

# **Sanskrit manuscripts on palm-leaves, paper and birch-bark in the TAR: What now?**

by

Ernst Steinkellner, Austrian Academy of Sciences

In January 2006, following instructions of the former Chairman Hu Jintao, an organizational group for the “Protection and Research on Tibetan Sanskrit Palm-Leaf Manuscripts” was established. The next month, the Government of the Tibetan Autonomous Region installed Prof. Tsewang Gyurme as the director of a work team and an office was opened at the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences. The search, survey and listing of the manuscripts were begun already in September 2006. All manuscripts traced were also digitized in colour.

The project was finalized in 2011 with the production of DVDs and the non-commercial publication of the collected material in a small number of copies—I have heard only of five — of sixty-one large and beautifully bound portfolio volumes, four volumes of a General Catalogue, and one volume of Photographic Reproductions. With this, the first step of “Protection and Research” on these materials seems to have been considered finished. The conclusion was celebrated in Lhasa with a ceremony also shown in Chinese national television.

So far, however, only the photo published on the third cover page of *The Palm-Leaf Manuscript Studies* (2014) provide an impression of the volumes produced. And a fine quality of the digitized material is suggested by some photos in the volume published in 2011 on the treasures in the Norbulingka Museum.

There is no doubt that due to this project it was possible to halt some of the grave dangers to which these manuscripts may have become subject, such as their deterioration, misuse, or even their loss. Thus, one of the greatest remaining treasures of humanity will now not only be better protected and kept in its current state, but is also safely preserved in this state for the future.

As an outsider I can only give you a general impression of how the world of scholars beyond the PRC perceives the present state of affairs and what expectations and hopes scholars have for the future.

In a contribution to the 2008 Beijing Seminar, I proposed a number of strategies for handling the Sanskrit manuscripts in the TAR. Among the tasks then mentioned as being of immediate urgency some are already fulfilled. Moreover, already apparent is a certain increase of interest on the side of Chinese scholars and institutions not only in these cultural relics but also in the study of Sanskrit as the crucial precondition for any research on these manuscripts. Most importantly, an Institute for Research on Sanskrit Manuscripts has been established meanwhile at the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences, and at a number of universities within the PRC new Sanskrit teaching positions have been installed.

As to methodological training and international cooperation, Peking University's "Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature" is successful with

publications and by providing post-graduate training for its students at international universities. Several editions based on Sanskrit manuscripts have been published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press since 1988. And the newly opened “Buddhist Resource and Research Center” at Zhejiang University aims at applying modern digital technology in a broad way to Buddhist studies and cooperates with Harvard University. Last but not least, the researchers of the CTRC cooperate successfully since 2004 with scholars in Japan and Europe, and the series “Sanskrit Texts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region” jointly published with the Austrian Academy of Sciences reached its 20<sup>th</sup> volume this very year.

The last twenty years or so have seen a great leap forward in the recovery of Buddhist literature, a leap that has inevitably resulted in a substantial increase of our knowledge of the development of this world religion. In particular, there are two hoards of documents of major importance.

One is the totally unexpected appearance of manuscripts and fragments that date from the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE and come from the area of greater Gandhāra in today’s Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. These manuscripts and fragments contain the earliest Buddhist literature ever found.

The second hoard are the manuscripts that have survived for centuries in the monastic and private libraries in China’s Tibetan regions. These manuscripts preserve a large array of major works of original Sanskrit literature brought over the Himālayas when Buddhism was slowly driven from its motherland. After being translated into Tibetan between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, the original Sanskrit manuscripts were safely kept as spiritual and cultural relics into our times. So much for a short summary of the current state of affairs with regard to the manuscripts in question.

We have seen that the legacy of the work and activities by the late Professors Ji Xianlin and Wang Sen, and the former directors of the CTRC, Dorje Cedan and Lhagpa Phuntshogs, to mention only a few, is being honoured by an increase of interest in the study of Sanskrit within China, and, most importantly, that the material relics in question have been put in order and also stabilised in digital form.

But: What now? At the present time, this treasure is still out of bounds for scholars, both within China and abroad. Why? I know of no answer. Together with many others inside and outside of China, I can only speculate on the reasons.

It seems that the lock on the treasure has been put on by the TAR Government or by a higher authoritative agency in the Central Government and thus it was a political decision. It is possible to consider such a decision wise if it is intended as a temporary measure. For example, it might be a measure for safeguarding the manuscripts until the necessary preparations have been made for meaningful and regulated scholarly access to them; or, until the capacity of Chinese scholarship has developed to the extent that all necessary work can be achieved by Chinese and Tibetan scholars alone, without international cooperation or participation.

