支謙) was incorrect. Demoto demonstrates that it dates from a time not earlier than the sixth century.⁴³ Demoto’s assessment depends to a considerable degree on the detailed layering of transmission she proposes for the *Avadānaśataka*. To assess the cogency of the proposed reconstruction goes beyond my present concerns and expertise, but it does not affect the suggestion that the position of the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool” may, in any case, require reconsideration in the light of this model of transmission. If the model envisioned by Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 53–57) for the *Avadānaśataka* transmission to China is at least partly relevant to the transmission of the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool,” the extant versions of this collection may have also been based on and reflect “incidental” summaries that were transmitted across Buddhist Central Asia. This acknowledgment, in turn, might also throw new light on the record in Sengyou’s (僧祐) bibliographical notice on the translation colophon to the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool” that the text was written down (or translated?) in Khotan from the oral exposition of a preacher, and also on some textual elements that betray a local Khotanese

⁴² See Martini for Khotanese and Lenz 2003 (*Dharmapada*) and 2010 (*Avadānas*) for Gandharan texts.

⁴³ Cf. also Karashima.

influence on the redaction process.⁴⁴

On the hypothesis that the translation of the “Scripture on the Wise and the Fool” might have been based on summaries, with different executions of the same summary pattern, it may be safe to leave at least open the possibility that the absence of a change of sex is not necessarily of major significance. In the next section, I continue to investigate the influence of the oral transmission and fruition of these narratives by broadening the discussion to include other aspects of their contextual reception.

4. Change of Sex, Female Agency, and the Ideological Assumptions of the Transmitters and Audience

In addition to issues posed by their peculiar modes of transmission, a number of contextual elements affect the actual reception of these narratives. I would like to take up the most salient with reference to the representation of female soteriological agency.

To begin with, in order to better appreciate the significance of sex change in these narratives, it is useful to remember that the motif of change of sex is widespread in Indian (and other) folklore and is not a Buddhist innovation. A change of sex into a male is considered as advantageous and progressive in numerous folktales in India and worldwide. In traditional patriarchal societies, it signals an upgrade in social positioning.⁴⁵ Within the patriarchal situation of ancient and medieval India,

⁴⁴ T 2145 at T LV 12c15ult, translated in Mair (3–4). On the abridged style of Khotanese narrative materials and its relationship to oral and aural modes of transmission see my discussion in Martini.

⁴⁵ E.g., Penzer in Tawney (222–223), Brown (3–24), and the repertory in Thompson and Balys (97–111, esp. no. D10).

a Buddha can only be conceivable as a male since he is supposed to occupy the topmost position of the Teacher, at the very apex of the social and institutional hierarchies of the time. Thus, on the one hand, to quote some observations made by Dimitrov (13), it may be at times difficult “to conclude with certainty whether the view indicated [in a given narrative and its parallel versions] is based upon a particular Buddhist ideology or whether it is a non-Buddhist, or presumably pre-Buddhist, belief common to those members of the Indian society out of whose milieu the archetype of the legend may have originated.” The Buddhist transmitters may have seen “no crucial conflict between the change of sex and the Buddhist ideology . . . adhered to.” It is probable that

. . . the folkloristic “change of sex motif” was given a Buddhist framework only subsequently . . . [T]his motif, at least in the early stages, does not seem to have been specifically connected with the Buddhist doctrine. Besides . . . in early Buddhism the change of sex was not considered necessary for a woman pursuing the spiritual path, insofar as the Buddha himself is said to have admitted that in fact women *are* capable of attaining perfection (Pāli *arahatta*).

However, with the arising of the path and goal of (male) Buddhahood, the need for a change of sex is consciously endorsed by the emerging ideology. It becomes “Buddhist” for those Buddhist communities that follow such a path. It signals a definite spiritual upgrade in that it sanctions that a person is on track for the new, highest goal of becoming a Buddha.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Along similar lines, see the remarks by Anālayo (“Princess” 122) apropos the story of Princess Muni: “[t]he narrative setting makes it clear that this tale is not a wholesale borrowing from ancient Indian narrative lore, but much rather a story that developed based on specifically Buddhist notions.”

