

19

Sri Lankan Impacts on East Asian Buddhism: Transmission of a Dhāraṇī Sūtra

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1. Introduction

As the primary religion of Sri Lanka today is Theravāda Buddhism, and Mahāyāna Buddhism is nowhere to be seen now, it is generally believed that there was no significant exchange of Buddhist ideas between Sri Lanka and East Asia. Nonetheless, since the fifth century, Buddhist exchanges did take place between China and Sri Lanka.

In the first half of the fifth century, Sri Lanka began interacting with China. In 428 or 429 as well as in 435, the Sri Lankan king Mahānāma sent an envoy to China. This indicates that state-level interactions had begun. Additionally, Faxian 法顯, a monk who came to India from China, stayed in Sri Lanka for two years around 410. He returned to China via Java with many texts, traveling on a merchant ship.* Furthermore, the *Samantapāsādikā*, compiled in Sri Lanka, and the *Vimuttimaggā*, a work by the Abhayagiri school based in Sri Lanka, were translated into Chinese in 489 and 505 respectively.† In addition, in the early fifth century, nuns from Sri Lanka went to China to propagate Buddhism. This further suggests the importance of Buddhism in early interactions between China and Sri Lanka.

From the evidence gathered in this paper, it is clear that Sri Lanka played an important role in the development of East Asian Buddhism. Among the many examples, through a comprehensive use of inscriptions from Sri Lanka and documents from China and Japan, this paper will focus on how a dhāraṇī sūtra transmitted from Sri Lanka to China influenced the Buddhist cultures of East Asia.

* Nagasawa (1996: 121-125, 179-181).

† Mizuno (1996: 118-119).

2. The Transmission of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*

It is clear that Mahāyāna Buddhism existed in Medieval Sri Lanka for two primary reasons. First, Xuanzang 玄奘, who travelled through India in the early seventh century, reported that there were two fraternities of Theravāda in Sri Lanka: “one is the Mahāvihāra fraternity that rejects Mahāyāna and the other is Abhayagirivihāra fraternity which studies both Mahāyāna and Theravāda.”¹ Second, inscriptions and manuscripts from the eighth or ninth century tell us that at least four Mahāyāna scriptures were circulating in Sri Lanka²: the *Pañcavi□śatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*,³ the *Ratnakū□a*, the *Kāyatrayastotra*, and the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*.

The latter is known by the full title, *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya guhyadhātu kara□□amudra-dhāra□ī-sūtra*.⁴ A stone inscription that quotes the dhāra□ī from this *sūtra* has been found near a stūpa at the Abhayagiri Temple in Sri Lanka. This discovery is extremely important because the quotation was found at the Abhayagiri Temple, which Xuanzang described as studying both Mahāyāna and Theravāda. This discovery proved the validity of Xuanzang’s descriptions concerning the temple.

In addition, it is significant that the *sūtra* was translated into Chinese by Amoghavajra 不空 (705–774), who studied in Sri Lanka. The earliest record of his life is an inscription referred to as *Daguanzhangsanzhangshangzhibei* 大廣智三藏和上之碑 which was composed in 774 following closely after his death. According to this inscription,⁵ he received an imperial order and together with his disciples went to Sri Lanka just after the death of his master Vajrabodhi 金剛智 in 741. There, after presenting an official letter to the king of Sri Lanka, Amoghavajra studied under Puxian Asheli 普賢阿闍梨 (*Samantabhadra Ācārya) and was given more than five hundred scriptures, including the *Tattvasa□graha* and the *Mahāvairocana Tantra*. He returned in 747.

¹ 『大唐西域記』卷十一：「一曰：摩訶毘訶羅住部，斥大乘、習小教。二曰：阿跋邪祇釐住部，學兼二乘，弘演三藏」（T51, 934a）

² Cf. Mudiyanse (1969), Bechert (1977), Mori (1999), and Baba (2011).

³ von Hinüber (1983).

⁴ Schopen (1982) identified dhāra□ī inscribed on the granite tablets found in Abhayagiri temple with the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*.

⁵ 授以十八會金剛頂瑜伽并毘盧遮那大悲胎藏，五部灌頂，真言秘典經論梵夾五百餘部（T52, 848bc）cf. Higata (1943).

