

RECENT JAPANESE STUDIES ON THE LALITAVISTARA

The Lalitavistara (henceforth LV) was the first important Buddhist Sanskrit text to become known in the West. In 1836 Robert Lenz published an analysis of the *Lalita-Vistara-pourana* based upon a manuscript copied in 1803 for Captain Knox<sup>1</sup>. This manuscript is described by Keith and Thomas in the *Catalogue of the Sanskrit and Prākṛit Manuscripts of the Library of the India Office*, Volume II, Part II, 1935, pp. 1420-1421., MS 688. Lefmann used two manuscripts LL which are copied from it<sup>2</sup>. Other manuscripts of the LV were sent to the Asiatic Society of Bengal and to libraries in England and France by B.H.Hodgson. However, the first translation of it was made from the Tibetan by Ph.É. Foucaux who published the Tibetan text in 1847 and a French

---

Note. The transcription of Chinese titles is that used in the *Répertoire du canon bouddhique sino-japonais*. Tokyo, 1978. T. refers to the Taishō edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka.

<sup>1</sup> R. LENZ, "Analyse du Lalita-vistara-pourana, l'un des principaux ouvrages sacrés des Bouddhistes de l'Asie Centrale, contenant la vie de leur prophète et écrit en Sanscrit", in *Bulletin Scientifique de l'Académie de St.-Petersburg*, Vol. I (No. 7-13), pp. 49-51, 57-99.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. LEFMANN, *Lalita Vistara. Zweiter Teil: Varianten-, Metren- und Wörterverzeichnis*, Halle, 1908, p. XII and F. WELLER, *Zum Lalita Vistara. I Über die Prosa des Lal. Vist.*, Leipzig, 1915 [Kleine Schriften, I. Halbband, Stuttgart., 1987, pp. 457-510], pp. 8-9.

translation in 1848<sup>3</sup>. Foucaux omitted many passages which he considered of less importance (24 passages according to Hokazono<sup>4</sup>).

In the second half of the nineteenth century the LV was studied by many scholars. Rajendralal Mitra published an edition of the Sanskrit text<sup>5</sup> and a translation of chapters 1-14 and part of chapter 15<sup>6</sup>. In 1884 Foucaux published a translation based upon the Sanskrit text, followed in 1892 by a volume of notes, variants and index<sup>7</sup>. Already in 1874 S.Lefmann had published a translation of the first five chapters of the LV<sup>8</sup>. The edition of the text which he subsequently undertook was completed in 1882 but only published twenty years later in 1902, followed by a volume of variants, list of metres and vocabulary in 1908<sup>9</sup>.

Until 1902 scholars were forced to use the very unsatisfactory edition of Mitra. Senart and Kern made great use of it, Senart in his *Essai sur la légende du Buddha* (Paris, 1873-1875; sec. ed., Paris, 1882) and Kern in his *Geschiedenis van het Buddhisme in Indië* (Haarlem, 1882-1884). In 1882 H.Oldenbergh showed that one finds in the LV many passages which are very similar to Pāli texts and must be considered to be old<sup>10</sup>. Among these old texts are several metrical passages which do not show the "barbaric" peculiarities of

<sup>3</sup> P.É. FOUCAUX, *Rgya Tsh'er Rol pa ou Développement des Jeux contenant l'histoire du Bouddha Cakya-Mouni*. Première Partie. Texte tibétain. Paris, 1847. Deuxième partie: Traduction française. Paris, 1848.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. K. HOKAZONO, *Raritavisutara no kenkyū. Jōkan*. Tokyo, 1992, p. 177, n.4.

<sup>5</sup> R. MITRA, *The Lalita Vistara, or Memoirs of the Early Life of Śākya Siṅha*, Calcutta, 1853-1877.

<sup>6</sup> R. MITRA, *The Lalita-vistara or Memoirs of the Early Life of Śākya Siṅha*, Calcutta, 1881-1886.

<sup>7</sup> P.É. FOUCAUX, *Développement des Jeux contenant l'histoire du Bouddha Cakya-Mouni, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa prédication*. Traduit du Sanskrit en français. 2 vol. Annales du Musée Guimet, VI-XIX. Paris, 1884-1892.

