

**A Study on Scripture Worship in the
Kathmandu Valley:
An Interim Review with a Prospect of a
New Approach for the Philological Study of
Sanskrit Buddhism**

**Kazunori Sasaki
Fumio Shoji**

Abstract

Even today the culture of Mahayana Buddhism, which originated in ancient India, still remains and is practiced daily in Kathmandu, the capital city of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Among the various cultural events associated with Buddhism that are carried out in Kathmandu, “scripture worship” is particularly of great interest as a subject of study, considering its development into a rite of Buddhist doctrine, it can also be viewed as a representative example that reveals the difficulty of studying a “living culture” that is routinely practiced.

This paper first looks at the example of a recitation ritual, *Prajñāpāramitā-pathana* that is conducted in a Buddhist temple named *Kwa Baha* in the city of Lalitpur (Patan) in the Kathmandu valley. Careful examination in multiple topics, mainly focusing on *Nava-Dharma*, reveals cultural meanings of this recitation ritual comparing with its doctrinal background. Related matters are also looked at to clarify the positioning of Scripture Worship in Nepalese Buddhism. Following that examination, it introduces a challenge that has been carried out by RNAP(Risho-University Nepal Academic-research Project) for pioneering new generation philological study of Nepal Buddhism, taking full advantage of digital format data of newly acquired huge database of unpublished Nepalese manuscripts, the *Thapa Collection*.

Nepal's Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts and the Birth of Modern Buddhist Studies

It was in the first half of the 19th century that Brian Houghton Hodgson (1801-1894), a British Resident officer of the Company¹ at Kathmandu and later recognized as a world-wide renowned pioneer naturalist and ethnologist on the Himalayan region, collected over 400 titles of Sanskrit manuscripts in his place of appointment. He sent them to Calcutta (now “Kolkata”) and other places.² It was only in 1937, however, that he started serious study of those manuscripts after Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852) of the College de France firstly put them on the desk in his study. No orientalist at that time, other than Burnouf, even noticed the importance of those historical documents and undertook serious investigation of them until this French genius drew out the first portrait of Indian Buddhism with his truly epochal work, *Introduction a l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien* (“Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism”).

Burnouf picked out a Sanskrit manuscript of *the Saddharmapundarika*, the so-called *Lotus Sutra*, from Hodgson's collection in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. He translated it into French and published it along with the detailed introduction. This introduction was cut out and published independently with the title mentioned above. It was the first introduction of Mahayana-Buddhist scripture written in Sanskrit into the modern world.

Modern Buddhist studies made their first step exactly at this point. There is no doubt that the discovery of Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal, along with Burnouf's elaborated introduction, set up the contemporary academic study of Buddhism. Regarding the extreme importance of the Nepal manuscripts as the source of Buddhist studies, Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) commented as follows:

It is this work (i.e., *Introduction a l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien*) which laid the foundation for a systematic study of the religion of the Buddha. Though acknowledging the great value of the research made in the Buddhist literatures of Tibet, Mongolia, China, and Ceylon, Burnouf showed that Buddhism, being of Indian origin, ought to be studied first of all in the original Sanskrit documents, preserved in Nepal.³

The Nepal manuscripts are important, as suggested by these words of the

great pioneer scholar in the comparative study of religions, because they consist of texts written in the original language of Indian Buddhism. This should mean that they convey the original ideas and thoughts of Buddhists in India. Hence, it is expected that expert scholars can elucidate, through the study of those manuscripts, the whole picture of original Buddhism, which was totally lost and disappeared in its mother land, just as Burnouf attempted, to attain the first fruit.

Ritual Background of the Corpus of Nepal's Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts

After Hodgson's discovery and Burnouf's introduction, Nepal became recognized as the storehouse of Buddhist manuscripts. Kathmandu valley is situated in the middle of the main trade route connecting Madhyadeśa of India and the capital area of Tibet, and it has been prosperous because of the great traffic of traders between those two Buddhist Empires. Since the merchants and traders are mostly Buddhists, Buddhist culture along with related materials were brought into the valley since ancient times.

With regard to the Buddhist manuscripts, some manuscripts are said to have been brought there so long ago that they date back to the 2nd century,⁴ as the oldest Buddhist manuscripts written on palm leaf found in the valley. However, the larger part of the manuscripts are relatively new, dated after the Muslim invasion of India when a flood of Buddhist monks took flight from their motherland and came to the valley with their arms full of manuscripts.