All together – that the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* existed at the Abhayagiri Temple at this time; that Amoghavajra studied in Sri Lanka, bringing back and translating into Chinese many other documents; and that he is credited with translating this dhāra□ī sūtra (一切如來心祕密全身舍利寶篋印陀羅尼經) – this evidence suggests that Amoghavajra obtained the text in Sri Lanka and brought it back to China from there. This means that it did not take even a hundred years for the sūtra to come to Japan via China. Kūkai 空海□774-835□first brought the text from China to Japan in 806 (大同元年), followed by Ennin 円仁 in 847 (承和十四年) and Enchin 円珍 in 858 (天安二年).⁶

3. The 10th century prints of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* by Qian Hongchu

The *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* consists primarily of a story that goes as follows. When the Buddha was in Magadha, he received from a Brahmin a request for a commemorative service. On his way to the Brahmin's house, the Buddha saw an old stūpa in a state of ruin. When the Buddha approached the stūpa, a light suddenly emanated from it and from there, a voice was heard, "Wonderful! Wonderful, Sakyamuni!" The Buddha told his disciples that inside the stūpa was placed the dhāra□ī of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*. After preaching to his disciples the merits of this dhāra□ī, the Buddha then orally transmitted it to those disciples. The Buddha explained that by placing the dhāra□ī inside a stūpa, that stūpa becomes a seven-treasure stūpa. Those who pay homage and make offerings to this tower will be freed from karmic sins and will obtain supreme awakening.

It is significant that the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* propogates a dhāra□ī to be placed inside a stūpa or statue. This often deeply influenced East Asian cultures in later times, including the printing of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* by Qian Hongchu 錢弘俶 (reigned 947–978).

From the late Tang dynasty to the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, Buddhism suffered political persecution especially in the North China so that center of Buddhism shifted to the South China.⁷ In this time, Qian Hongchu, the

⁶ 『御請来目錄』 (大正五五、一〇六一上)、『入唐新求聖教目錄』 (大正五五、一〇七九下)、『智証大師請来目錄』 (大正五五、一一〇三中)。

⁷ Cf. Sun (2007: 310).

fifth King of the Wuyue, one of Ten Kingdoms, was keen on reviving Buddhism. According to the *Fozutongji* 佛祖統記, he followed the model of King Aśoka by erecting 84,000 stūpas with the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* placed inside.⁸

Of the many stūpas Qian Hongchu sponsored, more than forty have been found in China and Japan.⁹ At least (probably many more than) eight copies of the printed sūtra survive. The dates of the stūpas are as follows: bronze stūpa 955;¹⁰ iron stūpa 965; silver stūpa 972 and 976. The dates of the printing of the sūtra are 956, 965, and 975. Therefore, the dates of the creation of the stūpas roughly match those of the printing of the sūtra. This suggests that the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* was printed to coincide with the creation of the stūpas.

As Carter (1955) points out, the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* that Qian Hongchu printed is significant also in that it is one of the earliest printed materials in China. The *Jingang Banruojing* 金剛般若經 (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*) found in Dunhuang is the oldest complete printed book in China known to date. In the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, many state printing projects developed. Lagging slightly behind the printing of Confucian material in the Later Zhou Dynasty, the Wuyue Kingdom also printed the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*.¹¹

From the viewpoint of Buddhist history, some features of the stūpas sponsored by Qian Hongchu cannot be traced to India. On the one hand, while the legend of King Aśoka erecting 84,000 stūpas comes from the *Aśokāvadāna*, wherein King Aśoka builds stūpas for the Buddha's relics, however, neither miniature stūpas nor the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* are mentioned. On the other hand, the practice of offering miniature stūpas originates in India. Many miniature stūpas containing Dharmadhātu have been found, however, none has been found containing the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*. Therefore Qian Hongchu was the first to combine all three of the following elements: first, the legend of King

⁸ 〔吳越忠懿王錢弘俶〕慕阿育王造八萬四千塔。金銅精鋼冶鑄甚工，中藏寶篋印心呪經，亦及八萬四千數。(T49, 206bc)

⁹ Cf. Hattori (2019)

¹⁰ A Japanese monk Dōki 道喜 wrote in the *Hōkyōikyōki* 宝函印經記 that he observed the bronze stūpa of Qian Hongchu in 961 and that the nine-inch stūpa contained the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*. The shape of the stūpa he describes matches the shape of the existing Qian Hongchu stūpa, so Dōki definitely saw the bronze stūpa firsthand.

¹¹ Cf. Zhang (1978 and 1989)

Aśoka erecting 84,000 stūpas; second, the practice of offering miniature stūpas; and third, the practice of offering the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* in stūpas. This is historically significant because no other example has been found in India or in China that predates Qian Hongchu.

