



Introduction

From 15 to 16 October 2008, the panel “Sanskrit Manuscripts in China: State and Prospects” was held as part of the “2008 Beijing Seminar on Tibetan Studies.” It was nothing less than the first of its kind. For this reason in particular we would like to thank the convenors of the conference, Prof. Lhagpa Phuntshogs, Prof. Zhu Xiaoming, as well as the other members of the leadership of the CTCRC for making this panel possible.

It was well evident to all of us that our meeting was quite special because of the immense task in front of us, a task that shall require a great deal of common effort, not only in terms of recognizing its scale, but also in terms of our willingness to freely and openly discuss the topics at stake. Only so will the institutions involved finally be able to arrive at a mutual opinion on what can and should be done.

The panel was conceived by Duan Qing and Ernst Steinkellner, who planned it with the idea of promoting sensible and feasible ways of dealing with the major issue of the Sanskrit manuscripts in China, in particular those in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. None of us can know how matters will develop in the near or farther future. But we thought it helpful to take stock of the current situation and to discuss the various possibilities for further developments by inviting experienced specialists, both local and international, as well as young researchers from the PRC who have had some first experience with our subject.

Participation in this panel was on an invitational basis. It was our hope, on one hand, that the various presentations would yield a con-

Ernst Steinkellner, Duan Qing, Helmut Krasser (eds.), *Sanskrit manuscripts in China. Proceedings of a panel at the 2008 Beijing Seminar on Tibetan Studies, October 13 to 17*. Beijing 2009, pp. 7–9.

crete impression of the work being currently done on these materials, and that our proposals for further steps forward could be openly discussed. On the other hand, we also believed that this issue should be discussed in general terms—not only in terms of the many private, individual interests and wishes that certainly exist worldwide.

On this occasion we would also like to give special thanks to Prof. Luo Zhao. His work in Lhasa in the 1980s was a giant step forward, a step as valuable as the impressive endeavours in the first half of the last century of Rahula Sāṅkṛtyāyana and Giuseppe Tucci. Luo Zhao can, without a doubt, be considered a pioneering figure. His work stands at the beginning of our present efforts.

During the panel itself, in addition to a number of short presentations from the desks of various scholars, we had, above all, time for discussing some of the main, critical topics. A number of institutions within China are presently engaged in different aspects of the Sanskrit manuscripts and their copies, and a major project has been launched by the TAR government. However, to our knowledge no overall plan has yet been evolved that is based on a comprehensive knowledge of the matter at hand. Only such a plan, accepted by all institutions involved, would allow the work being undertaken to be regulated and worthwhile. What is necessary are the means for avoiding overlapping work, avoiding work that is scholarly incorrect and therefore useless, for applying the most suitable modern tools and methods, and, simply put, for doing the right thing.

The main objective of our discussions was a mutual agreement concerning what should be done with respect to the most general issues. We would consider our meeting successful if an ensuing proposal, even if only in part, were finally considered useful and valid by the different institutions involved in this great task.

After the conference, Duan Qing organized another day of meetings to present the work of students and scholars at Peking University and its “Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature.”



The papers presented in this volume are not all of the same kind. A number of participants contributed substantially to the discussions at the conference but did not present a paper. Some of these then contributed a related paper at a later date. Some of the papers in the volume were presented at the subsequent meeting at Peking University. A few of the contributed papers will be published within another framework. And some of the contributions are abstracts. Irrespective of this somewhat erratic nature of the present volume of proceedings, in our opinion it reflects the state and the prospects of the subject quite well. We are sincerely grateful to Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek and Luo Hong for their help with the English and Chinese texts in this volume.

From the viewpoint of the prospects for the future study of these materials, materials that are immensely valuable for Buddhist and Sanskrit Studies, the contributions presented here are highly encouraging, because they demonstrate the scholarly potential that is already present within the PRC. They also show the serious commitment of the international scholarly community, first, to support the efforts of this, as yet small, group of scholars and, secondly, the community's willingness for cooperation. The open and fruitful discussions during this week in Beijing and over the course of the following months have been summarized in Steinkellner's paper "Strategies for the Modes of Management and Scholarly Treatment of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the TAR."

Let us, last but not least, remember Prof. Wang Sen. He passed away much too early. But his ideas and first activities with regard to this truly priceless cultural treasure from Tibet's past remain our precious inheritance. In this sense, we hope that Wang Sen's motivation will remain with us, and we hope, moreover, that the purity and sincerity of his intentions will also characterize our own humble efforts.

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Sanskrit manuscripts in China

Proceedings of a panel at the 2008 Beijing
Seminar on Tibetan Studies
October 13 to 17

Edited by

Ernst Steinkellner

in cooperation with

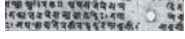
Duan Qing, Helmut Krasser

China Tibetology Publishing House
Beijing 2009



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