Buddhist monasteries in the valley could not afford sufficient accommodations for all those Indian refugees, according to Shanker Thapa of Tribhuvan University, so "Many of them had to support themselves by selling manuscripts, scriptures and antiquities which they carried at their arrival for personal use."⁵ Besides, if the refugees died of an unexpected cause, for example a natural disaster like famine, the host could have confiscated their belongings. Due to these reasons, Sanskrit manuscripts gradually accumulated in Nepalese Buddhist monasteries as well as in the homes of wealthy people.

However, although the Sanskrit manuscripts were transmitted and preserved in Nepal, the larger part of the extant manuscripts are not the original copies brought from ancient India. They are copies duplicated by particular

local workers, the scribes, in the Kathmandu valley. Traditional Buddhists in the Kathmandu valley, the members of which roughly overlap with the Newar people, accepted not only the materials of Indian Buddhism but also the customs and manners of it. They adopted Indian Buddhism as a whole and made it their own culture. They duplicated manuscripts instead of just preserving old ones which were passed down to them along the generations.

Copying and possessing manuscripts is, for the Nepalese Buddhist, believed to be a typical act of merit accumulation.⁶ Some Buddhists copied or had a proper person copy appropriate scriptures for special occasions to commemorate a dead kinsman with auspicious *pūjās* or rituals. Others did so on the death of a family member to accredit merit to the deceased on behalf of the dead person by himself. Unlike the case in Tibet and China, Nepalese Buddhists would not dare to utilize the woodblock printing method for duplicating sacred scriptures. This was no doubt not a matter of their poverty of woodworking skill. The Nepalese people were/are in fact superior artisans of wood carving. Why, then? It was probably due to the prohibition on the lower caste people using Sanskrit, the sacred language. Using Sanskrit is strictly limited to the upper castes, so the ordinary people could not even read it. There were so many opportunities requiring Sanskrit manuscripts, but only a few people understood and had the right to use Sanskrit. This is why being a scribe became one of the most popular occupations for intellectuals like Buddhist monks and the Brahmin caste, and copying manuscripts finally became a major industry in the valley. This propensity of the Nepalese people, the popularity of copying manuscripts, caused an inflation in the number of newly duplicated Sanskrit manuscripts, and they overwhelmed the original copies imported from India.

Thus, the manuscripts that Hodgson discovered and collected in the valley with the ready help of Amritananda Shakya (1774-1834), the eminent Nepalese Buddhist pandit who instructed Hodgson about Nepalese Buddhism, were also of recent duplication.

The case was the same with Ven. Ekai Kawaguchi, who first brought Sanskrit manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures to Japan. According to the Kawaguchi's famous memoirs of the journey into Tibet and Nepal, *Three Years in Tibet*, prime minister Chandra Shumsher Rana, who was the counter part of Ven. Kawaguchi in the negotiation to exchange scriptures, suggested that he would give, at first, copies of several titles of scripture that were available and currently not in use, and would give the remainings later when

Kawaguchi would come to Nepal again. The prime minister promised him that he would get certain persons to duplicate the wanting copies. This means that Nepalese people did not just store the manuscripts which their ancestors had received from India long ago, but also duplicated them quite freely to meet their needs. Duplication of Buddhist scripture is such an ordinal thing in the Kathmandu valley that there have been very many duplicated manuscripts in the valley in ancient times and in modern times also. Therefore, both Hodgson and Ven. Kawaguchi obtained mostly modern duplicated paper manuscripts of scriptures.

Manuscripts under Practical Use

I do not intend to imply that Nepal's Sanskrit manuscripts are less important because they are merely recent duplications and do not have the value of antiquity. What I want to point out here, however, is that having been recently duplicated seems to give some uniqueness to the corpus of the manuscript as a whole: The corpus would not be identical with that of the Indian original, simply because the corpus of manuscripts was composed under a unique ritualistic culture of Nepalese Buddhism.

In that case, the selection of scriptures to be duplicated depend on the needs of the ritualistic contexts, and the list of texts for duplication would not be identical to the list of texts ranked by doctrinal importance.

The focus on the ritual side is the most significant feature of Nepalese Buddhism, distinguishing it clearly from the situation of Tibet and China. In those countries, people put the priority on systematizing the doctrine: For that purpose, it was necessary for them to collect and translate all the concerning texts.

