

Contents

- **Preface**
- **Ven. Sengpan Pannawamsa**
: *Dham Vessantara – jātaka* & its recital in Kengtung 1
- **Ven. Sengpan Pannawamsa (tr)**
: *Dham Vessantara – jātaka* & its recital in Kengtung
in Tai/Shan language 35
- **Ven. Pannasiri Tusai (tr) & Ven. Pannasiha (tr)**
: *Dham Vessantara – jātaka* & its recital in Kengtung
in Tai/Khun language 69
- **Seng Kham Sar Nyo (tr)**
: *Dham Vessantara – jātaka* & its recital in Kengtung
in Myanmar language 103
- **Tu Tu Aung**
: The Palaung version of *Dham Vessantara – jātaka* &
its recital in Myanmar language 139
- Digitalized copy of the Palaung version of
Vessantara – jātaka in Yun/Khun script. 147
Collected by Seng Kham Sar Nyo

Preface

Dham Vessantara-jātaka recital in Kengtung is an excerpt of the PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka by Dr Ven. Sengpan Pannya Vamsa – himself a native of Kengtung.

In the Eastern Shan State of Kengtung, the belief and form of reciting the *Vessantara-jātaka* is unique and cannot be found anywhere in Myanmar proper where Buddhism is the dominant religion. While the Myanmar people simply call it *Vessantara Zat Taw* lit. the epic of *Vessantara*, the Tai/Khun people call it *Dam Vessantara-jātaka* – the teaching of Lord Buddha. They even regard it as *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets of Buddha teachings) for it encompasses many parts of *Tripitaka* in addition to the *Vessantara* story.

The Tai Khun people are so deeply imbedded in their belief, regarding the merit resulting from offering as shown in *Vessantara-jātaka* that they can never be satisfied with the many religious offerings they have given until they can sponsor the recitation of the great *Tang Dham Vessalong*. The sponsorship calls for great outlay of wealth for the celebration takes three days with some 60 learned monks reciting the *Dham Vessalong* in turn until its completion. Because of the unlimited generosity which it demands, it is said that some were driven into poverty after this religious offering. Therefore a rule lays down that the sponsorship for the recital of *Tang Dham Vessalong* must be filled with six obligations.

This form of the recital of *Dham Veassantara – Jātaka* is found in Northern Thailand, Lao and Sipsawngpanna in Yunnan, the areas where the Yun script is commonly used for Pāli. Incredibly, we also find the same form of *Tang Dham Vessalong* among the Palaung ethnic group in Lauksawk Township in Southern Shan State reciting the *Vessantara - jātaka* composed in the same

Yun/Khun script. Historical evidence proves that prior to the latter half of the 20th century, all good Buddhist Shan and ethnic groups in Shan State used the Yun/Khun letters for their religious writings. A wider study of the 550 Great Stories of the Lord Buddha (actually only 547) in Tai/Khun, Tai/Shan and Myanmar versions is therefore a prerequisite in any attempt to trace the source of Tai/Shan Buddhism.

Sai Kham Mong

Director

The Centre for Tai Studies