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A Brief History of Japanese Studies in Tibetan Buddhism**

In this essay I would like to present a brief history of Tibetan studies in Japan. I shall introduce the beginning and the development of Japanese research on Tibetan Buddhism. Recently, Sadakane Ayako published a bibliography of Tibetan studies. This bibliography includes not only articles and books in Japanese language but also those in Chinese. It is a very convenient bibliography for researchers of Tibetan subjects. Among those articles and books she collected, the earliest publication is a book titled *Rama-kyō enkaku* ラマ教沿革 (A History of Lamaism) by a Japanese scholar which was published in 1877 (Meiji 10). Hence, it has been already over a century since Tibetan studies have started in Japan.

For convenience's sake, I will divide the succession of Japanese researchers into three generations. The first generation belongs to the period from the end of the Meiji period to the end of the Taishō period, namely from around 1900 to 1930. The second generation belongs to the period from the end of the Taishō period to the middle of the Shōwa period, that is from around 1930 to 1960. The third generation covers the time since the 1960s. Of course, such classification cannot be taken too strictly since some of the researchers were working in times covering two generations. Also, some scholars whose main research took place in the period of the second generation are still living and some of them are quite active.

Representative scholars of the first generation were Kawaguchi Ekai, Teramoto Enga, Aoki Bunkyō and Tada Tōkan. They played the initial and crucial role in developing Japanese Tibetan studies, and their research is of significance even today. They were scholars who actually visited Tibet, absorbed the knowledge there, made Tibetan Buddhism accessible to Japanese Buddhist circles and significantly stimulated Japanese academic interest in Tibet.

Kawaguchi Ekai arrived in India August 1897. After having studied the Tibetan language in Darjeeling, he traveled through Nepal to Tibet. He returned to Japan in May 1903. His well-known book *Three Years in Tibet* published in English describes his journey. After his first trip to Tibet Kawaguchi undertook a second one from September 1904 to September 1915. He brought back with him Buddha

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images, the Tibetan Buddhist canon and Sanskrit manuscripts. Based on Tibetan texts, he translated some Mahāyāna Buddhist texts into Japanese, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, the *Śrīmāladevī-sūtra*, the *Guhyasamāja-sūtra*, etc.

Then, in November 1898, Noumi Hiroshi and Teramoto Enga tried to enter Tibet from China, but at Li-than they were prevented from doing so. Unfortunately, Noumi died during this trip. After some time, Teramoto Enga attempted again to enter Tibet (1899), and this time he succeeded. He stayed in Lha-sa long enough to study Tibetan language as well as Tibetan Buddhism. After his return to Japan he published some Japanese translations of Tibetan Buddhist texts he had collected in Tibet, such as the *Gsum bcu ba (Trīṃśika-vijñapti-mātrāta-siddhi)*, the *History of Indian Buddhism* by Tāranātha, etc. And he also published Tibetan reading texts for students of Tibetology.

Next, Aoki Bunkyo and Tada Tokan traveled to Tibet in 1912. They undertook this trip on the orders of the famous chief abbot of Nishi Hongan-ji, Otani Kozui, who had organized the first Japanese expedition to Central Asia (1907) in order to collect ancient manuscripts and to investigate Buddhist ruins. Aoki Bunkyo returned to Japan from his trip to Tibet in 1916, and Tada Tokan came back in 1924.

These early scholars brought to Japan texts of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, non-canonical texts and Buddha images which, together with their own knowledge of the living tradition, made a tremendous impact on the subsequent development of Japanese Tibetology. In fact, each Tibetologist even today owes much to them. In this sense, we Japanese Tibetologists call them the pioneers of Japanese Tibetology.

When they traveled to Tibet, these early scholars also clearly stated the initial purpose of Japanese Tibetology. Kawaguchi Ekai, for example, wrote in his book *Saizō ryokō-ki* 西藏旅行記 (Travel record to Tibet): "I started reading the [Chinese] Buddhist canon with the idea in order to make Buddhist sutras easier to read and easier to understand for Japanese society." But he was wondering about the explicit meaning of Chinese Buddhist texts when being translated into Japanese. He continued to write:

There are many extant Chinese translations of certain texts, even though the Sanskrit original text is supposed to be only one. Translations of the same sentence vary depending on the translator; sometimes they are the same and sometimes they are different. I realized this.

Furthermore he stated:

The most remarkable thing is that you can find some translations which convey completely different meanings of the same text passage. Some portions are missing in one translation, whereas these parts are contained in other translations. Some translations present a sentence order different from other translations. However, I believe those holy translators cannot have been liars. So there must have been some reasons for these discrepancies which I have to research. Or there must have been different original texts. What is the truth? This I cannot judge. I thought the only way to solve these problems was to obtain the original texts.

