

A Report on Newly Discovered Buddhist Texts at Nanatsu-dera

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Ochiai Toshinori, *The Manuscripts of Nanatsu-dera: A Recently Discovered Treasure-House in Downtown Nagoya*. With related remarks by Makita Tairyō and Antonino Forte. Translated and edited by Silvio Vita. Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies (Occasional Papers Series no. 3), 1991. xii + 102 + 18 pp. Illustrations.

To discover, far out in the desert, a text long lost or never seen before, save it from an obscure or perilous fate, edit, translate, study and share it with others, thereby adding to our appreciation of humanity's past adventures . . . such is the dream of many who work day in and day out with texts as their primary source. Some of us have even gone off to the deserts and mountains in search of such a find. Little did I expect, upon arriving in Nagoya for a research visit some few months ago, that a cache of newly discovered manuscripts, perhaps second only in importance to the discoveries of Dunhuang, was awaiting me only six subway stops from my office, at a small temple in downtown Nagoya. In downtown Nagoya!??!

In *The Manuscripts of Nanatsu-dera*, one of the many recent publications of the Italian School of East Asian Studies in Kyoto, we are introduced not only to a number of the important texts discovered last year at the Nanatsu-dera 七寺, but also to the circumstances of the discovery itself, the small group of dedicated scholars who diligently worked to bring it to light, and the excitement they all felt as the scope of the discovery became apparent. I was fortunate to arrive in Japan as this book was in its final editing stages, and, having stuck my nose in here and there, I feel this should be considered not so much a review as an introduction to the work, so that others might also know of this discovery and its import.

Besides introductory notes, an excellent bibliography and index, and photographs, the book is made up of three separate articles, consisting

of "A Report on the Newly Found Texts of Nanatsu-dera" by Ochiai Toshinori, "General Evaluation of the Nanatsu-dera Manuscripts" by Makita Tairyō, and "My First Visit to Nanatsu-dera" by Antonino Forte. Although Forte characteristically understates the value of his own contribution ("a few impromptu notes and impressions"), his piece contains valuable background material to Ochiai's more detailed textual remarks. I recommend starting with Forte's article, then reading Makita's general evaluation, and finally digesting the "meat" of the volume, Ochiai's description of the first fifteen texts examined.

Forte's "impromptu notes" begin as he, Makita, Ochiai, and Kim Pyong-ō meet at Kyoto Station to make the trip to Nagoya for the first survey of manuscripts, and ends some nine hours (and twenty pages) later, after Makita has "tasted the supreme joy of the scholar," as they board the train to visit Makita's new grandson, "another joy, more personal and yet not less intense (p. 75)." Sandwiched between is the fascinating story of the discovery of the manuscripts, a short history of Nanatsu-dera, and a chronicle of the actual survey they conducted that June. Nanatsu-dera, named for the ancient *shichidō garan* 七堂伽藍 ("seven halls") configuration of a monastic complex and belonging to the Shingon school, is said to have been founded by the famous Gyōgi in 735. The few buildings that remain of this once imposing complex were rebuilt after World War II, with the exception of the Meiji-period brick-and-cement storehouse containing the scriptures. The scriptures (*issaikyō* 一切經, "the complete canon") were copied between 1175 and 1180 at the behest of the governor of Owari province (the area around Nagoya), and have been stored at the temple since that time in lacquered chests. The existence of the collection was actually well known, and both the manuscripts and the chests themselves (also dating to the late Heian period and occasionally decorated with *maki-e* paintings) had been declared "National Treasures" in 1900 and "Important Cultural Properties" in 1950; indeed, a catalog of the collection had even been published over twenty years ago (*Owari shiryō: Nanatsu-dera issaikyō mokuroku* 尾張史料七寺一切經目錄 [Nagoya: Nanatsu-dera issaikyō hozonkai], 1968) and distributed to museums, libraries, and interested scholars (including Makita). However, the compilers of the catalog were not in a position to judge the content of the texts, and the scholars that were qualified believed the Nanatsu-dera canon to be a manuscript copy of the printed Northern Song canon (completed 983), an edition that had considerable influence on all subsequent printings, including, though indirectly, the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, and therefore not likely to contain any surprises.

