

The *Lotus Sutra* in Tibetan Buddhist History and Culture, Part 2

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This paper concludes the study of the *Lotus Sutra* in Tibetan Buddhist History and Culture that was initially published in Volume 32 of the *Bulletin*. The *Lotus Sutra*, an important Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture, influenced many East Asian Buddhist traditions such as the Tiantai School in China and Korea, its Japanese Tendai derivative, and Nichiren based traditions in Japan. A recent paper argued that the *Lotus Sutra* had a significant place in the history of Indian Buddhism (Apple 2016). This essay examines the place of the *Lotus Sutra* in Tibetan Buddhist history and culture. Part 1 outlined the initial Tibetan translations of the *Lotus Sutra* in the late eighth century and highlights Tibetan Buddhist understandings of the *Lotus Sutra* in the early history of Buddhism in Tibetan culture. Part 2 examines the Tibetan understanding of the *Lotus Sutra* among scholarly commentators from the twelfth century up to the present day. The paper also discusses the differences between East Asian and Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and practices related to the *Lotus Sutra*.

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The *Lotus Sutra* during the early *Later Diffusion* Period (10th-12th centuries)

The Imperial age in Tibet, with governmental financial support for Buddhist monastic institutions and state sanctioned translations, what Tibetan scholars refer to as the “early diffusion” (*snga dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet, came to an end in the mid-9th century with the assassination of the Tibetan King Lang Darma (ca. 842/846 CE). Stoddard (2004:54) has referred to the time period from the mid-9th century until the reestablishment of the Buddhist Saṃgha in Central Tibet in 978 CE as the “splintering of Tibet.” Without Imperial support of Buddhist monasteries, temples and colleges were closed, books were hidden or lost, and Buddhist masters passed away or were exiled (Stoddard 2004:55). Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the domestic practice of Buddhism continued on in local areas. Among tenth century manuscripts from Dunhuang, the Avalokiteśvara chapter of the Lotus Sutra circulated as an independent text in both concertina (P.781, ITJ191) and booklet form (ITJ351 + PT572). The Dunhuang manuscripts of this chapter appear to be extracted from the translation of Surendrabodhi and sNa nam Ye shes sde listed in the early imperial catalogs. These texts were part of a broader range of manuscripts related to Avalokiteśvara at Dunhuang, which as Van Schaik (2006) suggests, indicate a popular level presence of devotion and practice to this Buddhist deity, as well as to the *Lotus Sutra*, in the pre-eleventh century era of Tibetan Buddhist culture.

In general terms, the arrival of the Indian Buddhist master Atiśa Dīpaṃkarasījñāna in Western Tibet in 1042 CE marks the revival of imperial support for monastic institutional forms of Buddhism in Tibet and the

beginning of what Tibetan historians call the Later Diffusion (*bstan pa phyir dar*) of Buddhism. A significant characteristic of the Later Diffusion was the gathering of Indian Buddhist texts and teachings, the oral and textual transmission of these texts and teachings to Tibet, and their subsequent translation into Tibetan. This phase of expansive translation of Buddhist texts, rather than on Mahāyāna sūtras, focused particularly on scholastic commentaries on Prajñāpāramitā, Madhyamaka, and Pramāṇa, along with the massive literature related to Tantric consecration and ritual praxis that flourished under the South Asian Pāla dynasty (750-1150 CE).

