On a Birch-bark Sanskrit Manuscript Preserved in the Tibet Museum

Kazuhiro KAWASAKI

I. Introduction The Tibet Museum adjoins the Norbulingka, known as the Dalai Lama’s Summer Palace in Lhasa. It was established in October 1999, as the first comprehensive museum, in the Tibet Autonomous Region and is endowed with modern facilities. It preserves and exhibits a precious cultural property of about 1000 items, from prehistoric to modern age, collected from various parts of Tibet. The Sanskrit manuscript on birch-bark reported in this paper is displayed in the art and civilization department of the Museum, as “Sutra written on birch-bark”.

Although some photographs of this birch-bark manuscript had been shown in some books published in China¹, its contents were still unknown. However, when I visited the Tibet Museum in 2002, I had an opportunity to analyze several unpublished photos. As a result, I discovered that the manuscript has an index which reveals the outline of its contents.

II. Structure and Date of Composition The manuscript is bound in Western style and covered with tanned leather. The sizes of the manuscript are 15.6cm long and 15.3cm wide. Birch-bark, the material out of which the manuscript is made, was called bhoja-patra or bhurja-patra in India. It was used as a writing support for a long time, together with palm-leaf, before the introduction of paper. The style of handwriting is the so-called Śāradā script and page numbers are found in the lower left of each double page.

As regards the age of the manuscript, at the end of the text Sāmadyottararagāthā-vyākaraṇa, contained in the manuscript, there is the following colophon:

οṁ saṃvatsare ekonatriṃṣat □7 kāṛṭṭikabahula-caṭuḥyaṃ □kaśmirāmaṇḍale śrimad anantadevarājye // // namo ratnatrayāya //

Accordingly, the manuscript was copied during the reign of King Anantadeva in Kashmir. In the ṇāratarāṅgini, which gives an account of the imperial line and the
history of Kashmir, King Ananta's reign is dated 1028-1063 A.D. If the King Anantadeva mentioned in the colophon and the King Ananta mentioned in the Jāra-tarāṅgini are regarded as the same person, the manuscript must have been copied in the 11th century.

### III. The Contents of the Index

A Roman alphabet transliteration is shown below. The index is written on a sheet stuck on the reverse-side of the front-cover. It was probably added when the manuscript was bound and its style of writing is about the same as the one used in the main text.

```plaintext
```

This index shows that it is a collection of 27 items concerning esoteric manuals of rituals, as well as commentaries. Especially worth of note is that it contains many texts of the Jñānapāda school, which is considered one of the two major schools (the other is the Ārya) for the interpretation of the Guhyasamājata-tantra. In item Nos. 3, 12, 18, of the index the name Jñānapāda appears explicitly. No. 12 can be identified as a commentary to the Samantabhādrasādhana (Toh. No. 1855), known as Jñānapāda’s own work. Moreover Padmavajra, the author of item No.18 is considered one of the “four major disciples of Jñānapāda, who were enlightenment during their lifetime”. He is also famous as the author of the Jñānasiddhi.

Next, I will examine these items which specify the correspondent author’s name. No.6 is identified as the Caturthasadbhāvopadeśa (Toh. No. 2475) and deals with the fourth initiation (abhiseka). Its author, Ratnavajra, was one of the “six sages of the Vikramasila monastery” and followed the Jñānapāda school. The im-
On a Birch-bark Sanskrit Manuscript Preserved in the Tibet Museum (K. KAWASAKI)

Immediately preceding No. 5 is possibly the *Aksobhyavajrasadhana* (Toh. No. 1884), written by the same author. No. 25 can be considered a commentary, to a text by Bhadrapāda about “Śrisamājatantra” (i.e. the *Guhyasamāja-tantra*), written by Ratnākaraśānti. Bhadrapāda is considered another name for Dipamkarabhadra, one of Jñānapāda’s direct disciples. Ratnākaraśānti is known as a great scholar who, as one of the “six sages of the Vikramasila”, lived in the East gate of this monastery. Dipamkarabhadra wrote the *Guhyasamājamanḍalavidhi* (Toh. No. 1865) 4), while Ratnākaraśānti wrote a commentary to it, the *Guhyasamājamanḍalavidhi-ṭīkā* (Toh. No. 1871). No. 25 corresponds, most probably, to this commentary.

Now, I will point out those items which can be identified as text contained in the *Tibetan Tripitaka*. No.10 is the *Ātmasadhanavatara* (Toh. No. 1860), written by Jñānapāda. Although it is possible to think that No.11 is the *Kusumāñjali* (Toh. No. 1851), a voluminous commentary to the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* written by Ratnākaraśānti, the amount of the text renders this identification problematic.

**IV. Conclusion**  As a result of the investigation reported above, it can be established that the birch-bark Sanskrit manuscript preserved in the Tibet Museum is a collection of 27 Tantric Buddhist texts which bear a close connection to the Jñānapāda school. In many cases, the original Sanskrit version of the text of Jñānapāda school is missing. Therefore this birch-bark manuscript is very precious for the further research into this school. However, at present, scholars are not allowed to peruse it. Hopefully, in the near future, the whole manuscript will be made accessible to researchers.

---


(Key Words)  Birch-bark manuscript, Tibet Museum, Jñānapāda school

(Assistant, Koyasan University)