However, in unrelated research on the *Da Tang Xiyu qufa gaoseng zhuan* 大唐西域求法高僧傳 (which showed that the original title was *Da Zhou Xiyu xingren zhuan* 大周西域行人傳), most likely changed to purge the

reference to Empress Wu's reign), Professor Ochiai discovered that the Nanatsu-dera version of this text was not based on the Song edition but rather on a manuscript of the Nara period. Searching further, he began to realize that a good many manuscripts actually stemmed from Nara-period recensions, thus greatly increasing the chances that they contained variants no longer transmitted after the composition of the standard-setting *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 and the printed Song canon (even after the fourth survey of 7–9 October 1991, the exact number of texts based on pre-Heian originals is still unclear). Suspicions were verified during that first survey, when the team determined that the Nanatsu-dera version of the apocryphal sixteen-volume *Foshuo Foming jing* 佛說佛名經, while different from any other printed canons, was identical to the fragments discovered at Dunhuang. This fired the enthusiasm of all the scholars present, and they laid plans for subsequent visits to continue their investigations, investigations that are still in progress as hardly a week goes by without some new discovery. The results of the second survey, carried out a little over a month later, are presented in Ochiai's article.

The second article, "General Evaluation of the Nanatsu-dera Manuscripts," consists of an interview given by Professor Makita to Yomiuri Television shortly after the second survey was completed. Although, considering the intended audience, the remarks are not what one might expect from the foremost scholar of Chinese apocrypha, they are nonetheless quite refreshing for the expansive view that such an esteemed scholar can bring to the topic (Makita, at age 79, has spent more years studying Chinese Buddhist apocrypha than most of us have been alive). He notes, for example, that these discoveries will help clarify the routes by which Buddhist scriptures came to Japan (in turn shedding light on a host of other issues, including immigration, local power, trade, etc.), will force us to rethink issues of medieval Japanese history (which obviously wasn't only a story of Kyoto), the dissemination of Japanese Buddhism (the fact that most of the Nanatsu-dera canon was copied in the Owari area indicates that other temples in the area also had the stature and resources to own the canon), and, of course, the history of Chinese Buddhism. Perhaps an indication of both the excitement of this discovery and Makita's sense of their importance is his intention to rewrite his epochal *Gikyō kenkyū* (1976).

The first article in the collection is Professor Ochiai's "A Report on the Newly Found Texts of Nanatsu-dera," prepared for the talk he gave at the Italian School of East Asian Studies in Kyoto officially announcing the discovery to the international scholarly community. In addition to a more technical discussion of how he came to realize the importance of the Nanatsu-dera manuscripts, the article contains the outlines of an amazing *fifteen* newly discovered texts, some of which were thought to

exist no longer and some of which had never even been recorded before. These texts, and several others mentioned but not discussed in this volume, all were microfilmed during the second survey at Nanatsu-dera. Among the newly discovered works discussed are the oldest extant Chinese apocrypha, the *Foshuo Piluo sanmei jing* 佛說毘羅三昧經 (first mentioned in Daoan's catalog of 374); a text explaining the ascetic *dhūta* practices (*Foshuo Touta jing* 佛說頭陀經), an important topic more familiar in the literature of Southeast Asian forest monks than that of Chinese Buddhism; the *Foshuo Qingjing Faxing jing* 佛說清淨法行經, an oft-quoted yet previously lost text of a type that reverses the "conversion of the barbarians" stories (*hua hu* 化胡), casting Laozi and Confucius as the skillful apparitions of bodhisattvas; several texts that do not appear in any other Chinese or Japanese catalogs (e.g., *Foshuo Bi'an shenzhou chengjiu jing* 佛說彼岸神咒成就經 and the *Foshuo Dayuan gongde liuzhai jing* 佛說大願功德六齋經), the second *juan* of the important and influential *Jingdu [sanmei] jing* 淨度三昧經, missing from the Dunhuang manuscript; the above-mentioned *Foshuo Foming jing*; and the only extant work attributed to Kumārajīva that is not a translation (other than his correspondence with Huiyuan), the *Dasheng pusa rudao sanzong guan* 大乘菩薩入道三種觀. In addition to these texts, other important texts that were discovered but not discussed in this volume include the *Sanjie fofa* 三階佛法, the main text of the Three Stages movement, long since declared heretical in China; important manuscripts of the *Zhenyuan xingding Shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄; and more. The discovery of any one of these would have been a rare find, but that they all surfaced together, in relatively good condition, is truly surprising.