Atiśa taught a systemized mixture of Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine combined with Vajrayāna ritual and yogic practice that exemplified for Tibetans the lifestyle of being a celibate scholar-monk and tantric yogin. His *Bodhipathapradīpa*, “Lamp for the Path to Awakening,” composed in Tibet at the request of his disciples, became famous for illustrating this model of practice and scholarship. Atiśa’s successors came to be known as Bka’-gdams-pa, “adherents of the [Buddha’s] word,” which was the first Tibetan Buddhist school to arise during this period. Atiśa does not cite the *Lotus Sutra* as a proof text in the majority of his works including his *Bodhipathapradīpa* (Sherburne 2000) and *Ratnakaraṇḍodghaṭamadhyamakopadeśa* (Apple 2010). Atiśa does cite the *Lotus Sutra* in the 18th chapter of his *Mahāsūtrasamuccaya* (18.7; Mochizuki 2004:184-186) that outlines the types of activities a monk should refrain from. He cites the first eighteen verses of the *Lotus Sutra*’s Chapter 13 on conduct for a bodhisattva monk.¹ As recorded in his Tibetan biography, while travelling across Tibet Tibetan scholars asked Atiśa about the date of the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* and he replied with a well-known calculation of 2137 BCE². Atiśa also mentioned in his reply regarding the Buddha’s life that, after thirty-nine years of teaching the dharma for śrāvakas, the Buddha taught the Mahāyāna Dharma of the *Lotus Sutra* [lit. White Lotus] and so forth for

1 KN, 278.8-281.7; Tib. P. Chu 120a5-121a1; Khangkar 2009:280-281; Śikṣāsamuccaya 47.13-49.4; cf. Mochizuki 2002: 28-29.

2 On Atiśa’s calculation of the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* see Ruegg 1992, Part 2, 265-266 and Sørensen: 1994, 56, n. 79.

the next thirty years.³ This anecdote demonstrates the high regard that Atiṣa placed on the role of the *Lotus Sutra* in the teachings during the life of the Buddha. According to Tibetan accounts, Atiṣa reportedly retrieved *circa* 1050 a treasure text known as the *Pillar Testament* (*Bka' chems ka khol ma*) that supposedly dates back to the time of early Tibetan kings in narrating how Buddhist texts came to Tibet (Kuijp 2013:125). Most likely an indigenous Tibetan work from the eleventh century, this text contains a list of twenty-one texts affiliated with the worship of Avalokiteśvara.⁴ The tenth stage bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *spyān ras gzigs dbang phyug*) has great importance in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetan people believe that they have a unique relationship with the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, who is believed to manifest as the Dalai Lama and who serves the needs and spiritual aspirations of the Tibetan people. The sixteenth text listed in the *Pillar Testament* is the *Lotus Sutra*. This evidence demonstrates the importance of the *Lotus Sutra* as part of the worship and veneration of Avalokiteśvara at least from the eleventh century onward in Tibetan Buddhist culture.

The *Lotus Sutra* in Tibetan Buddhist Scholasticism (12th century onward)

From the Later Diffusion onward, Tibetan scholars did not often compose commentaries on individual Mahāyāna sūtras. Outside of the brief commentaries on the *Heart Sutra*, extended commentaries on individual Mahāyāna sūtras are few and far between. For example, in the one hundred

3 *Jo bo rin po che rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags bzhugs so*, 2014. Pp. 65-205 in *Jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, p. 159: *de nas lo sum cu'i bar du padma dkar po la sogs pa theg pa chen po'i chos* [159.20] *bshad* / ; “Then, for thirty years he taught the Mahāyāna Dharma of the *Lotus Sutra* [lit. White Lotus] and so forth.”

4 The twenty-one texts are listed from the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (2006:99.14-20): *gtso bor thugs rje chen po'i mdo rgyud nyi shu rtsa gcig bsgyur te bka' chems kyi lo rgyus chen mo las* / (1) *za ma tog bkod pa* / (2) *phyag stong spyān stong gi gzungs* / (3) *padma snying po'i mdo* / (4) *zhal bcu gcig pa'i mdo* / (5) *bcu gcig zhal gyi gzungs* / (6) *don yod zhags pa* / (7) *don zhags phyi ma* / (8) *padma mchog* / (9) *dbang bsgyur 'khor lo* / (10) *cho ga sngags kyi rgyud* / (11) *yid bzhin nor bu'i gzungs* / (12) *snying rje chen po mi gshol pa* / (13) *'od zer rnam bkod* / (14) *padma cod pan gyi rgyud* / (15) *ye ge drug pa'i mdo* / (16) *dam chos pad dkar* / (17) *punḍa ri ka'i mdo* / (18) *chu klung sna tshogs pa'i mdo* / (19) *snang pa rol ba'i mdo* / (20) *mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad* / (21) *mtshan rab yongs su bstan pa'i mdo ste/ nyer gcig pa yin la 'di las don 'di ltar bshad pa'ang bka' chems lo rgyus na yod do* /.