The Sanskrit language is not the mother tongue of the Nepalese people. The Newar language, which is the native language of the Newar people, belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group and totally differs from the Indo-Arian language group, of which Sanskrit is an ancestor. This means the Newars had to take pains to learn Sanskrit. It would not seem an easy task for the Newar people, yet they did indeed learn Sanskrit. We need to know what motivated the Newar people to study this difficult foreign language and use Sanskrit manuscripts for rituals.

In fact, recent field research on Buddhism in Nepal, reveals that the

library of Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures found in Nepal contains quite a lot of documents which are written/edited by Nepalese natives. It is also reported that manuscripts of texts with a theme related to Nepal tend to remain⁷; the Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts found in Nepal have been duplicated and transmitted under the unique religious cultural sphere known as “Newar Buddhism.”

The Buddhists in Kathmandu Valley as I mentioned above, did not just receive and hand down the ideas and materials of the Indian originals; they also accepted and transmitted the whole culture. For example, take their practice of rituals. They practice daily rituals using a certain ritual cord, and in these rituals, they sometimes use real manuscripts in the process as a representation of the corresponding sacred matter.

The Nepalese people in general did not copy manuscripts for purposes of study. They did not necessarily read the manuscripts. They prepared them for merit accumulation: The major reason for duplicating manuscripts was to use them in rituals.

We can often see that cover board above manuscripts are stained with some colored powder. It is stained not because of ill maintenance, but because it was used in the ritual. That color powder was an offering. The stain that remains recalls those offerings.

As long as the tradition of scripture worship continues, manuscripts as the object of offering are required. The fact that they are used in rituals is a strong motivation to duplicate manuscripts.

I assume that they use Sanskrit because of a ritualistic reason. In ritual, what is important is the sound of the Sanskrit. What is not so important is to deliver the meaning.

The fact that there remain so many manuscripts in the Kathmandu valley suggests that the people accept Buddhism through rituals.

Nava-Dharma

The people of the Kathmandu valley practice unique customs of scripture worship, which have made the situation of Nepal’s manuscripts different from that of any other places. I will introduce here two examples of rituals which indicates the uniqueness of Nepalese Buddhism: the Dharma Mandala in the *Aṣṭamīvrata* ritual and *Prajñāpāramitā Paṭhana* ritual which is practiced

routinely in the Golden Temple (*Kwa Baha*).

Aṣṭamīvrata is a ritual practiced on the 8th of every month of the Nepalese calender. It is a fasting ceremony for lay believers with a *pūjā* (offering ritual) for Amoghpaśa Avalokiteśvara, the deity of rain-fall and fertility.⁸

In the process of the ceremony, Vajrācāryas, Buddhist priests in Nepalese Buddhism, are invited and give an offering ritual. Nine real manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures are set on the ground, making a wheel shape with eight spokes. This formation of scriptures is called *Dharma Maṇḍala*. *Prajñāpāramitā* is set in the center of the maṇḍala, and the other eight scriptures are put according to the four directions and four oblique directions. Those nine scriptures compose the set of *Dharma Maṇḍala* called “*Nava-(ratna-)Dharma*,” or the “nine precious scriptures.” The contents of this set of scriptures are as follows:

- (1) *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*
- (2) *Gaṇḍavyūha*
- (3) *Daśabhūmika*
- (4) *Samādhirāja*
- (5) *Lankāvatāra*
- (6) *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*
- (7) *Tathāgata Guhyaka*
- (8) *Lalitavistara*
- (9) *Suvarṇa Prabhāsottama Sūtrendra Ratnarāja*

Nava-Dharma is well-known among Nepalese Buddhists, especially to Vajrācāryas. Hodgson also noticed this set of scriptures through Amritananda soon after he started researching Nepalese Buddhism. He wrote about it in his *essays*⁹:

The nine Dharmas are as follows: 1. Ashta Sahasrika. 2. Ganda Vyuha. 3. Dasa Bhumeswara. 4. Samadhi Raja. 5. Lankavatara. 6. Sad Dharma Pundarika. 7. Tathagata Guhyaka. 8. Lalita Vistara. 9. Suvarna Prabhasa.