<sup>8</sup> S. LEFMANN, *Lalita Vistara, Erzählung von dem Leben und Lehre des Cākya Siṅha*, Berlin, 1874.

<sup>9</sup> S. LEFMANN, *Lalita Vistara*. Erster Teil: Text (1902), *Lalita Vistara*. Zweiter Teil: *Varianten-, Metren- und Wörterverzeichnis*, Halle, 1908.

<sup>10</sup> H. OLDENBERG, "Über den Lalita Vistara", in *Verhandlungen des 5. Internationalen Orientalisten-Congresses. Berlin, 1882*, Bd. 2.2 (Berlin, 1882), pp. 107-122 [Kleine Schriften, Teil 2, Wiesbaden, 1967, pp. 873-888].

the so-called *Gāthā* dialect. According to Burnouf the prose parts of the texts are older than the metrical parts, whereas Weber and Kern believed that the metrical parts were older. Oldenberg disagreed with all three scholars and distinguished three different layers: old metrical passages, prose passages and younger metrical passages written in the *Gāthā*-dialect. Often one finds references to Oldenberg's article as stating that the oldest parts of the text are these corresponding to Pāli texts. Comparisons with the Chinese versions has shown that in the oldest recension of the text these passages were not present. However, Oldenberg assumed that a compiler had combined these older texts with younger texts and pointed out that further research on the Chinese materials was necessary. Oldenberg's assumption remains valid. However, it is not the author or compiler of the oldest recension who incorporated these texts but a later compiler. They are the oldest parts in the LV but not the oldest parts of the LV. In *Māra und Buddha* (Leipzig, 1895) and in *Buddha's Geburt* (Leipzig, 1908) E. Windisch studied several parallel passages in the LV and corresponding Pāli texts.

In the twentieth century Western scholars have paid less attention to the LV. In his study of the prose of the LV F. Weller clearly demonstrated the imperfections of Lefmann's edition and confirmed the critical remarks made by Speyer in his review<sup>11</sup>. Weller concluded that originally the prose parts were not written in Sanskrit and that in its original form they must have been close to the prose of the *Mahāvastu*<sup>12</sup>. Of great importance for the study of the LV are the materials collected by F. Edgerton in his *Grammar and Dictionary of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*<sup>13</sup>. Several articles on the LV have been published by Western scholars in this century. They

---

<sup>11</sup> J.C. SPEYER, "Review of *Lalita Vistara. Leben und Lehre des Cākyā-Buddha. Testausgabe mit Varianten-, Metren- und Wörterverzeichnis*. Erster Teil: Text. Halle, Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1903", in *Museum* 10, 5 (1903), pp. 145-151.

<sup>12</sup> F. WELLER, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> F.E. EDGERTON, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, New Haven, 1953.

are all listed in Hokazono's Study of the Lalitavistara<sup>14</sup>. However, no Western scholar has undertaken a new edition of the Lalitavistara.

In 1992, a hundred and ten years after the completion of Lefmann's edition, a new edition of chapters 1-14 has appeared in Japan<sup>15</sup>. As one can see from Hokazono's work Japanese scholars have been very active in the study of the LV, especially in recent decades, few Western Indologists read Japanese and for this reason it is perhaps useful to draw attention to the research done by Japanese scholars. In 1882 Oldenberg expressed the wish that a study be made of the Chinese translations of the LV. It is in this domain that important results have been obtained by Japanese scholars by comparing the two Chinese translations with the Sanskrit text. These results are incorporated in the first part of Hokazono's book which in four large chapters treats of the biographies of the Buddha, the Lalitavistara, the history of the research on the LV and the critical edition of the text<sup>16</sup>. It is not possible to give even a detailed summary of these chapters. We must limit ourselves to a few remarks.