and twenty volumes of the recently recovered *Collected Works of the Kadampas* (*bka' gdams pa gsung 'bum*) comprised of works of Atiśa's early followers from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, only one work is a commentary on a Mahāyāna sūtra, that being an anonymous commentary on a chapter from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.⁵ Far more pervasive in Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism are commentaries on the Indian Buddhist technical digests such as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, or *Madhyamakāvatāra* as well as commentaries on Indian Buddhist Tantras. I am not aware of any extended individual commentary on the *Lotus Sutra* composed by a Tibetan author. Rather, Tibetan Buddhist scholars often cited the *Lotus Sutra* as a proof text in their own commentarial works to authenticate points of exegesis.⁶

For example, Gro lung pa Blo gros 'byung gnas (fl. second half of the eleventh century to the early twelfth century, Jackson 1996:230) was a famous Kadampa master who was praised as “the matchless one whose eyes have viewed all the Buddha's scriptures.”⁷ He wrote one of the earliest and most influential “stages of the doctrine” (*bstan rim*) texts entitled *Exposition of the Stages of the Path for Entering the Jewel of the Sugata's Doctrine* (*bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa rin po che la 'jug pa'i lam gyi rim pa rnam par bshad pa*), known under its abbreviated title as the “Great Stages of the Doctrine” (*bstan rim chen mo*). As Jackson (1996) notes, its ten chapters outline the Buddhist path in terms of length and scope “on a scale probably never before attempted by the Tibetans.” This monumental text serves as an encyclopedic source for understanding early doctrinal and scholastic developments during the early decades of the later dissemination (*phyi dar*) phase of Tibetan Buddhist history.

In this work, Gro lung pa cites the *Lotus Sutra* twice (2009:100.16;125.21). The first citation (2009:100.16) occurs in the chapter

5 The *'Phags pa lang dkar bshegs pa'i mdo las sangs rgyas thams cad kyi gsung gi snying po zhes bya ba'i le'u rgya chen 'grel pa'i rab tu byed pa*, *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, Volume 109, pp. 5-560.

6 This is not to state that Tibetan scholars/teachers/meditators did not study, recite, or transmit individual Mahāyāna sūtras. One may view any “list of teachings received” (*gsan yig/ thob yig*) to see the vast amount of education on Buddhist scriptures received by Tibetan scholars. Rather, I am claiming here that Tibetan scholars did not often compose extensive commentaries on individual Mahāyāna sūtras.

7 Gro lung pa blo gros 'byung gnas (2009:i, preface): *gsung rab kun ka lta ba'i mig / zla bral blo gros 'byung gnas dpal //*.

on how to rely on the spiritual teacher (*dge ba'i bshes bnyen bsten pa'i tshul bshad pa /*), where he makes a paraphrased citation of verses from chapter 13 (verses 24-35) on the proper conduct of a teacher. These verses are also cited by Śāntideva and Atiśa.⁸ Gro lung pa's second citation occurs in the chapter on contemplating the difficulty of attaining a life endowed with freedom and favorable conditions (*dal 'byor rnyed dka' ba bsam pa /*) in his discussion on the rarity of the occurrence of a buddha (*sangs rgyas 'byung ba dang dkon pa*) (2009:125.21). He cites from a parable in Chapter 25 (Chapter 27 of Kumārajīva's version) of the *Lotus Sutra* on the difficulty of encountering a buddha as his proof text.⁹