Divine worship is constantly offered to these nine works, as the “*Nava Dharma*,” by the Bauddhas of Nepal. The aggregation of the nine is now subservient to ritual fancies, but it was originally dictated by a just respect for the pre-eminent authority and importance of these works, which embrace, in the first, an abstract of the philosophy of Buddhism;

I esteem myself fortunate in having been first to discover and procure copies of these important works. To meditate and digest them is not for me; but I venture to hint that by so doing only can a knowledge of genuine Buddhism be acquired.

(underline is added by the present author)

Hodgson's description here is certainly a secondhand opinion of his instructor Amritananda. Amritananda is not a Vajrācārya but he is a extremely learned pandit and he must have introduced the Nava-Dharma collection as the most respected set of scriptures in Nepal. Thus Hodgson came to regard these nine scriptures as an authentic collection of Buddhist scriptures which contain the core of Buddhist philosophy.

His estimation was widely spread by Max Muller who took up his opinion of Nava-Dharma and introduced it in his essay comparing it to the authentic *Tripitaka* of Southern Buddhism:

What corresponds among the Northern to the Tripitaka of the Southern Buddhists are the nine Dharmas, though it is difficult to understand why those nine works should have been selected from the bulk of the Buddhist literature of Nepal, and why divine worship should have been offered to them.¹⁰

Thus the *Nava-Dharma* acquired an authenticity corresponding to Southern *Tripitaka*. But the reason why those nine scriptures were selected, as he commented here, remains unclear.

Sudan Shakya of Shuchi-in University, Kyoto recently provided some background information on this question. Nava-Dharma is a set of scriptures which was used in the *Dharma Maṇḍala*, as I said above. The Dharma Mandala is also one constituent of the three maṇḍalas comprising the *Tri-Ratna Maṇḍala*. *Tri-Ratna* is a common word referring to the well-known three precious treasures for Buddhists: *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Samgha*. Therefore, the offering ceremony is not for the scriptures only. But it was a part of a ceremony regrading all three of those precious treasures.

Scripture worship in the Kathmandu valley is practiced not because the Nepalese people found some mystical power to benefit people in the scriptures nor because they admit special authenticity in those nine selected scriptures. Unlike those assumption of the western scholars, the set is

seemingly composed merely according to ritualistic reason.

Although we take note of the background structure of *Nava-Dharma*, the reason why those nine scriptures were selected is still vague. We need to find another scope instead of viewing the object from a doctrinal perspective. As for this purpose, I am not prepared for now to answer the question but I will venture a hint from the iconological viewpoint.

Since the *Dharma Maṇḍala* has a ritual background and is one of three equivalent maṇḍalas, the components of those three mandalas are seemingly expected to correspond to each other. From the iconological view point, the maṇḍala has Vairocana in the center, and four Buddhas are set in the four cardinal directions. The combination and arrangement of the five Buddhas are identical with the maṇḍala of *Vajradhātu* or the Diamond realm, whereas the remaining deities in the *Buddha Maṇḍala* are different from the ones in the *Vajradhātu Maṇḍala*. As to the remaining deities, the four *Buddha-mātri* or Mothers of Buddha are situated in oblique or inter-cardinal positions like in the maṇḍala of *Guhyasamāja-tantra* or the tantra of the secret community. So the *Buddha Maṇḍala* is a mixture of those two maṇḍalas, and this arrangement is identical with the central part of the mandala of *Māyājāra-tantra*.

This tantra is said to be a source of *Nāmasaṃgiti*,¹¹ the most popular text among Nepalese Buddhists. *Nāmasaṃgiti* is also strongly associated with *Svayambhū-prāṇa*¹² which tells the origin of Nepalese Buddhism; the *Buddha Maṇḍala* is surely rooted deep into the mythical earth of Nepalese Buddhist culture.

We can apply the same assumption about the *Buddha Maṇḍala* to the *Dharma Maṇḍala* on the grounds that the arrangement of those two maṇḍalas are considered to be corresponding each other. Thus, the arrangement of the *Dharma Maṇḍala* is to be analyzed within a ritualistic context instead of a doctrinal context. Likewise, the list of *Nava-Dharma* is to be analyzed within a ritualistic context; it is not the list of scriptures of the most doctrinal importance.