Questions such as these are unavoidably being raised within the international scholarly community as long as no movement can be felt or seen. Because the alternative option seems inconceivable, namely, that after all the admirable and certainly expensive efforts that have already been invested, this treasure has now been locked away, perhaps for a long time. In any case, for the time being it is definitely dead, and for all we are afraid of it may even remain dead for the rest of our lifetimes.

Is it possible then, that no measures are being taken, or at least being discussed by the institutions in the PRC that would be involved in commencing the second step of the “Protection and Research Project”? And if this is not the case, or if this is not intended, what can we propose should be done?

According to the official report on the first step, the project team has inventoried “roughly one thousand bundles with sixty thousand folios of Sanskrit manuscripts in the TAR”. The number of texts in this collection probably amounts to about three and a half to four thousand individual texts and fragments.

These texts are of all types of Buddhist and non-Buddhist Indian literature. To approach the needed work most effectively, they need to be sorted by scholars in terms of well-reasoned priorities.

In general, it will be easy to distribute these materials among scholars for editing. But this distribution should be done with circumspection to achieve the best results.

The current situation of scholarship, in the PRC and elsewhere, is not particularly auspicious. And the task we face with the materials from the TAR is not easy at all, since so much specialised knowledge is required. Both within the PRC and around the world, the number of scholars already experienced and willing or able aside of their normal occupations to undergo the necessary training and accomplish the actual work is small. Considering the enormous quantity, complexity and difficulty of the texts waiting to be edited and studied, this is a main reason I think this work better be distributed worldwide and not be restricted to scholars in the PRC alone.

In my paper of 2008, I proposed regulation and supervision by a Board consisting of members from PRC institutions together with senior scholars from both the PRC and

abroad. Yet, already establishing such a Board seems to be impeded by the fact that, while the problem does not seem to exist in the Sciences, in the Humanities, the various institutions involved within the PRC still have no regular tradition of practically cooperating on a common project. It seems feasible to me, therefore, that precisely this extensive research project might be an outstanding occasion for combining the capacities of all the governmental, administrative, and academic forces within the PRC to constitute a body of administrators and scholars as an authoritative “think-tank”. The task of this “think-tank” would be to overcome the present deadlock and find a way for finally beginning the second step, which is “Research” and should begin with the installation of a supervising Board.

I am aware of the hesitations with regard to including international members in such a Board from certain quarters of Chinese society because of the colonial period’s history of exploitation and plunder of cultural relics. But we live today in a quite different age, when cooperation between all peoples has developed substantially in many ways. Indeed, cooperation on the same eye-level seems to be the only way to globally survive for all.

Buddhism did not remain in its motherland, but instead spread out and became one of the world’s religions. The literary heritage of fully developed Buddhism was received by the Tibetan people. And, although they translated it, they also safely kept it in its original form. The material form of this heritage—as the manuscripts on palm leaves, paper, and birch-bark— is the possession of the TAR or other parts of the PRC. But its contents are part of the heritage of the entire world. The world therefore has a right to read and know this treasure, and also has the obligation to sponsor its study and publication.

Today, the People’s Republic of China is politically and economically a leading power in the world. While it has the same rights, it also has the same obligation as the rest of the

world to take care and to promote such a project with regard to one of the last great literary, religious, and philosophical treasures of humanity's past. This treasure is still waiting to receive proper attention. I have no doubts that promoting the second step of the "Protection and Research" project will be a strong signal to the entire world that China is truly acknowledging and honouring the value of this heritage left from the past of the Tibetan people.

## 西藏自治区的贝叶、纸质和桦树皮梵文写本：何去何从？

恩斯特·斯坦因凯勒

2006年1月，遵照胡锦涛主席的指示，一个致力于西藏贝叶写本保护和研究工作的领导小组成立了。同年2月，西藏自治区人民政府任命次旺俊美为该项工作的负责人并在西藏社会科学院设立了专项办公室。办公室的工作人员随即于2006年9月开始进行贝叶写本的调查、检视和登录，他们对所有找到的写本进行了彩色数字化处理。

该计划于2011年结项，项目成果包括若干DVD和一套非盈利性且复本有限的写本全集。据我所知，这套写本全集仅有5个复本，它包括61册装帧华美的大开本精装分册，4册总目录和1册复制还原件。很明显，这些写本全集的复本目前保存在拉萨和北京的研究机构里。随着该计划的结束，由胡锦涛主席启动的针对这批资料的“保护和研究”工作中的第一项被认为是已经完成了，有关部门为此在拉萨举行了该项工作结束的庆典，中央电视台也就此作了相关的报道。

我们只能在2014年出版的《贝叶经研究》的封3上得以一睹这些精装分册的风采。2011年出版的一本关于罗布林卡博物馆珍贵藏品的画册中的一些图片表明这些数字化资料的品质非常好。