To which school does the LV belong ? In many publications one encounters the statement that it belongs to the *Sarvāstivāda* school. There are two Chinese translations of the LV, the first made by Fa-hou in 318, entitled *P'ou yao king* "The Sūtra of Universal Brilliance" (T.186) [henceforth C 1]. The second was translated by Divākara in 683, entitled *Fang kouang ta tchouang yen king* "The Extended Great Splendid Sūtra" (T.187) [henceforth C2]. There is, moreover, an immense compilation of different biographies of the Buddha, translated by Jñānagupta about 590, entitled *Fo pen hing tsi king* "Sūtra Collecting the Buddha's Original Course" (T.190) [henceforth C 3] which contains many passages parallel to passages in C1, C2 and LV. Extracts of it were translated by S. Beal in 1875<sup>17</sup>. This work, the title of which Beal reconstructed as

---

<sup>14</sup> K. HOKAZONO, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-193.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-262.

<sup>17</sup> S. BEAL, *The Romantic Legend of Sākya Buddha*, London, 1875.

*Abhiṅskramaṇasūtra*, mentions in the colophon that the biography of the Buddha of the Sarvāstivādins is called *Ta tchouan yen king* which is always reconstructed in Sanskrit as Mahālalitavistara<sup>18</sup>, probably because the title of C2 contains the characters *tchouan yen*. However, *tchouan yen* usually reisers Sanskrit *vyūha*, *alaṃkāra*, *bhūṣaṇa*, etc, and *Ta tchouan yen king* is more likely a translation of *Mahālāṃkārasūtra*<sup>19</sup>. The fact that a *Mahāyānasūtra* is said to be a *Sarvāstivāda* work is explained by Winternitz with the supposition that the LV was originally the *Sarvāstivāda* version of the biography of the Buddha but that the LV as we know it is "*eine im Sinne des Mahāyāna erweiterte und ausgeschmückte Redaktion des ursprünglichen Hīnayānatextes*"<sup>20</sup>. Hokazono shows that, although one finds in the LV some ideas similar to those of the *Sarvāstivāda* school, it is definitely not a *Sarvāstivāda* text, and the *Ta tchouan yen king* mentioned in the colophon of C 3 must belong to a different tradition<sup>21</sup>. In a recent article Okano has suggested that the title *Ta tchouan yen king* designates an unknown prose recension of the Buddhacarita<sup>22</sup>. According to him this prose recension has been utilized almost in its entirety by the author of C3 and partially by the author of C2<sup>23</sup>. Hokazono points out that there are two theories concerning the growth of the LV. According to the first the three successive stages of the LV are C1-C2-LV, but according to the second the order is C1-LV-C2. Hokazono compared C2 and LV and adopted the first theory because there are many additions in the LV

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. v-vi, 386-387; C. REGAMEY, "Encore à propos du Lalitavistara et l'episode d'Asita", in *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 27/1 (1973), pp. 1-33, p. 6., n. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. NAKAMURA, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*. Jōkan. Tokyo, 1975, p. 717d.

<sup>20</sup> M. WINTERNITZ, "Beiträge zur buddhistischen Sanskritliteratur", *WZKM* 36 (1912), p. 237-252 [Kleine Schriften, Teil 2, Stuttgart, 1912, pp. 520-535] in part. p. 245.

<sup>21</sup> K. HOKAZONO, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-107.

<sup>22</sup> K. OKANO, "Butsuhongyōjikkkyō no hensan to Lalitavistara", in *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 37, 2 (1988).

<sup>23</sup> K. OKANO, "Buddhacarita no kaisaku butsuden ni tsuite - Butsuhongyōjikkkyō to Hōkōdajshōhongyō ni mochiirareta nichi no butsuden", in *Tōhoku daigaku Indogaku kōza rokulūgoehūnen kinenronshū: Indoslushō ni okeru ningenkan* (1991), pp. 57-77.

which are missing in C2<sup>24</sup>. Okano distinguishes four stages in the development of the LV. (1). The original LV. (2). Additional chapters found in C1 and C2 (C1 chapter "Eighteen transformations" and the three following chapters). (3). Further additions relating to praises of the Buddha and the incomprehensibility of the *Buddhakāya*, etc. and *Āgama* materials. These additions to stages 1 and 2 are found in the present. Sanskrit text. (4). C2 diverged from the LV tradition and many parts were omitted and others revised on a large scale. Hokazono argues that there are many passages in the LV which are missing in C2 and it is difficult to imagine that the author of C2 would have omitted all these passages. Hokazono suggests that before C2 diverged from the LV tradition there was already existing a LV very similar to C2. This text developed in two different directions, one resulting in C2, the other in the present Sanskrit text. "The first borrowed passages from the prose recension of the *Buddhacarita*"<sup>25</sup>.