The same idea may be applied to the whole corpus of Nepal's Sanskrit manuscripts. Recent statistical research reveals that manuscripts which have a strong relationship with the unique features of Nepalese Buddhist culture are more likely to be copied and preserved.¹³ In other words, the present proportion of the existing manuscripts by title is practically irrelevant to the popularity or the importance of the texts in the doctrinal sphere of Buddhism. It can only tell us how strong the relationship is between each text and the

ritualistic culture of Nepalese Buddhism; we should be restraint when interpreting the situation of late Indian Buddhism based on an analysis of Nepal's Buddhist manuscripts.¹⁴

Reformation of *Nava-Dharma*

A knowledge of ritual background is helpful when one comes across a mystery difficult to solve only with a doctrinal view. For instance, the contents and the array of scriptures in *Nava-Dharma*, Tuladhar-Douglas said, have been reformed twice in the history of Nepalese Buddhism.¹⁵ According to his argument, the most noticeable change was the replacement of two scriptures between the oldest set and the following two sets, which had occurred along with the transformation of the ritualistic context of Newar Buddhism.¹⁶

The substituted original scriptures which had been in the oldest set are:

(7') *Nāmasaṃgīti*

(9') *Pañcarakṣā*

Each scripture was substituted to a new one with the corresponding number without dash(') in the *Nava-Dharma* list above: *Nāmasaṃgīti* and *Pañcarakṣā* are out while *Tathāgata Guhyaka* and *Suvarṇa Prabhāsottama Sūtreन्द्रa Ratnarāja* are in.

Both of the old members are very popular scriptures in Nepalese Buddhism. It is very natural that they are in the list. But in the wave of drastic reformation of Nepalese Buddhism, Tuladhar-Douglas assumed, they were eliminated because they are *Vajrayāna* scriptures. The new ones both belong to *Pāramitāyāna* and, what is more, they also have been used in another old scripture worship ritual.¹⁷ There is no doctrinal concordance between those old substituted members and new substituting members whatsoever. So we cannot reason about this substitution from a doctrinal point of view. It must remain a mystery unless we understand the ritual background.

Emendation: A Serious Problem for Philological Research

Pāṭha/paṭhana, or recitation of specific scriptures, is very popular custom

among Nepalese Buddhists for it is recommended as one of ten meritorious deeds of Buddhists (*:Daśa Dharma-caryā*). Although the recitation itself is performed by Vajrācāryas or the Buddhist priests in a proper ceremony, the merit is accumulated to all the participants, especially the sponsors. So the Nepalese Buddhists readily hold recitation assemblies on every special occasion.

In the Kathmandu valley, there is a custom of having the gathered recitation of *Aṣṭasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, the most respected scripture placed in the center of *Dharma Maṇḍala*.¹⁸ The most famous recitation ritual of this kind is the one which is held at the *Kwa Baha* (well-known as “the Golden Temple”) in Patan.

In that ritual, priests take turns to recite in a mutter the manuscripts of the scripture in public. They actually read the lines; that manner forms a clear contrast with the corresponding ritual being performed in Japan. In that Japanese ritual, called *Hannyagyo-Tendoku* and practiced only at a few prestigious Buddhist temples, priests just look over the manuscript from the beginning to the end while hastily sending pages into the air.

It is a good thing in general, and toward anthropologists especially, for the Nepalese Buddhists to actually read the manuscripts, because it represents the Buddhist culture is living and active there. But this lively culture would cause a serious problem against the philologist scholars of Sanskrit Buddhism at the same time.

On the one hand, since Nepalese Buddhists do read the lines, they can sometimes find scribal errors within the present manuscripts they are reading. On the other hand, they perform this recitation ritual so many times that the manuscripts used there can be easily damaged by the offerings or any sort of manipulation. Degradation of the manuscripts is inevitable, so continuous restoration of manuscripts, including substituting with new copies, is required to maintain this custom.

Therefore, under the lively culture of Nepalese Buddhist society, manuscripts are always subjected to continuous renovation to maintain their good condition. Every seeming error is revised and overwritten by appropriate wording according to modern authenticity; thus we will end up losing the old samples of variant readings of the text.

This includes quite a big problem in terms of the philological study. Making a critical edition is an attempt to reconstruct a more correct “original” by comparing and examining multiple manuscripts containing various

different readings when the original cannot be obtained. Every critical edition will remain forever in a hypothetical reconstructed version of the original; the text which seems to be definitive at the present time always has the possibility of being corrected by a newly found variant reading. Therefore, all the information of the manuscripts should be preserved for the future higher criticism.