Another example of a well-known Tibetan stages of the doctrine text was Gam-po-pa Sod nams Rin chen's (*sgam po pa sod nams rin chen*, 1079-1153) *Ornament of Precious Liberation* (*dam chos yid bzhin gyi nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*). In the first chapter on buddha-nature, Gam-po-pa mentions the story of the leader, merchants, and the phantom city from chapter seven of the *Lotus sūtra* in explaining that all *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* will eventually become buddhas (2015:126-127). In the twelfth chapter on the Perfection of Generosity, Gam-po-pa cites the *Lotus sūtra* in his discussion of how one should be in a clean and pleasant place when teaching the Dharma. His citation is drawn from *Lotus Sutra* chapter 19 on the Dharma-preacher (2015:160). In the seventeenth chapter on the Perfection of Wisdom, Gam-po-pa cites the *Lotus Sutra* among several sutras in his discussion of *nirvāṇa*. Specifically, he cites the *Lotus Sutra*'s fifth chapter where the Buddha states to Kāśyapa: "Kāśyapa! To comprehend the utter equality of all phenomena, this is *nirvāṇa*" (2015:325).

Tsong-kha-pa blo-gsang grags-pa (1357-1419 CE), one of the most profoundly influential and innovative thinkers in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, references the *Lotus Sutra* several times throughout his works. In his *Clear Elucidation of the Thought: A Thorough Exposition of "Entering the Middle Way"* (*dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, 2009:8.1ff), he cites the *Lotus Sutra* but mainly follows Candrakīrti in his exegesis of such citations (see

8 See Silk (2001:99-101) on these verses as cited by Śāntideva and the Tibetan and Chinese *Lotus Sutra* correlations.

9 Cited from the "The Previous Life of King Wonderfully Adorned" (*śubhavyūharājapūrvayo gaparivarta*) chapter discussion of the difficulty of encountering a buddha (D171b; Kangar 2009: 463).

Apple 2016a on Candrakīrti and the *Lotus Sutra*). In his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (*byang chub lam rim che ba*), completed in 1402 and praised as “one of the most renowned works of Buddhist thought and practice to have been composed in Tibet” (Ruegg 2000, p. 17), Tsong-kha-pa mentions the *Lotus Sutra* three times. The primary discussion mentioning the *Lotus Sutra* occurs within a section on four qualities of greatness of the *Great Treatise*’s teaching. These qualities include (1) knowing that all of the [Buddha’s] teachings are free of contradiction, (2) understanding that all scriptures are instruction for practice, (3) easily finding the intent of the Buddha’s teachings, and (4) automatically refraining from great wrongdoing (2000:46). In elaborating on “The greatness of enabling one to refrain automatically from great wrongdoing” (*nyes spyod chen po rang ’gags su ’gro ba*, 1985:19.12), Tsong kha pa mentions that the *Lotus Sutra* explains that all of the Buddha’s words directly or indirectly teach methods for becoming a buddha (2000:53, 54). This discussion is based on verses in chapter 2 of the Tibetan version of the *Lotus Sutra*. In Tsong-kha-pa’s discussion we see his selective citation of the *Lotus Sutra* to argue for his inclusive understanding of the Buddha’s teachings.

Tibetan scholars relied upon the *Lotus Sutra* for commentarial exegesis in other genres besides the “stages of the doctrine/path” (*bstan/lam rim*). Butön Rinchen Drup (bu ston rin chen grub, 1290—1364 CE) in his *A Treasury of Precious Scripture*, also known as *Butön’s History of Buddhism*, cites the *Lotus Sutra* four times (2013, pp.30, 71-72, 133, 181). The first citation relates to Butön’s elucidation of the twelve types of Buddhist scriptures, where he mentions the *Lotus Sutra* as an example of Buddhist scripture that declares predictions (*lung du bstan pa’i sde*) of his disciples (*śrāvaka*) passing and future rebirths.¹⁰ The second citation of the *Lotus Sutra* occurs in Butön’s discussion of the method of teaching the Dharma where he outlines the procedures for teaching. He quotes the *Lotus Sutra* (2013:71-72; Tib. 1988:41.17-42.11) as scriptural testimony for the manner in which a teacher of Dharma should prepare for giving teachings, including how to dress, the type of throne to sit upon, and the proper attitude to cultivate in giving such teachings. Another citation occurs in a section of the text where