Then Kawaguchi learned that the original Mahāyāna texts existed in Nepal and Tibet, and that the sutras translated into Tibetan represent a more exact and accurate meaning of the original texts. When he realized this, he expressed his thoughts as follows:

With respect to academics it is very interesting and valuable to study Buddhist texts by comparing the Tibetan texts with Chinese texts. Therefore it is necessary to go to Tibet and to study the Tibetan language.

As mentioned before, Kawaguchi's words clearly express the purpose of Japanese Tibetology at the time when it had started. Its aim is first to understand Mahāyāna Buddhism correctly, and second to understand the Mahāyāna sūtras through comparative studies not only within the Chinese context, but also with sources from other languages, including Tibetan. This purpose has been the fundamental trend of Japanese Tibetology for a long time. And it is still a main trend in a certain sense.

Besides the scholars who traveled to Tibet were also other well-known contemporary Tibetologists, such as Matsumoto Bunzaburō, Kusunoki Kido, Toganoo Mitsudō, and Katō Genchi. They were active during the period from the end of Meiji to the Taishō period and can be called the first generation of Japanese Tibetologists.

Next, the second generation consists of scholars who received Tibetan education from those of the first generation. Among them is Hatano Hakuyū who compiled a bibliography of the Tibetan Tripitaka preserved in Tōhoku University. Having grasped the Tibetan Tripitaka as a whole, he tried to understand the character of Tibetan Buddhism by analyzing the order as well as the translators of sūtras and śāstras compiled in the Tripitaka. This method was traditionally used in Japan when Japanese scholars tried to understand the development of Chinese Buddhism. Indeed, the last part of a translation of a certain text contains a lot of information about the translator, the period of the translation, the place of the translation, etc. Later in his studies Hatano focused on Tantric Buddhism.

Another scholar of the second generation is Susumu Yamaguchi, who was educated in France under Prof. Sylvain Lévi. He applied a unique comparative method to Buddhist studies in Japan for the first time. He studied not only the original Sanskrit texts, but at the same time compared them also with their Chinese and Tibetan translations as far as possible; he also tried to avoid misreading the texts. Furthermore, he made an index of terms in these three languages. As a result, Japanese studies of Buddhist terminology developed rapidly.

Among the scholars of the second generation are also Nagao Gadjin, Yoshimura Shūki and Satō Hisashi, but they are a bit younger than Hatano and Yamaguchi. However, the character of these three scholars is unique in that they actually visited Lama temples in Mongolia in order to study the Tibetan language. This was before the Second World War when Japanese were in a position to travel in this area.

During the period of the second generation, Japanese Tibetology expanded its field very quickly, as can be seen in the case of Hatano and Yamaguchi. Yamaguchi's method was inherited by Nagao, who in his studies compiled indexes

of the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālarikāra*, the *Madhyanta-vibhāga-bhāṣya*, etc. His contributions to Japanese Buddhist studies have been tremendous. Yoshimura Shūki composed a Tibetan-Japanese dictionary on the basis of the personal word-cards he had compiled when reading Buddhist texts. Since he was one of the assistants when Hatano was editing the bibliography of the Tibetan Tripitaka, Yoshimura felt the necessity of collecting word-cards which contained also the corresponding Sanskrit words as well as Chinese translations. In his translation of the *Rgyu-bzi* (a Tibetan medical text) he was assisted by his wife Masae, who was a medical doctor. His study of Dunhuang manuscripts preserved at Ryukoku University shows how much the second generation of Japanese Tibetologists expanded their field of research. The historical studies by Satō Hisashi still provide detailed knowledge for Tibetologists in Japan. As for the study of Tibetan Grammar, Inaba Shōju and Yazaki Shōken have to be named.

Among the third generation, scholars like Yamaguchi Zuihō, Ueyama Daishun, Mimaki Katsumi, Tachikawa Musashi, Nagano Yasuhiko, and so on, have to be counted. In fact, these days many Japanese scholars are involved in Tibetan studies. One main difference from the previous two generations is that scholars of the third generation invited Tibetan and Mongolian monks to Japan in order to study Tibetan, whereas the previous two generations had to visit Tibet and Mongolia by themselves. A few Japanese visited Tibet even during the Second World War, but they undertook the trips for certain political reasons. However, from a purely academic viewpoint, Tibetologists of the third generation can be characterized as those who have never been in Tibet to study Tibetan.

As a scholar belonging to the third generation who could not travel to Tibet, I was fortunate to receive the benefit of studying Tibetan directly from a Tibetan monk in Japan. Subsequently I would like to convey my personal study experience under my Tibetan teacher. It began in fall 1974 when I had just entered the graduate school of Ryukoku University. One day, a friend of mine came and said: "I heard that a Tibetan monk will come to Kyoto and teach Tibetan. Let's go and see what it's like." I was interested in a class taught by a real Tibetan. At that time only a few people in the Kansai area could pronounce Tibetan correctly. Usually students who studied Tibetan memorized Tibetan letters like Chinese kanji, which is supposed not to be so difficult for Japanese students. But in Tibetan courses at various places all sorts of funny sounds were heard. Since it is very difficult for Japanese to pronounce consonants without a vowel, they somehow pronounced the consonants with the sound of a vowel attached. For example, in the case of the expression *sems can thams cad*, which means "all sentient beings," they pronounced it like *semusu can thamusu cado*.