Who designed the combination of the three elements? According to a record from the Song Dynasty, it was most likely Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽(705-774). Yanshou had been a bureaucrat in the Wuyue Kingdom and continued to be supported by Qian Hongchu after his ordination as a Buddhist monk. According to the *Yongming Zhijuechangshifangzhanshilu* 永明智覺禪師方丈實錄¹² written by Lingzhi Ranruo 靈芝蘭若, Yanshou “requested the state to create 84,000 iron stūpas so as to implant in all sentient beings a cause for enlightenment.”¹³ If this record reflects historical facts, the one who combined the above three elements is Yanshou. It can be surmised that Qian Hongchu received the request of Yanshou and carried out the creation of 84,000 miniature stūpas containing the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*.

Why then did Yanshou focus on the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* among so many dhāra□ī sūtras? The key to answering this question is in the title of this sutra itself: the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*, which means “the core of power of all Buddhas,” is translated into Chinese as *Yiqie Rulaixin* 一切如來心, which means “the heart of all Buddhas.” Because the heart, h□daya in Sanskrit, is the core concept in Yongming Yanshou’s thought, there is no doubt that the title of the Chinese translation of the sutra resonated with his central tenets.¹⁴ That is most probably why he chose this sūtra.

4. Qian Hongchu’s Influences on Japan

Because the *Hōkyōikyō-ki* 宝篋印經記, written by a Japanese monk, Dōki 道喜, in 965, describes Qian Hongchu’s placing paper-printed copies of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* in 84,000 stūpas, and *Hōkyōikyōki* spread along with the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*, Qian Hongchu’s offering of 84,000 stūpas became a well-known story in Japan from early on. But it was only in the late Heian period, in the twelfth century, when Qian Hongchu’s influence became manifest

¹² The text is included in the *Xinfuzhu* 心賦注 of Song version 宋版.

¹³ 請国家鑄八万四千铁塔与一切衆生作得度緣。

¹⁴ Cf. Welter (2011).

and the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* began to enjoy popularity.

4.1. Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河法皇's Offering of 84,000 Stūpas

In 1181, Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127-1191) had 84,000 five-inch stūpas made and therein placed manuscripts of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*. In 1185, he sought to build 84,000 nine-inch "five-wheeled stūpas" each containing a manuscript of the same sūtra in order to pray for the peace of the nation and in order to commemorate those who died in battles since the Hōgen Rebellion.¹⁵ It is clear that Emperor Go-Shirakawa combined the three elements as discussed above. Therefore his offering of 84,000 stūpas was influenced by Qian Hongchu. It is likely that Emperor Go-Shirakawa sought not only to model himself after King Aśoka, but also imagined himself following Qian Hongchu, who revived Buddhism after its decline in the late Tang dynasty.

4.2. Shōgun Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝's Offering of 84,000 Stūpas

The Kamakura Shogunate also actively engaged in the offering of stūpas. The 84,000 stūpas made in 1197 by the first shōgun Yoritomo (1147-1199) were five-inch "five-wheel stūpas" containing manuscripts of the dhāra□ī of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*.¹⁶ His offering of 84,000 stūpas followed the model provided by Emperor Go-Shirakawa.

According to the *Azumakagami* 吾妻鏡, the second shōgun Minamoto no Yoriie 源頼家, the third shōgun Minamoto no Sanetomo 源実朝, Shikken Hōjō Yasutoki 北条泰時, the fourth shōgun Fujiwara no Yoritsune 藤原頼経, the fifth shōgun Fujiwara no Yoritsugu 藤原頼嗣, and the sixth shōgun Munetaka Shinnō 宗尊親王 also offered 84,000 stūpas. If we assume that they followed Minamoto no Yoritomo in their offering, we can surmise that their stūpas also contained manuscripts of the dhāra□ī of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*.

4.3. Chōgen 重源 and the Kei School's 慶派 Building of Statues.

In the late Heian period, Buddhist revival movements became active in Nara temples, which had been devastated by the Heike 平家 force. Many temples were

¹⁵ Hino (1938).

¹⁶ Nishiyama (2006: 17-18).

rebuilt during the Kamakura period. Often copies of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□dayasūtra* or its *dhāra□ī* were placed inside the Buddhist statues created during this time.¹⁷

Chōgen (1121–1206), who reestablished Tōdaiji's Daibutsu Hall 東大寺大仏殿 in 1185, supported by Go-Shirakawa and Minamoto no Yoritomo, placed the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* inside the new Daibutsu. The Daibutsu re-dedicated is no longer extant, but in his book, *Namu Amida Butsu Sazenshū* 南無阿弥陀佛作善集, it is recorded that he placed the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* inside the rebuilt Daibutsu. In addition, copies of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* were placed in each of the two Vajrasattva 金剛力士 statues in Tōdaiji's southern gate built in 1203 by sculptors from the Kei school under the guidance of Chōgen.