10 *Bu ston chos ’byung* (1988:17.17-18): *lung du bstan pa’i sde ni / nyan thos ’das te shi ba’i dus byas pa dang ’byung ba lung ston pa dam pa’i chos pad ma dkar po lta bu’am...*

Butön outlines the twelve deeds of a Buddha and considers the question of whether these deeds are carried out by buddhas or bodhisattvas. He cites the *Lotus Sutra*, along with the *Pitāputrasamāgamasūtra* (1988:80-81), as scriptural proof that the Buddha attained awakening aeons ago before his life as Śākyamuni indicating that buddhas carry out these deeds as a form of skillful means. However, Butön follows these citations with further scriptural citations from texts like the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* to show that these deeds were carried out by the buddha's emanation body (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*), a concept not found in the *Lotus Sutra* itself and articulated from the fourth century in Vasubandhu's *Commentary on the Lotus Sutra* (Tamura 2014:85). Butön's final citation of the *Lotus Sutra* in his history occurs in his discussion of *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa'i don*) (2013:180-182;1988:114.10-115.15) where he describes the parable of the doctor feigning his death to persuade his sons to take medicine from chapter fifteen of the *Lotus Sutra*. Butön describes this parable to illustrate that although a buddha's emanation body may pass into *nirvāṇa* its ongoing continuity does not cease, just as the son's father, the doctor, did not actually pass away.

A rare example of an individual Tibetan work focused on the *Lotus Sutra* is a short text (around fifteen pages) by the Sa-skya scholar Lama 'Phags-pa Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (1235-80) entitled *A Refutation of the Misunderstanding of the Statements of the Lotus Sutra*.¹¹ 'Phags-pa Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan was a National Preceptor (guoshi, 國師) of the court of Qubilai Qaghan (Shizu Emperor, r. 1260-1294) from 1264 to 1270, and later, from 1270 to his passing, the Qaghan's Imperial Preceptor (*dishi*, 帝師) (Kuijip 2004:3). Lama 'Phags-pa composed this work at the request of his student Dashman (Mon. Dashman) at Chu-mig Dpal-gyi sde-chen monastery on March 18, 1277 (Kuijip 2004:56, note 164). In this work, Lama 'Phags pa refutes the views of an unspecified "large number of Chinese monks" (*rgya'i dge sbyong shin tu mang po*) who interpret the *Lotus Sutra*'s chapter eleven (Kumārajīva, Chapter 12) episode on the Dragon King's daughter as teaching instantaneous attainment of Buddhahood (*cig car du 'tshang rgya ba*). Lama 'Phags pa first closely cites chapter eleven of the *Lotus Sutra*, then refutes the wrong interpretations he perceives by citing several Buddhist scriptures, primarily the

11 *Dam chos pad dkar gyi tshig don la gzhan gyi log par rtoq pa dgag pa*, SSBB Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum comp. Bsod nams rgya mtsho, vol 7 (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1968), no. 233, 215/2-9/111. For a study and translation of this text see Shotaro Iida (1991:65-83).