毫无疑问，这个计划让我们得以避免下列可能发生的严重的写本损毁情况：自然衰损、人为损坏、甚至是丢失。现在，这个宝藏不仅已经得到了更好的保护，得以保持现有的状况，而且可以完好地存续到未来。不论是现在还是将来，全世界的学者都会深深感激胡锦涛主席、已故的次旺俊美教授和西藏自治区人民政府，因为他们为保护人类最伟大的宝藏之一做出了贡献。

我是一个局外人，不了解详情，尤其是我不熟悉那些与本文论及的写本相关的所有法规、背景和实践，因此我只能泛泛地谈一谈中华人民共和国以外的学者们对现状的理解和他们对于未来的期待和希望。

我在2008年北京藏学研讨会分论坛：“中国的梵文写本：现状与未来”中发表的一篇文章中就如何处理西藏自治区的梵文写本提出了一些战略性的建议。该文中我提醒大家关注于2002年10月22日经第九届全国人大修订的《中华人民共和国文物保护法》，此后该法规于2013年和2015年两度修订，但更改的部分和我们讨论的主题无关。



一些当时我提到的迫在眉睫的任务已经在已故的次旺俊美教授的带领下完成了。此外，很明显的是，中国学者和学术机构不仅对于这些文化遗产而且对于梵文研究的兴趣已经有所增长，后者是从事任何与写本相关的研究所不可或缺的前提条件。最为重要的是，一个从事梵文贝叶经研究的学术机构目前已经在西藏社会科学院成立，中华人民共和国国内的若干大学中也设立了梵文教学的职位。

关于研究培训和国际合作，北京大学梵文贝叶经与佛教文献研究所成功地持续出版学术成果并安排学生在国外大学接受博士后培训。2011年，段晴教授启动了梵文贝叶经和佛教文献系列丛书，迄今已经出版4册。1988年以来中国社会科学院出版了数部基于写本的文献校勘本。此外，新近在浙江大学成立的佛教资源与研究中心正致力于将数字化技术广泛运用于佛教研究并与哈佛大学开展合作。最后，中国藏学研究中心的学者自2004年以来成功地与日本和欧洲的学者开展合作研究，藏研中心与奥地利科学院合作出版的西藏自治区梵文文本系列丛书今年已经开始出版第20册。

仅仅几年时间，中华人民共和国国内已经能够培养一些有天赋有潜力胜任写本研究的学者。我的印象是，总的来说，在发展这种潜力的过程中，中华人民共和国国内研究机构所选择的各种类型的国际合作是有所助益的。

在过去的20年左右，佛教文献的探寻工作有了一个飞跃式的进展，这一进展大大丰富了我们的知识并引发了我们对于这个世界性宗教的发展进程的全新的认识。这其中有两批文献的意义尤其重大。

其中之一是一批源于大犍陀罗地区，即现今阿富汗和巴基斯坦北部一带，书成于公元前1世纪至公元3世纪之间的写本和残片，它们的出现完全出乎人们的意料之外。这些写本和残片中有迄今为止所发现的最为古老的佛教文献。

这批出自犍陀罗地区的文本使我们得以初步了解早期佛教的最初的文字记录。然而佛教在印度的发展经历了又一个千年。第二批文献是一个无价的宝藏，它们以在中国西藏的寺庙和私人图书馆中保存了长达数个世纪之久的写本为代表。这批写本包含各类梵文文献中的重要作品，当佛教在其发源地开始渐趋消亡时，它们被带到了喜马拉雅的另一边。这批文献包括大乘经、密续、戒律、宗义、注释、哲学论典、佛教赞颂、诗歌、故事、以及各类密续文献。这里不仅有佛教文献，也有印度语法著作、辞书、诗歌、医学论著以及工艺典籍。这些文献在公元8至14世纪之间被译成藏文，此后梵文写本的原件被作为圣物完好地保存至今。以上是我对本文中所论及的写本的现状所作的简要回顾。

近年来，我们目睹了中国国内对于梵文研究与日俱增的兴趣，这是对已故的季羨林教授、王森教授、以及中国藏学研究中心前总干事多杰才旦和拉巴平措等代表人物所留下的功绩的致礼，最为重要的是，这些文化遗产已经受到保护并以数字化的形式得以永久保存。

然而，现在我们应该何去何从？目前，无论对于中国学者还是国外的学者，这个宝藏依然是一个禁地。这是为什么？对此我没有答案。和其他在中国国内和国外的学者一样，我只能猜测。