Secondly, other contextual factors come into the picture. The social and religious value system internalized by narrators and audiences (both male and female) played a crucial role in the reception and didactic actualization of such narratives.

When framing the reading of Buddhist narratives with a view to gender, it is also essential to bear in mind that these narratives are not “gender” or “gendered” narratives as such. The narratives are not primarily created in order to communicate a specific standpoint on the relationship between gender and soteriology. They are narratives that involve a gender component as one among their many dimensions. A story of a past life of the Buddha as a woman is a story of a past life as a woman and a story of merit-making, of generosity, of faith, a story of resolve on awakening. Thus, to see only a single role or a single identity, or to focus on a single facet of moral and spiritual agency or discourse—womanhood and female agency—may result in a limiting or even faulty vision.

Even though in most cases gender is unlikely to have been the primary concern of a text or the audience, a gender discourse is unavoidably embedded in the text, and it is also further shaped by the living ideological context of the transmission. How did the fact that the transmitters and preachers of these texts were male monastics effect the transmission and reception of the stories among both male and female audiences? The representation of female agency in these narratives is related to its effect on the audience. The portrayal of female moral and soteriological agency in storytelling contributes in specific ways to the making of the female audience into a (moral and soteriological) actor.

It is therefore important to focus on the epistemological consequences of these stories as told from the “narrators” perspective. In this case, it is a third-person perspective. As highlighted by Tirrell (118), engaging in the practice of storytelling,

. . . contributes to the development of the moral agency of both the teller and the reader or listener. . . . Storytelling, because of its narrative structure, is an aid to moral epistemology and so moral development. It is not the product, but rather the process of articulation that is of the first significance. . . . This first fact about articulation, that it presents a structure of significances, is closely tied to a second feature: every story is a story told from a perspective.

There is a distinction between first- and third-person perspectives and between omniscient and non-omniscient narrators. Buddhist narratives whose protagonists are Buddhist women, but which are constructed and transmitted by male monastics, fall into the category of stories told by a third-person narrator who expresses and relies on the normative authority of tradition and often takes the epistemic privilege of omniscience. The conditioning impact of such a perspective on female audiences who project themselves onto female “agents” in the narrative is critical to interpreting the construction of these narratives. It is also critical to appreciating the contribution of an at times definite, at times putative (as discussed above) absence of sex change on the building of moral and soteriological agency in a female audience. Information and assumptions from authority figures who possess the epistemic privilege of omniscience influence not only the characteristics that the audience perceives but also the degree to which they come to believe in these realities.⁴⁷

Some observations made by Jamison (7–17) in the context of Vedic and Brahmanical orally transmitted textual materials for the study of

⁴⁷ I have benefitted from the theoretical discussion of storytelling and moral agency by Tirrell.

marriage law and ritual in ancient India are also relevant to understand the weight of the male, third-person perspective on the female and her agency in these narratives:

Though we may think of oral traditions as “folky,” “informal,” “noninstitutional”—hence a potential for women’s lore—in fact for such a tradition to endure for very long, it must be the opposite: regimented, institutionalized, and purposeful, qualities not likely to be available to groupings of women in the ancient world, especially over many generations. A text needs to be accepted into this tradition to survive: be orthodox or be forgotten. From the beginning we must face the fact that we are not going to hear an authentic woman’s voice—or at least not without tampering by those who have inserted it into the tradition for their own reasons. There will be no forgotten diaries unearthed in the attic, no cache of letters that can serve as a private and direct channel to women’s experience. . . . [P]erhaps the most important “methodology” to emphasize is the simple aim of the good philologist, to engage as fully as possible with each text on all levels and to try to understand it as an entity on its own terms as far as possible, rather than subordinating it to the purposes of the investigator. . . . [W]e must respect the integrity of each text and endeavor to model ourselves, in the first instance, on the original audience for this text—to try to hear with ancient ears. This is not to say that separate texts should not be compared, or that passive and uncritical “appreciation” should be substituted for analysis. Indeed, the different types of texts can act as limiting or correcting mechanisms for each other to some degree. . . . All these images are mediated through male mentalities—

they are, of course, not direct images of real ancient Indian women, nor even the idealized portraits that such women would have had of themselves. But the dialogic confrontation of the varying images gives us an opening, to peer behind the relatively homogeneous façade that each text type presents individually.