Daśabhūmikasūtra, to prove that the Dragon King's daughter was a tenth stage bodhisattva who achieved her status due to progressing through stages and levels, and then changed her female body to that of a man to attain buddhahood, as buddhahood, for him, is unattainable in the body of a woman. Lama 'Phags pa concludes by stating that the *Lotus Sutra* teaches that all things have the single flavor of emptiness (*chos thams stong pa nyid du ro gcig pa*), that all vehicles are ultimately one vehicle (*theg pa thams cad theg pa gcig tu grub pa*), and that the essence of its teaching is known by all buddhas of the past, present, and future. For Lama 'Phags pa, then, the *Lotus Sutra* is of definitive meaning (*nges don*), although the interpretation of the scripture as advocating sudden awakening is incorrect. As Iida (1991:80-82) remarks, the Chinese monks whom Lama 'Phags pa alludes to are not known, although their viewpoint resembles that of the Tiantai tradition. In spite of Lama 'Phags pa's refutation, as Kuijp (2004) notes, he was supportive of Chinese forms of Buddhism. Lama 'Phags pa's advocacy for gradual awakening goes back to the Tibetan tradition's understanding of the Bsam-yas debate which refuted the sudden awakening position of *Heshang* Moheyen (see Part 1). Moreover, Lama 'Phags pa's argument in this short work closely resembles the standpoint found in Kuiji's *Lotus Sutra* commentary mentioned above (cf. Iida 1991:81) that espouses the gradualist position.

A final example of Tibetan scholarship on the *Lotus Sutra* is that of the fifteenth century scholar Pad-dkar bzang-po of Tsetang Monastery. Pad-dkar bzang-po wrote a general survey of the sūtra section of a Kanjur which was completed after many years on February 9, 1445 (Kuijp 2009:9). In this work, Pad-dkar bzang-po provides an analytical survey of the contents of every sūtra and its doctrinal contents. In his survey he quite often summarizes the content of an individual sūtra, identifies its philosophical position (*grub mtha'*), and then "replies to controversies" (*rgal lan*) that are associated with a sūtra. Pad-dkar bzang-po (2006:167-169) begins his discussion of the *Lotus Sutra* by describing it as a great vehicle sutra (*theg pa chen po'i mdo*) given last among the three turnings of the Buddha's teachings. He describes the greatness of the place of its teachings (*gsung pa'i gnas phun sum tshogs pa*) at Vulture's Peak, the excellence of the audience (*'khor phun sum tshogs pa*) including monks and nuns, bodhisattvas, gods and humans, and the excellence of the *Lotus Sutra's* teaching, including the profundity that enable beings to attain unsurpassable complete full awakening of buddhahood through hearing

just four lines of this profound sutra. Pad-dkar bzang-po then outlines the contents of the *Lotus Sutra*'s twenty-seven chapters and indicates that the doctrine (*grub mtha'*) that this sūtra teaches is Yogācāra-Madhyamaka (*rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma*) (2006:168.16-17). As suggested in Part 1, this may relate to Kamalaśīla's advocacy of this sūtra. Pad-dkar bzang-po emphasizes that the *Lotus Sutra* teaches the one ultimate vehicle (*theg pa ni mthar thug gcig go*) and that the order of its presentation is in relation to the capacities of those to be trained. In the reply to the controversies section (2006:168.19-169.9), Pad-dkar bzang-po responds to the question of whether the *Lotus Sutra* is of interpretable or definitive purport in relation to how śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats can be predicted to attain buddhahood when the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* teaches that śrāvakas are not be able to attain buddhahood and teaches three separate vehicles as definitive. Pad-dkar bzang-po answers that three separate vehicles are not definite and then explains how śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats are able to attain buddhahood despite attaining peace with regard to conditioned existence.¹² He concludes his overview of the *Lotus Sutra* with a prayer wishing that the merit of his explanations lead those who practice the single vehicle to quickly attain full buddhahood.

As we have seen in this brief survey of traditional commentarial scholarship, Tibetan authors cited the *Lotus Sutra* for a variety of exegetical purposes in their scholastic works. It is not clear if these authors memorized and recited the *Lotus Sutra* as an independent text, or knew key sections of the *Lotus Sutra* based on scholastic lineages of exegesis. Either way, the *Lotus Sutra* was perceived as a key teaching within the corpus of Mahāyāna sūtras by Tibetan scholars and cited in numerous Tibetan commentaries beyond the brief range of sources presented here.