At this time, at the suggestion of some scholars in Kyoto, Rev. Tatebe Kimiaki, an abbot of a famous temple in Hamamatsu, invited two Tibetan monks from India, Ge she Tshul trim kal bzan and Ni chang Rin poche. Ge she Tshul trim khal bzan came to Kyoto, whereas Ni chang Rin poche went to Mt. Kōya and taught at Kōya-san University. Rev. Tatebe bought an apartment in Okazaki (Kyoto) where Ge she Tshul trim kal bzan moved in and gave a Tibetan class. At first this was

very difficult because our teacher could not speak any Japanese and we could not pronounce Tibetan correctly. In order to confirm the meaning of each word we needed a long time. Even though we could understand technical terms of Tibetan Buddhism through our knowledge of the corresponding Sanskrit words, we tried to catch the specific meaning of the Tibetan interpretation of these words. Usually it resulted in a long discussion among the students.

We started to study a grammar text called *Sum bcu ba* by Legs bsad brdsod dban. Then we proceeded with the *Abhidharma-kośa*, the *Chos byun* by the fifth Dalai Lama, the *Dmar khrid bde lam* by the first Pan chen lama, etc. The classes took place on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and began at 6 o'clock in the evening and ended at 9 o'clock, that is three hours each time with 15 minutes' break in the middle of the class. After class, we Japanese students like to discuss the topics we just had learned, usually while drinking beer especially after late classes. Sometimes even professors join the discussion. However, Ge she Tshul trim kal bzang was a monk who strictly refrained from alcohol. Therefore after class we returned directly to our home. I felt something missing. I remember that sometimes I returned to my house while counting the steps in Tibetan. I drank beer when I arrived at home.

After a while our teacher became familiar with the Japanese language, and sometimes during the break he explained about Tibet and the Tibetan people. The more he became familiar with the Japanese language, the more our interest in Tibetan matters increased. Once a student asked him about the manner of traditional dharma discussions in Tibetan temples since we could only read their descriptions found in books by Kawaguchi or Nishikawa Kazumi. Ge she Tshul trim kal bzang demonstrated such discussions for us by gesturing and performing.

Fortunately the Japanese language and Tibetan have a very similar syntax. One exception is the location of adjectives. In Tibetan an adjective is placed behind the noun which the adjective modifies, while in Japanese it is always located before the noun. But generally speaking both languages are very similar in their structure. Like the Tibetan language, Japanese has some particles which represent certain cases. Therefore, it is very easy to understand Tibetan for a Japanese student as far as he or she has a certain knowledge of technical terms. Before attending each class, students tried to translate a portion of the text at home, and during class they mainly checked whether each particle was translated correctly. Students also focused their efforts on whether they translated long adjectival clauses correctly or not, which are usually found in Tibetan sentences.

Another issue we were very careful about in class was, as mentioned before, the question of how the Tibetan tradition interprets Buddhist technical terms. We cared much about this problem because we Japanese also have certain traditional interpretations of technical terms, but this understanding was transmitted from the Chinese tradition. It completely reflects Chinese scholastic concepts determined by various Buddhist schools extant when they were transmitted to Japan. The interpretation of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) may serve as an extreme example. Since Chinese people did not care about the original Sanskrit text once it had been translated into Chinese, subsequent Chinese commentators interpreted the text

by using the Chinese translated text only. So once they had translated the Sanskrit word *sūnyatā* into Chinese, which consists of the two Chinese characters 空性, they commented on each letter even though it was originally one word in Sanskrit. Based on such an interpretation method, various complicated philosophical discussions evolved between different sects. This problem is caused by the facts that Chinese letters are ideograms and that the Chinese have a tendency toward xenophobia.

Japanese Buddhologists, especially since the Meiji period, have a strong tendency toward comparative studies, as I mentioned before. They try to grasp the meaning of technical terms by tracing them back to their original meaning in Pāli or Sanskrit and by comparing their meaning with the Chinese versions. Indeed, this method is very important, and based on it research has produced a great amount of new knowledge for Japanese scholarship and opened up new possibilities for fruitful results in future studies. However, there has evolved also another problem. Comparative studies are naturally inclined to grasp the most common sense of terms while ignoring the distinctive meanings provided by each tradition. Of course, it is very important to try to reach the original meaning of each technical term, but it is also important to know how Buddhism was transmitted into different cultures and how it has transformed into unique forms under their influence. In this sense, Ge she Tshul trim kal bzang's class contributed considerably to the development of Japanese research. Eventually, he became a lay Buddhist and married in 1979. He taught for many years as professor for Tibetan Buddhism at Ōtani University and retired only recently (2008).