The Hudō-myōwō 不動明王 (Acalanātha) and Bishamon-ten 毘沙門天 (Vaiśrava□a) statues at Ganjōju-in 願成就院, created in 1186, and Bishamon-ten 毘沙門天 (Vaiśrava□a) statue at Jōraku-ji 浄楽寺, created in 1189, by Unkei 運慶 (?-1224), a representative sculptor of Kei school, contain stūpa boards with the *dhāra□ī* of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* written on them in Sanskrit. Likewise, the Miroku-butsu 弥勒佛 (Maitreya Buddha) statue at the Kōfukuji Temple 興福寺, created in 1212 by Unkei, contains stūpa boards with the *dhāra□ī*.

The Maitreya Buddha statue, originally in Kōfuku-ji and now in a Boston museum, by another representative sculptor of Kei school, Kaikei 快慶, in 1189, also has the *dhāra□ī* (written in 1190) inside. The Shaka-muni 釈迦牟尼 (Śyākyamuni) statue of the Bujōji Temple 峰定寺 in Kyoto is thought to be a work by someone from the Kei school in 1199, and this statue also contains a copy of the *dhāra□ī*.

Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa and Shōgun Minamoto no Yoritomo had deep relations with Chōgen, who was also familiar with artisans from the Kei school. Therefore, it is probable that Chōgen encouraged them to dedicate 84,000 stūpas with the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* as well as to place the sūtra inside statues they were making.

¹⁷ Hiraoka (1990).

4.4 Hōkyōin-tō 宝篋印塔

In the medieval period, many artisans created stūpas called Hōkyōintō 宝篋印塔. This is one of Japan's most numerous stone-built stūpas along with the Gorintō 五輪塔 ("five-wheel" stūpa). Hōkyōin-tō means "the stūpa of *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya gulhyadhātu kara□□amudra-dhāra□ī-sūtra*." As Ōtsuka (2010: 12-13) points out, it became known by the name because the form of Hōkyōin-tō corresponds with Qian Hongchu's stupa described in the *Hōkyōintō-ki*. In that sense, there is strong connection between this sort of stūpa and the sūtra. According to Miki (1996 and 1999), only five have been found with the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* or its dhāra□ī inscribed in the medieval times,¹⁸ but Hōkyōinkyō began to be inscribed on Hōkyōin-tō much more frequently in the early-modern period.

5. Conclusion

1. The *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* was brought from Sri Lanka to China and was translated into Chinese by Amoghavajra; the translation was brought from China to Japan by Kūkai, Ennin, and Enchin.
2. The Wuyue king Qian Hongchu, with Yongming Yanshou's suggestion, combined the legend of King Aśoka's erection of 84,000 stūpas and the practices of offering miniature stūpas and dedicating the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*; Qian Hongchu accordingly made 84,000 miniature stūpas and placed inside the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*, which is one of the earliest surviving prints in China.
3. In Japan, the influence of Qian Hongchu became manifest in the Kamakura period: Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa and Shōgun Minamoto no Yoritomo dedicated 84,000 stūpas with manuscripts or stūpa boards of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya*. Chōgen and sculptors of the Kei school like Unkei and Kaikei placed manuscripts of the *Sarva tathāgatā dhi□□hānah□daya* or its dhāra□ī inside the Buddhist statues. The sūtra or its dhāra□ī were inscribed in

¹⁸ They are: 1. Hakone-yama Hōkyōintō (Kanagawa Prefecture, 1296), 2. Hotoke-iwa Hōkyōintō (Nagano Prefecture, 1311), 3. Myōkō-ji Hōkyōintō (Saitama Prefecture, 1354), 4. Shinpuku-ji Hōkyōintō (Aichi Prefecture, 1384), 5. Myōkan-ji Hōkyōintō (Nagasaki Prefecture, 1442). Cf. Miki (1996) (1999).

medieval times on some Hōkyōintō, one of most popular stūpas in Japan, and with increasing frequency only in the early-modern period.

Abbreviations and References

T = Taishō Shinshū Daizkyō 大正新修大藏經.

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