To the extent that these attitudes tend to be hegemonic and normative, they are also representative of the generalized perceptions within members of both genders in the religious communities that used narratives such as the ones analyzed in this article. Muldoon-Hules (*Brides* 13–14), in her study of women’s stories in the *Avadānaśataka*, seems to me to put forward a reasonable perspective in this respect:

One of the factors to consider . . . is that these . . . stories from the *Avs* [*Avadānaśataka*], are, insofar as we can tell, the literary creations of a male compiler, who was probably a monk, and the subsequent redactors. Therefore we are more engaged with what women “meant” or “represented” for the monastic compiler and his community, rather than with what real early Indian women actually did or felt or thought. Due to the dearth of clearly identified works by Buddhist women, lay or monastic, for this period and the scarcity of archaeological sites and art historical evidence that can be clearly connected with Buddhist women’s activities for this period, we are forced to operate within this limitation. But such male literary creations must nonetheless have been rooted in recognizable “facts” of women’s lives to have validity for their audience, and any overlaps between such “facts” in the *Avs* [*Avadānaśataka*] and narrative “facts” about women given in other sources, Brahmanical and Buddhist, would in-

dicating these are indeed commonly held notions of women and their situation in this time and area.

In addition, I would suggest, to tackle the issue from yet another perspective, that these notions fit the conventional character of classical Indian literatures. A look at the female spectator in the Indian dramaturgic tradition may help put the female audience's sentiments and perceptions vis-à-vis the male "narrators" into perspective.

The audience is structurally indispensable in Indian theatre in that without a competent audience, the *rasa*, the "aesthetic mode" or "aesthetic experience" that is an intrinsic component of Indian theatre, cannot arise. By necessity, as indicated by Steiner (119–120), one has to "take into consideration two kinds of female persons connected with the performance of a play: the female characters and the female spectators." Stage characters and their expressions are hierarchically arranged and conventionally constructed on the basis of theoretical works on dramaturgy. Now certainly a female audience educated according to the conventions of classical dramaturgy would be able to "respond" and feel in tune with these conventions—which include a particular kind of humor women share with children, specific kinds of gestures, gazes and movements, the use of Prakrit rather than Sanskrit (in general) for female characters, the belonging to characters of low nature (*prakṛti*) within a classification into high, middling, and low rank, and so forth.

However, for instance the classification of characters into high, middling, and low rank is not identical with a moral classification. It is, rather, the expression of a hierarchic convention. To say that the status of female characters in Indian theatre is generally "lower" than that of men does not imply that there are no female heroines or other female characters who are morally eminent and superior to men. The lower status is given to them in principle, as a matter of convention. It does not equal a taxonomy into good, average, and bad persons, or intelligent,

normal, and stupid persons. Thus, the female audience would be participating in the performance and identifying itself with the female *personae* to the extent that status and morality are framed within a commonly perceived domain: The conventional domain would not be thought to have an intrinsic moral bearing on the stature of the female character.

At the same time, as a matter of fact, as stated by Steiner (128), the defined female spectator “is not (only) the result of male wishful thinking, but a male concept of the female, how male dramaturgists think female persons really are.” In other words, the script and the aesthetic experience of female participants in the performance are both imagined as directed by a male-conceived dramaturgical tradition. Of course, the normative element has a weighty role in the construction of female agency on stage and within the audience. The moral and soteriological flourishing of female audiences can exist within conventional hierarchies. The role modeling and agency of female characters and audience in the Buddhist narrative literature under examination can probably be better understood against this background in view of the oral and aural mode of the production, transmission, and reception of this literature which carries an inherent element of dramatization.

The representation of female characters in Indian dramaturgy draws attention to the fact that a positive (or negative) view of women’s agency expressed in the texts (narratives as in the present case, or other genres of Buddhist literature), remains by necessity conditioned by the conceptual and conventional dimension which the texts stem from and, in turn, construct. The distinction between ultimate moral stature and spiritual or even mundane standing vis-à-vis the restrictions due to the composition’s score of theatrical literature brings me to another aspect to take into consideration in the hermeneutics of female agency in traditionally transmitted texts.