As to the *Āgama* materials (i.e. the passages parallel to Pāli texts studied by Oldenberg and Windisch), several scholars have pointed out that they are also found in the *Mahāvastu*. Okano supposes that a learned monk belonging to the Mahāsāṃghika school inserted them in the LV<sup>26</sup>.

Japanese scholars have carefully compared the Chinese translations of the LV with the Sanskrit text, either by studying single chapters or complete texts. The most detailed comparison is to be found in two articles published by Okano<sup>27</sup>. In a later article Okano studies the four stages of the development of the LV in detail<sup>28</sup>. According to him the original LV was written about 150 A.D. by a poet, a lay follower, a *dharmabhānaka*, who probably

---

<sup>24</sup> K. HOKAZONO, "Lalitavistara to Hōkōdaishōgongyō", in *Nihon bukkyō gakkai nempō* 43 (1978), pp. 17-36.

<sup>25</sup> K. HOKAZONO, *Raritavisutara no kenkyū. Jōkan*, pp. 108-110.

<sup>26</sup> K. OKANO, "Raritavisutara no buha", in *Shūkyō kenkyū* 279 (1989), pp. 181-182.

<sup>27</sup> K. OKANO, "Fuyōkyō no kenkyū - Lalitavistara ni okeru shinko no sō no kubun (Jō)", in *Tōhoku Indogaku shūkyō gakkai ronshū* 14 (1987), pp. 17-32; (Chū), *ibid.* 15 (1988), pp. 25-38.

<sup>28</sup> K. OKANO, "Fuyōkyō no kenkyū (Ge)", in *Bunka* 53, 3-4 (1990), pp. 55-74.

lived in North-Western India and belonged to a Mahāsāṃghika milieu as can be seen from the use of the expressions *loka-anuvṛt-* and *lokottara*. One does not find in the original LV the worship of the book but of the *caitya* (the word *stūpa* is not used). The only *bodhisattva* mentioned is Maitreya. However, in 1987 Okano pointed out that Maitreya is only mentioned in the Sanskrit text of the LV and not in C1 and C2<sup>29</sup>. The concept of the void (*śūnya*) does not play a great role in it and the author is above all inspired by a passionate belief in the *bodhisattva* idea. Finally one does not find in it the theory of the ten *bhūmis* but only the germ of it. The author of the later additions was a learned monk belonging to the Mahāsāṃghika school but at the same time a follower of *Mahāyāna*. He was responsible for inserting the *Āgama* materials and fragments *Mahāyāna* doctrines in a pedantic way. These are only a few of the many interesting ideas in this article which ought to be translated in full<sup>30</sup>.

In another article Okano studied the translation of the different metres in C1<sup>31</sup>. The translator translated 424 out of the 932 verses as prose, especially when the text does not announce the verses. More than thirty different metres are used in C 1. Okano shows that the translator was better in translating *triṣṭubh-jagatī*, *vakra* and *ārya* metres than verses written in the *puṣpitaḅgrā* metre. As to the *vasantatilaka*, *śārdūlavikrīḍita* and *māninī* metres he translated them correctly in about half the cases.

Hokazono briefly discusses the Tibetan translation of LV which, according to him, translates literally the Sanskrit text but not without occasional mistakes such as translating a verse in prose (Chapter 11, verse 14), omitting one of the 64 *ākāras* of the family in which the *bodhisattva* must be born and translating *Mithilā* by the equivalent of Mathurā<sup>32</sup>. Hokazono refers to an article by Yamagishi in which

<sup>29</sup> K. OKANO, "Fuyōkyō no kenkyū - Lalitavistara ni okeu shinko no sō no kubun (Jō)", in *Tōhoku Indogaku, Shūkyō gakkai ronsū* 14 (1987), p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> K. OKANO, "Fuyōkyō no kenkyū (Ge)", in *Bunka* 53, 3-4 (1990), pp 55-74.