There are, of course, far more questions raised than answered in this volume. The authors are careful to point out on several occasions that their account must be considered tentative, as it is not based on a thorough and careful examination of the texts; as Silvio Vita, the editor, tells us, "its main purport lies rather in introducing as soon as possible to scholars outside Japan the broad outlines of the discovery (p. x)." This spirit of collegiality permeates the volume and bodes well for further research as well, and, indeed, plans have already been made for a ten-volume series of editions and studies of the Nanatsu-dera texts, and a "Society for the Study of the Recently Discovered Scriptures of Nanatsu-dera" meets regularly, with a membership of over fifty scholars, to hear of ongoing research, jointly read the texts, and share in the reconstruction of damaged passages, etc. At the recent fifth meeting of this group Professor Ochiai introduced the Nanatsu-dera version of Aśvaghōṣa's biography, *Maming pusa zhuan* 馬鳴菩薩傳, demonstrating clearly that it, rather than the Taishō version, T no. 2046, was the text attributed to Kumārajīva during the Tāng period.

In addition to the textual issues, however, these texts raise a number

of questions about the social and historical context as well, and it is to be hoped that historians, social scientists, economic historians, chroniclers of local power and cult, and others will also take this opportunity to reassess our understandings of this period and locality. For example, what kind of resources were required to undertake such a venture as copying the entire canon? How many people were involved, what was their training, and how much were they paid? We have some information about these sorts of institutional aspects of sūtra copying during the Nara period, but what about in Nagoya of the late Heian period? What is the import, ideological and physical, of beginning such a venture amidst the turbulence of the final decade of the Heian period? What was the relationship of the patron, Yasunaga, Ason of the Ōnakatomi 大中臣朝臣安長, to the other protagonists of the time? What was the cultus of the Nanatsu-dera, and how did the temple and the sūtra copying serve (or not serve) popular religious practices? What was the ideology of the “canon” at that time, and what is the significance of the inclusion of 48 works clearly designated “extra-canonical” works in a catalog that served as the basis of the Nanatsu-dera canon? These and many more questions await further research, and given the open and collegial attitude of the persons involved in this work, we can be sure they will be taken up in due time.

Downtown Nagoya? Since my arrival at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture I had been past Nanatsu-dera many times (after all, it is in the heart of the computer and electronics district of Nagoya), but, having myself trudged futilely around Xi’an, the ancient capital of Tang China, looking for lost works in the past, I little expected that I would fulfill a certain dream of my own here. In early October this year, however, as I participated in the fourth survey of the Nanatsu-dera manuscripts, I finally came face to face with the *Sanjie fofa*, a text that was first discovered among Dunhuang manuscripts earlier this century. Even before this manuscript was removed from its chest, however, I felt quite privileged to be not only examining these 800-year-old texts, but to be working with them as a sort of laborer – hauling the heavy chests from the storehouse, laying out the rolls, and, my primary job during the three days of cataloging and microfilming, rerolling the texts after the photographer was done. As I held the roll containing the *Sanjie fofa*, I couldn’t help but wonder why a text proscribed in China continued to be copied as canonical in Japan half a millennium later. Actually, I had some idea of the reason why, and hope for confirmation in hitherto lost portions of the *Zhenyuan xingding Shijiao mulu*, thought to differ markedly from the Taishō version. Though he did not know which version of this catalog was contained in the Nanatsu-dera canon, Professor Forte, aware of my interest in the text, called me over when *juan* 28, the apocryphal section of the catalog, was removed from its chest, saying that I

should be the first to see it. Unrolling the manuscript, I began to feel the kind of excitement that had so visibly infused these scholars. I was not disappointed—the manuscript proved to be different from the Taishō version, containing materials on the Three Stages movement and their texts that I had thought lost forever. But that is another story. Suffice it to say that for anybody interested in Buddhist apocrypha, Chinese Buddhism, or Japanese history, the find at Nanatsu-dera is of unquestionable importance, and this volume of essays is the mandatory starting point.

REFERENCE

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