The Tibetan *Lotus Sutra* rarely circulated as an independent text in traditional Tibet, although it was possible to receive an individual manuscript of the scripture. The Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi (河口慧海, 1866–1945), the first recorded Japanese citizen to visit Tibet (two times, 1900–1902, 1913–1915) received by donation a beautiful individual Tibetan manuscript copy of the *Lotus Sutra*. This unique manuscript was crafted at Tashilunpo

12 Pad-dkar bzang-po's reply is based on a passage in Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, for which see Apple 2008:83.

Monastery (*bkra shis lhun po*) in Shigatse and brought back to Japan where it is currently kept in the Toyo Bunko (Shoji 2011). Along these lines, Khang-dkar tshul-khrims skal-bzang compiled and edited a Tibetan edition of the *Lotus Sutra* that was printed in Japan (2009). Both the gift Kawaguchi received and Khang-dkar's attention to independently printed Tibetan versions of the *Lotus Sutra*, separate from a Tibetan Kanjur, more than likely represents Japanese Buddhist cultural interests rather than Tibetan ones.

This is because in traditional Tibetan Buddhist ritual life at the village level of common lay people, the *Lotus Sutra* would be venerated, but as part of a larger ritual worship together with all the one hundred or so volumes that comprise a Tibetan Kanjur (Childs 2005). The *Lotus Sutra* in present day Kanjurs is part of a single volume within the larger set among other sūtras (e.g., *mdo sde* Ma among Them spang ma prints). In Tibetan Buddhist culture, a Kanjur is considered the embodied speech of the Buddha in textual form and represents his powerful and transformative teachings. A Kanjur is usually kept within a local temple or monastery in specially constructed recesses where each volume is individually wrapped in cloth and stored. Within Tibetan Buddhist culture, the physical presence of a Kanjur collection conveys sanctity when seen, touched, or heard as it is recited, regardless of whether mental comprehension takes place or not. In this regard, Tibetan monasteries or villages often ritually recite the complete Kanjur on an annual basis during a festival known as the Kanjur Kora.¹³ After volumes of the Kanjur are ritually removed from a Kanjur temple (*lha khang*), individual volumes of the Kanjur are distributed to low level lay practitioners who recite a complete volume at their own pace. This recitation may take up to nine days (Childs 2005:44). During the festival, the volumes of a Kanjur may also be ritually carried around a village and its surrounding agricultural fields to ensure abundant crops and protect against economic disaster. In this way, although the *Lotus Sutra* is not venerated as an individual scripture among the laity, it is revered as part of the Kanjur in Tibetan Buddhist lay practice.

Conclusion

The *Lotus Sutra* does have a place in the history and culture of Tibetan Buddhism. Officially translated during the Imperial Era, the *Lotus Sutra* has

13 *bka' gyur skor ba*, "circumambulation of the Kanjur"; Childs 2005:44.

been copied and honored as part of the Kanjur, the collected teachings of the Buddha translated into Tibetan. The *Lotus Sutra* was utilized by traditional Tibetan Buddhist scholars over the centuries for exegetical points to authenticate their commentarial viewpoints. Although not worshipped as an individual scripture, it was, and still is, recited as part of the Kanjur among the laity. The *Lotus Sutra* also is still actively taught by Tibetan monastic teachers. According to a recent website announcement (<http://kyabgon2016.drikung.ru/en.html>), Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang, the current throne holder of the Drikung Kagyu Lineage (*'bri kung bka' brgyud*), visited Russia and Buryatia in late August and early September 2016. As part of his teaching tour, he conducted special bodhisattva vow rituals, gave an empowerment of the Buddha of Infinite Life, gave blessings of longevity deities including White Tārā, and toward the end of his teaching tour, bestowed *Lotus Sutra* teachings. The announcement mentioned that the *Lotus Sutra* is an essential teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism, that the *Lotus Sutra* proclaims that each being will become a buddha, and that buddha's life is eternal. In this way, although the *Lotus Sutra* does not have near the attention and devotion that the scripture receives in East Asian forms of Buddhism, the *Lotus Sutra* does have a place in Tibetan Buddhist history and culture that is more than commonly acknowledged.

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