However, under the circumstances of Nepalese Buddhist culture, all the variant readings are most likely to be lost due to the practical reasons noted above.

A case: “vaineya vaśāt” in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* Chap.15

We can see a typical example in a manuscript of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* Chap.15 of the *Thapa collection*¹⁹. Before checking how the words go in the manuscript of the *Thapa collection*, we shall see the wording of a corresponding portion in a modern critical edition of the same scripture. The target here is a sentence in the middle of Chap.15, *Tathāgatāyuspramāṇa parivarta*, of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. The wording in a modern edition²⁰ is as follows;

...sadā sthitaḥ| aparinirvṛtas tathāgataḥ| parinirvāṇam ādarśayati vaineya vaśāt| na ca tāvān me kulaputrā...(p.271.15-p.272.1)

For comparison, we quote here the corresponding part of the Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation.

...常住不滅 諸善男子...

There are only eight characters in the Chinese translation. It is obviously insufficient if it is a translation of the sentence above; the underlined portion in the Sanskrit text is entirely wanting in the Chinese translation. In such case, two possibilities are conceivable: the translator intentionally omitted to translate the portion, or the portion did not exist in the source text of the translator from the beginning.

Most modern scholars have supported the former possibility, because the translator here, Kumārajīva, is known not to have cared about literal word-by-word translation. But would the latter possibility be also hard to dismiss if

we had a manuscript without this portion?

The Institute for the Comprehensive Study of the Lotus Sutra of Rissho University published a series of books entitled *Sanskrit Manuscripts of Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, which collected 30 manuscripts available at that time along with two critical edition and aligned them in parallel in order to compare all the texts in a single view. The portion we are now checking is on p.60 of the 8th volume of this book.

We can confirm that although 6 of 32 texts are totally wanting of this portion, all the remaining 26 texts have the portion in question, containing some minor variant readings like the positions of danda(|) or the substitution of “vaśāt” with “vaśena” and so on.

Next, we proceed to check another manuscript in the *Thapa Collection*. The wording of the corresponding portion is as follows;

...||sadā sthita aparinirvṛtas tathāgataḥ parinirvāṇam ādarśayati | na ca
tāvāt me kulaputrāḥ|...(fol.178 verso.5-6)

A careful observation informs us that the underlined portion which corresponds to the untranslated part in the Chinese version is shorter than what in the first example. Two words, “vineya vaśāt”, are dropped from the line. What we shall remember here is that no existing manuscript, except this one in the *Thapa Collection*, is wanting this part.

This variant reading is a small but significant sign in that it suggests the possibility that there was no such part in the “original” text. Of course this omission of two words might be the result simply of a simple scribal error. But it is no less important even if that were the case, because it would bring about a new import of the text, which leads us closer than ever to the supposed original.

A New Approach: Shifting the Focus Onto Publishing “Diplomatic Text”

Thus, from the philological point of view, ideally we should record every minor variant reading. This was practically nearly impossible until we become able to deal with massive volumes of data using electronic devices. Now, with the help of various electronic devices, we can not only store big

data but also utilize and process it, and, what is more, even publish it in the form of digital data. The popularization of these new technologies can make real this long-time hoped ideal of philology.

Philologists have ever taken the method of publishing so-called “diplomatic copy” of the source manuscripts when they found a new and important copy of them. “Diplomatic” here means exactly reproducing an original version with some simple process like transcription for publishing purposes. This method was taken only when a few limited philologically important texts were to be published because of the cost-effectiveness; a diplomatic version is so bulky in general containing much noise that only a few experts could realize the value of that version.

Now we can easily deal with the bulky data by applying new technologies, in light of the philological ideal, which is to record and publish every single variant readings along with noise-like minor information, no matter how big the data becomes, so that we can shift the focus onto proactive use of diplomatic copy.

Manuscripts of philological importance, so far, often have been kept concealed behind collectors for long periods of time until they finish preparing to publish. Although it was somehow inevitable in the circumstances of yesteryear, that custom has caused a delay in the progress of study in this field. Instantly publishing a raw data in the diplomatic format is far more efficient in reaching a good text with the help of many outside experts, rather than publishing the same text after one deliberately prepared critical edition personally. So we had better shift our first priority to taking the method of diplomatic publication for the benefit of the whole.