也许这是一个政治性的决定，是西藏自治区人民政府或者是中央人民政府的权威人士决定封存这个宝藏。如果这只是一个暂时性的处理方式，也许这是一个明智的决定。举例来说，也许这样处理是为了保证写本的安全，直到必要的准备已经完成，学者们可以有成效地、规范地使用这些写本；或者，直到中国学术界发展到可以完全依靠自身完成一切必要的工作而无需国际合作和国际参与。

当国际学术界觉察不到有任何动向时，自然就会提出这一类的问题。因为很难想象还有别的可能性：在投入了大量令人钦佩且代价不菲的努力之后，现在，这个文化宝藏被封存起来了，也许还要封存很长一段时间。不管怎样，目前来说它沉入了死寂之中，而且就我们所知的情况，也许在我们的有生之年它会就此沉寂。

或许，中华人民共和国国内可能参与开展胡锦涛主席提出的“保护与研究计划”的第二步工作的学术机构尚未采取任何行动，或者至少尚未开始讨论应该采取何种行动？如果事实并非如此，或者这并非是大家所意愿的，那么我们能够就应该怎么做提出什么样的建议呢？

根据第一阶段工作的官方报告，工作组整理了“西藏自治区内的约1000函，近60000叶梵文写本”。因为很少有一函中只有一个文本的情况，这批文献中大致应该有3500到4000个文本。

就我所知，这些文本中包括各类佛教和非佛教文献。为了有效地开展研究工作，学者在整理这些文本时应该区分轻重缓急。

1. 首先应该整理那些迄今为止只有藏、汉译本存世的文本以及从未被翻译因而完全不为所知的文本。
2. 其次是那些以前根据尼泊尔和印度所发现的梵文写本编辑的文本。在以往的几个个案中，我们很快发现那些新写本不仅年代更为古老而且还保留了很多更好的读法，它们还可以帮助我们寻回文献中佚失的部分

和已知写本中损毁的部分。这意味着我们需要利用这些新材料来修订甚至重新编辑许多我们日常使用及工作参考的佛教和非佛教的经典文献。当然这里还有其他的相关工作。

总体而言，把编辑这些写本的任务分配给学者是一件简单的事情。不过这个分配工作要以取得最佳结果为目的。

目前，中华人民共和国国内和其他各地的学术水准并不十分令人欣慰，而我们所面临的整理这个保存在西藏自治区的宝藏的工作绝非易事，因为它需要许多专业知识。就中华人民共和国国内以及全世界而言，有经验的学者和愿意或能够在本职工作之外参与必要的培训的学者是很少的。主要是鉴于这些有待整理和编辑的文本的数量、复杂性和难度，我认为这项工作应该在全世界范围内来分配而不是仅仅限于中国学者。

我在2009年的文章中就设立一个由中华人民共和国国内的学术机构和中华人民共和国国内和国外的资深学者所组成的委员会来对该项工作进行管理和监督提出了若干建议。这个委员会的设立似乎遇到了阻力，现实情况是，虽然自然科学领域内通常没有这样的困难，然而在人文学科领域内，中华人民共和国国内的相关学术机构似乎还没有建立起就某个计划开展合作的习惯。因此我认为，也许这个大计划能够把中华人民共和国国内所有政府的、行政的、和学术的力量整合起来组成一个行政人员和学者的联合体，一个权威的“智库”。这个“智库”的使命是要解开当前的死结并找到最终迈出第二步的途径，这第二步即是胡锦涛主席提出的综合计划中的“研究”任务，包括监督委员会的设立。

我了解中国社会某些方面对于国际人士加入委员会存有犹疑，因为在殖民地时期中国的文化遗产曾经遭到不公正的对待，曾经受到掠夺。但现在我们处于完全不同的时代，这是一个不同种族之间广泛开展合作的时代。我们完全可以说，合作似乎已成为人类延续的唯一途径。

佛教在其发源地没有存续下来，然而它却向外传播并成为世界性的宗教之一。藏族人民继承了经过充分发展的佛教。他们将它译成藏文，并将它的原始形态完整地保存了下来。作为这份遗产的物质载体，那些抄录在贝叶、纸张和桦树皮上的写本属于西藏自治区和中华人民共和国其他的地区。然而这份遗产的内容是世界文化遗产的一部分。因此全世界有权查阅和了解这个宝藏，也有义务资助对它的研究和出版。

今天，中华人民共和国在世界政治和经济生活中占有极其重要的地位。它应该与世界上的其他国家一样，有权利同时也有义务支持和促进与这批文献相关的研究计划，它们是人类历史上最后的文学、宗教和

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哲学宝藏之一，然而这个宝藏尚未得到应有的关注。我坚信，推动胡锦涛主席提出的“保护和研究”计划中的第二步工作将向全世界表明：中国切实认识到并充分尊重这份藏族人民保留下来的文化遗产的价值。