The use of the category of (female) agency perhaps requires some clarification. The traditional Indian linguistic term for the category of agency would be the grammatical notion of *kartṛtā*, the state or condition of being the agent of an action. Agency is the condition of being the agent of certain acts, of responding to life circumstances, of initiating actions, of being able or unable to carry them through, perhaps facilitated or hindered by the agency and power of others. The category and terminology of (female) agency has two interrelated but distinct implications. The first is related to theoretical and the second to literary or narratological hermeneutics.

The first of these two perspectives is philosophical;⁴⁸ it looks at the theoretical, psychological, and moral aspects of agency. This perspective—when applied with a view on gender—tries to determine if representations of intentions and expressions of will differ in the case of male and female agents. The second perspective studies the contextual representation of women’s agency, as articulated in textual descriptions, in its mental, verbal, and physical dimensions. In the case of the narratives discussed here, there is a focus on the representation of agency intended as the capacity of an entity (i.e., a Buddhist woman as seen in these Middle-Period literatures) to act in a given environment (i.e., the soteriological landscape of the emerging bodhisattva path). Needless to say, notions held in the theoretical (or ultimate, from a Buddhist doctrinal perspective) sphere vis-à-vis the conventional sphere may affect each other. The narratives articulate and also in turn reframe the theoretical aspects of agency. My own use of the category of agency refers to the representation of women’s agency in the texts, how their capacity as individuals engaging with the soteriological and ideological structures is

⁴⁸ For an overview of conceptions and theories of agency in Western philosophical thought see Schlosser.

represented by the third-person perspective of the traditional narrators and transmitters.

Coming back to the texts, the interpretative challenges posed by a stanza in the story of a female bodhisattva, the *Rūpyāvati-jātaka* in Haribhaṭṭa's *Jātakamālā*, provides an example of the complexity involved in precisely discerning the assumptions of the transmitters: How do we know where to draw the line between the ultimate moral vis-à-vis the contextual facets of "(female) agency"? The verses appear to lay emphasis on gender in this female birth of the Bodhisattva. They read,⁴⁹

*strītve 'pi bodhisattvaś chittvā māṃsaṃ dadau nijād dehāt |
kim utādhikasattvabale parārthakuśale manuṣyatve ||*

Even in the state of being a woman, the Bodhisattva cut flesh from her own body and gave it away. *How much more* when in the state of being a man, possessing more strength of character and proficient [in acting] for the benefit of others.

Dimitrov (8–9) perceptively comments,

[w]hat is noteworthy here is the use of the particle *api*, "and, too, moreover, even, though," which combined with *kim uta*, "how much more," can also be translated as "even though . . . [but] how much more" In whatever way one may interpret the implication of the text, it is evident that the superiority of the male Bodhisattvas over the female ones is not put in question and the superior strength of the male Bodhisattvas is accepted as a matter of common sense. At the same time, however, *api* could also indi-

⁴⁹ *Jātakamālā* VI.1, ed. Hahn (*Haribhaṭṭa* 75,2–3) translated with minor modifications after Dimitrov (8) (emphasis mine); on this *jātaka* cf. also note 9 above.

cate the view that under certain circumstances women can surpass men, especially if the latter are not prudent enough to make use of their usually greater physical strength. The particle may also be taken in a way to suggest the attempt to oppose an existing prejudice against the ability of a woman to act as a Bodhisattva. This can thereby be interpreted as reflecting a then existing internal conflict between divergent Buddhist attitudes. Even though this interpretation may be possible, how can we be sure what the author [transmitters] has [have] actually had in mind?