Through this methodological shift, we can expect some good side-effects. Making private raw materials open by proactively sharing them through publication in the diplomatic format, we can attract many experts working in the same field around the material. The host institute would be served as a platform and can take the initiative of organizing a research project in the particular field.

Therefore, even though it does not look professional for a philologist to publish raw material without a critical edition, it is far more beneficial to the whole if we strategically share our own properties with outsiders as quickly as possible. An ancient Asian proverb says, “It’s better to be brisk and slapdash than painstaking but slow.”

About the *Thapa Collection Digital Library of Nepal Sanskrit Buddhist Manuscripts*

These last few years, the *Rissho University Nepal Academic-Research Project* (RNAP)²¹ has carried out comprehensive research into Nepalese Buddhism. We are currently working on a study on Nepal's Sanskrit Buddhist Manuscripts, a collaborative research project with Prof. Shanker Thapa of Tribhuvan University, a Nepalese native scholar working in this particular field.

Prof. Thapa has been working on collecting and preserving Nepal's Sanskrit Manuscripts as a private activity without any financial support from any institute. He works independently, walking around the Kathmandu valley to visit private houses and temples which possess never-before published manuscripts.

He collects the manuscripts in digital data format, not the real objects; actually he only asks the owners to let him photograph those manuscripts. This is his strategy to access those unpublished manuscripts. Since those manuscripts are valuables for each owner for various reasons — for some owners they are practically used in rituals and for others they are cashable properties and so on — the owners will not take the risk of showing their possessions if he were asking them to hand over the actual manuscripts. Prof. Thapa is indifferent to the value of the manuscripts as real properties. He just wants to know and record the whole picture of the present status of Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts before their traditional contents disappear for reasons such as continuous renovation of manuscripts in the ritual culture, which I referred above, or export outside Nepal through private trade, etc. He takes color photos of all the folios of the manuscripts one by one, and has compiled a huge amount of data in CRW²² and JPG format.

Through this activity, Prof. Thapa has collected digital data for over 1,000 titles of private unpublished Sanskrit manuscripts. In the collaborative work with Prof. Thapa, RNAP have been given access to the entire data of this collection, which is exactly the same as what Prof. Thapa stores/will store in his storage device. Cataloguing the whole collection is now underway by RNAP. It will be published in several volumes from time to time within a couple of years.²³

Prospect of the Activity of RNAP

In the section before last, we proposed a new approach for philological study of Sanskrit Buddhism. Following our own proposal, we shall start publishing raw materials in the diplomatic format from the huge stock of manuscript data in the *Thapa Collection*.

The first issue will be the diplomatic text of the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* (No. 12-002), from which the portion of text we quoted above was taken. This manuscript is the very thing worth publishing in the diplomatic format because it preserves several new variant readings not found in any other versions, as we saw above.

We will also proceed with further study of *Nava-Dharma*. Although this set of scriptures is not the authentic core of Northern Buddhism, as Hodgson had wrongly assumed, it is no less important on the point that it is deeply rooted in the unique and most significant feature of Nepalese Buddhism, ritual. So, if we understand the *Nava-Dharma* well — the structural background, the history of reformation and so on, we can see the Buddhism of Nepal more systematically. Manuscripts of all the 11 scriptures associated with the *Nava-Dharma* are found in the *Thapa Collection*, including *Tathāgata Guhyaka*, a very rare scripture of which only one complete manuscript has ever been discovered.

Because the *Thapa Collection* consists of clear, full-color, high-resolution photo data, we can utilize it for bibliological study, which is difficult to undertake with the rough monochrome microfiche hard copy. Take the cover paintings for instance. The Rissho University Library possesses a Sanskrit manuscript of *Gaṇḍavyūha* that was brought from Nepal to Japan by Ven. Ekai Kawaguchi. It has beautiful cover paintings on the first folio of the manuscript. Interestingly enough, *Laṅkāvatāra* in the *Thapa Collection* also has a cover painting almost identical with the one on the *Gaṇḍavyūha* at Rissho University. Cover painting, in general, relates to the workshop which duplicated the manuscripts. Therefore, it is most probable that both of these manuscripts were the product of the same workshop. This conclusion leads us to another philological or bibliographical assumption that hints the lineages of duplicated manuscripts both remain in Nepal and scattered around the world.