<sup>31</sup> K. OKANO, "Jikuhōgo no 'Fuyōkyō' no honyaku ni okeru inbunshinbetsu no erā to sono gen-in", in *Shūkyō kenkyū* 291 (1992), pp. 146-147.

<sup>32</sup> K. HOKAZONO, *Raritavisutara no kenkyū. Jōkan*, Tokyo (1992), pp. 150-151.

he shows that in three places additions are found, in the Tibetan translation<sup>33</sup>. According to Yamagishi these additions are not found in the Chinese translations or in the manuscripts of the Tokyo university used and were therefore added by the Tibetan translator. Interesting is the third case. In Lefmann's edition on p. 313, line 5 there is only one *pāda*: *tasmān nivartāmaha tāta sarve* whereas the Tibetan translation contains a complete verse:

*sku dañ thugs kyañ rab tu dag |*  
*sems can kun la byams pa'i thugs dañ ldan |*  
*de la mtshon dañ dug gis yon mi tshugs |*  
*de bas yab cig thams cad bzlog tu gsol ||*

The fact that three *pādas* are missing in C 2, C 3 and the Sanskrit manuscripts cannot be explained by the fact that they were added by the Tibetan translator. They must have been in the Sanskrit manuscript used by the translator. Their absence in C 2, C 3 and the Sanskrit manuscripts shows that they are all based on manuscripts in which three *pādas* were lost. This is an important fact with regard to the history of the LV and shows that the text has been better preserved in the Tibetan translation than in the Sanskrit manuscripts and in the texts used by the Chinese translators.

The studies by Japanese scholars of the Chinese translators are of great importance for understanding the development of the LV. Further work has to be undertaken with regard to the study of the linguistic peculiarities of the LV. For instance, Brough was of the opinion that C I was translated from a Gāndhārī version<sup>34</sup>. Okano rightly remarks that in order to prove this thesis it is necessary to study systematically all the transliterations of Sanskrit words into Chinese characters in the text<sup>35</sup>. As mentioned above already Oldenberg distinguished older and younger parts in the verses of the LV and Winternitz remarked that the same is the case for the prose<sup>36</sup>.

---

<sup>33</sup> S. YAMAGISHI, "Lalitavistara Kōmabon no kenkyū" - Chibet-to-goyaku to no hiyaku, in *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 33, 2 (1985), pp. 549-550.

<sup>34</sup> J. BROUGH, "The Arapacana syllabary in the old Lalita-vistara", in BSOAS XL,1 (1977), pp. 85-95 [Collected Papers, London, 1996, pp. 438-449], p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> K. OKANO, "Fuyōkyō no kenkyū (Ge)", in *Bunka*, 53, 3-4 (1990), p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> M. WINTERNITZ, *op. cit.*, p. 245.



A systematic study of the language of the older and younger parts of the LV is still to be carried out. Thanks to the new edition of the first 14 chapters by Hokazono these tasks have become considerably easier because Hokazono's edition, based as it is upon a close comparison with the Chinese and Tibetan translations, presents a much better text than the one found in Lefmann's edition. Moreover, he has been able to use six manuscripts belonging to the Tokyo university among which there is one palmleaf manuscript written in Śaṃvat 652/1531-1532 and microfilms of five manuscript photographed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project. Since publishing his edition and translation of the first fourteen chapters Hokazono has recently published text and translation of the first part of chapter 15<sup>37</sup>. It is to be hoped that the remaining chapters will be published in a not too distant future.

I have tried to convey some idea of the important work done by Japanese scholars on the LV. Much had regrettably to be left out but perhaps it will be possible on another occasion to draw attention to publications not mentioned above.

---

<sup>37</sup> K. HOKAZONO, "Raritavisutara no kenkyū; Honbun kyōtei oyobi wayaku (Dai 15 shō)", in *Kagoshimakeidaironshū* 37,1 (1996), pp. 77-118, 37, 2 (1996), pp. 1-36; 37, 3 (1997), pp. 33-69.