In fact, I would not even necessarily perceive “existing internal conflict between divergent Buddhist attitudes” or internal inconsistencies in these types of text. Cases of actual “ambivalence” would, to my mind, look different. I would rather take into account the coexistence of diverse aspects of “agency,” as discussed above.⁵⁰

Last, and perhaps most importantly, the availability of multiple versions with their variant readings bearing on gender-related issues has its greatest potential when approached from a text-historical perspective. It can, at the very least, “enable a reconstruction of stages in the development of attitudes towards nuns [and/or Buddhist women] among male monastics responsible for the transmission of the respective texts” as already remarked by Anālayo (*Foundation* 44). Here too, there may be complexity. Narrative materials are intrinsically unstable, subject to fluctuation, to the proliferation of multiple versions. Oral transmissions and aural editing do not leave the same kind of traces as exclusively

⁵⁰ On the characterization of ambivalence as misleading in relation to gender discourse in the early Buddhist texts in general see the comments by Sponberg (3–4) and Anālayo (“Going forth”).

written literatures do. An ancient component can go a long way forward and be preserved, whereas a new element can go “backwards” too and cause a readjustment of the original soteriological content.

Conclusion

To summarize, the going forth towards Buddhahood as a woman in the Tibetan and Mongolian versions of the story of Princess Munī in the “Scripture of the Wise and the Fool” and in all extant versions of Yaśomatī’s *avadāna* testifies to an earlier doctrinal stage when sex transformation was not yet considered compulsory. The variations bear witness to the struggle of the Buddhist traditions to reconcile the existence of the story of a past life of the Buddha as a woman with the notion that the Bodhisattva, and bodhisattvas in general, should be male.

The variations registered in the foregoing thus document the gradual evolution of this notion and how the transmitters of these narratives did not always perceive the change of sex as a categorical necessity. It seems that the original and essential focus of these narratives of the bodhisattva path would not have been on the transformation into a male. Therefore, it can be surmised that male-hood was not integral to the bodhisattva path in its early articulation, at least not for the textual communities in which the analyzed narratives originated and circulated. That is to say, the requirement that a predicted bodhisattva should be male seems not to have been an organic component of their bodhisattva ideal and soteriology.

It is possible that the later prevalence of the dictate that a bodhisattva—in addition to a Buddha—should be male is a result of reading *jātaka* and *avadāna* tales as *prescriptive* rather than descriptive or illustrative of the path of a bodhisattva.

The element of sexual metamorphosis was already current as a mark of status upgrade in the ancient Indian narrative tropes on which these stories are built. Once such an element is included or re-read as an indispensable requisite, combined with and reinforced by the scholastically framed dogma of the male-hood of a Buddha, the past lives of a confirmed bodhisattva would have been invested with the same expectation of having to leave womanhood behind for good.⁵¹

At least within a patriarchal society such as ancient and medieval India, a historical Buddha who is to turn the Wheel of the Dharma can only be conceived as a male since he is supposed to occupy the topmost position of the Teacher, at the very highest of the social and institutional hierarchies of his time. It would be historically unrealistic to conceive of an ancient or medieval Indian society where, once upon a future time, a Buddha could be female. With the growing apotheosis not only of the Buddha's person but also of the spiritual accomplishments, religious prestige, and social influence of bodhisattvas, the upgrade to male-hood seems to be projected back to the time of the first arising of the resolve upon awakening, back to the very beginning of a Bodhisattva's career.

The main point is perhaps that the life in which the one to become *the* Bodhisattva definitely entered on the path to Buddhahood by receiving a prediction is at the same time his or her last conceivable life as a woman. Once the aspiration and prediction have arisen, there is no more retrogression to female birth. Women's predictions to future Buddhahood in general are modeled on the prototype of the Bodhisattva's career. It is thus possible that the necessity of a change of sex in the same life in which a prediction has been obtained arose secondarily. This conclusion would be based on the belief that not only the present life of a bodhisattva must be her or his last as a woman, but also that an

⁵¹ For references on such a dictum see note 7 above.

individual, having become an irreversible bodhisattva, simply cannot continue to be a female person in the present lifetime. Adherence to this belief would make a change of sex upon receiving the prediction a dogmatic necessity.

Abbreviations

CBETA Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association

D Derge edition (Tōhoku)

EĀ *Ekottarika-āgama* (T 125)

P Peking edition (Ōtani)

SĀ *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99)

SĀ² *Samyukta-āgama* (T 100)

SHT Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden

Si-K Sichuan collated edition of the Kanjur (*dpe bsdur ma*)

SN *Samyutta-nikāya*

T Taishō edition (CBETA, 2014)

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