Conclusion

By focusing on the practice of scripture worship in the Kathmandu valley, we have first drawn out many topics to argue for a comprehensive understanding of Nepalese Buddhism. Firstly, we are to realize that Sanskrit Buddhism which the western pioneers of modern Buddhist study try to draw out from Nepalese Buddhism was somewhat imaginary and need revision. We should not hope too much to find a medieval Indian Buddhism behind Nepalese Buddhism.

On that basis, we can proceed to study Nepalese Buddhism as it is, to gain a comprehensive understanding of it. At that level, knowledge of the *Nava-Dharma* is helpful in grasping the whole structure of Nepalese Buddhism.

Then, we shall take up the manuscripts that are the container of the scriptures and see how they function or dysfunction in the ritualistic cultural context. Actually, the ritualistic culture is not always beneficial to Sanskrit Buddhism, especially from the philological point of view.

In those circumstances, what we should do is record as many documents as we can. This has become possible thanks to the recent development of information technology. Prof. Thapa actually has been doing this. We can make free use of the data he has collected.

Now, RNAP is preparing to publish it in various ways and is ready to lead the study in this field.

*This research was financially supported by *Rissho University Nepal Academic Research Project* (RNAP), Japan.

Notes

1. *The Company*: The East India Company (EIC), also known as the Honourable East India Company (HEIC) or the British East India Company.
2. According to Max Muller (1881), Hodgson made the list with the help of Amritananda. The list should be almost identical with the one in his essay. He elaborately collected almost all manuscripts in the list and sent it to the Asiatic Society of Bengal but no one started studying them, so they made new two sets and sent them to London and Paris. This was in 1924.
3. Max Muller (1881) p.185.

4. Hodgson insisted that he found a manuscript which had been transmitted to Kathmandu in the 2nd century of the Christian era. This information is also from Max Muller (1881). The oldest academically confirmed existing manuscript, however, is the *Suśrta Saṃhitā* in the Kaisal Library.
5. Shanker (2018). p.3.
6. *prakāśa* is also one of the *Daśa-karma*. See Takaoka (1984) for the detail.
7. Tanaka Kimiaki & Yoshizaki, Kasumi (1998).
8. *Aṣṭamīvrata* is a fasting celemony which worships the Amogapāsa Avalokiteśvara. The Buddhist story of bringing Avalokiteśvara from Assam to Kathmandu is depicted in genealogy text. See Sasaki (2018).
9. Hodgson (1874) p.13.
10. Max Muller (1881) p.170.
11. *Mañjuśrī-jñānasattvasya-paramārtha-nāmasaṅgīti* (大正藏1187-1190, 北京 No.2). This scripture is said to be derived from the Samādhi Chapter of *Māyājāra-tantra*. But the present Māyājāra doesn't contain such a portion.
12. See Shakya (2015).
13. Tanaka & Yoshizaki (1998).
14. Tuladhar-Douglas reported the Darbhanga Institute's case. This Mithila based institute "chose to publish editions of these same nine texts on the basis of Hodgson's descriptions of Sanskrit Buddhism." He continues; "This has led many student of Sanskrit Buddhism to the false assumption that the navagrantha are a category within medieval Indian Buddhism." P.67.
15. Tuladhar-Douglas (2003).
16. Regarding this transformation, see Tuladhar-Douglas (2006).
17. A ritual of *Guhya-sūtra/tantra*. Tanaka (2010), p.91.
18. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* called *Bhagavatī* or the mother of the Buddha.
19. The *Thapa Collection* is introduced in a later section of this paper.
20. Here we use the edition of Wogihara and Tsuchida: *Saddharmapundarikasūtram, Romanized and Revised Text of the Bibliotheca Buddhica Publication by Consulting a Sanskrit MS. and Tibetan and Chinese Translations*, Tokyo, 1934.
21. The office of the project is situated in the Faculty of Buddhist Studies, which is jointly directed by Fumio SHOJI and Kazunori SASAKI.
22. The RAW data format produced by Canon digital cameras.
23. RNAP has published a tentative catalogue of Prof. Thapa's first phase collection (containing 235 titles) in the *Journal of Institute for the Comprehensive Study of Lotus Sutra (Hokekyō Bunka Kenkyūjo)*, vol.44, 2018.

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