

Jambudvīpe pracaramāṇaḥ : The Circulation of Mahāyāna Sūtras in India

Peter Skilling

I

The fact—or better, perhaps, *concept*—of the circulation of Mahāyāna sūtras in India was expressed in some of the sūtras themselves by the verb *pra-car*, used with a locative, in many cases with “Jambudvīpa”. The usage is consistent in the *Samghāṭadharmaparyāya*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Suvarṇabhāsottama*, and *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*. The Tibetan translation is *spyod* or *rab tu spyod*.¹ The usage is not recorded in Edgerton’s *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, and it seems appropriate to offer a brief note on the topic in this volume dedicated to the memory of Hirakawa Akira, who devoted his life to the study of Indian Buddhism and the rise of the Mahāyāna.

¹ I take this from the lexicons: Edward Conze, *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1967, p. 268; Yasunori Ejima et al., *Index to the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra-Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese*, Fascicle VII, Tokyo: The Reiyukai, 1990, pp. 654-655; Johannes Nobel, *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra, Das Goldglanz-Sūtra, ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus, die tibetischen Übersetzungen mit einem Wörterbuch*, Zweiter Band, *Wörterbuch Tibetisch-Deutsch-Sanskrit*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1950, p. 132. The single occurrence of the verb in the *Sukhāvativyūha* is in a different context: *na ca tāni ratnāni loke pracaranti, yāni sukhāvatyāṃ lokadhātau saṃvidyante*, in Atsuuji Ashikaga (ed.), *Sukhāvativyūha*, Kyoto: Librairie Hōzōkan, 1965, p. 30.6.

1. *Samghāṭa-nāma-dharmaparyāya*²

The *Samghāṭa-sūtra* was translated into Khotanese by the first half of the fifth century. It was translated twice into Chinese: once in 538 and again by Dānapāla in 1001 (Taishō 423, 424). It was translated into Tibetan in the ninth century. Seven Sanskrit manuscripts, in varying degrees of completeness, were found at Gilgit; they have been dated by von Hinüber to the sixth to seventh centuries. Sogdian fragments are preserved in the Turfan and St. Petersburg collections.

Canevascini, who published the Khotanese fragments, Sanskrit text, and English translation has the following to say about the text:³

No special aspect of the Law is therein treated at length as the main concern of the authors seems to have been the glorification of the *sūtra* itself: the narratives, parables, and similes extensively used by the Bhagavat in his answers are essentially aimed at illustrating the intrinsic saving virtues of the Law, and particularly of this book on the Law, for him who believes in it.

The text is studded with prodigious events: beings appear, disappear and sometimes levitate, Bodhisattvas emanate animal forms from their bodies, incorporeal voices are heard in the ether and so on.

The setting of the *dharmaparyāya* is Mount Ḡḍhrakūṭa near

² Giotto Canevascini, *The Khotanese Saṅghāṭasūtra: A critical edition*, Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1993. The Sanskrit published by Canevascini is from the unpublished Habilitationsschrift of Oskar von Hinüber (Mainz, 1973). My translations gloss over the grammatical problems in the Sanskrit.

³ Canevascini, p. ix.

Rājagrha. Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Sarvaśūra asks the Blessed One:⁴

*asti bhagavaṃ saddharma-paryāyo yaṃ śrutvā sarva-sattvānāṃ
paṃcānantaryāṇi karmāṇi niravaśeṣeṇa kṣayaṃ gacchaṃte,
tathānye ca karmāvaraṇāḥ kṣīṇābhaviṣyanti, kṣipraṃ cānuttarāṃ
samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambuddhyaṃte?*

Is there, Blessed One, a *Saddharma-paryāya* hearing which the five deeds of immediate effect of all beings will be eradicated without remainder, other karmic obstacles will be obliterated, and [those beings] will swiftly awaken to unsurpassed true and full awakening?

The Blessed One answers in the affirmative:

*asti sarvaśūra saṃghāto nāma dharmaparyāya; etarhi **jambudvīpe pracariṣyati**. yaḥ kaścit sarvaśūremaṃ saṃghātaṃ dharmaparyāyaṃ śroṣyati, tasya paṃcānantaryāṇi karmāṇi pariḥṣayaṃ yāsyanti, avaiivartikāś ca bhaviṣyanty ānuttarāyā samyaksaṃ bodheḥ.*

There is, Sarvaśūra, the *Saṃghāta-nāma-dharmaparyāya*, which is now to circulate in Jambudvīpa. The five *ānantarya-karma* of one who hears the *Saṃghāta-dharmaparyāya* will be fully eradicated, and [those who hear it] will become irreversible from unsurpassed true and full awakening.

⁴ Canevascini, p. 6.

2. *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtrendrarāja*⁵

Like the *Samghāta-sūtra*, the *Suvarṇabhāsottama* is textually well-represented. It exists in Sanskrit from Nepal. It was translated into Chinese several times: first by Dharmakṣema, who came to China in 414 CE. In 597 Baogui compiled a new version based on earlier translations, some now lost, but Yijing's translation, published in 703, eclipsed the earlier translations and was itself rendered into Tibetan, Sogdian, Tangut, and Uighur. There are altogether three Tibetan translations and at least two Khotanese translations.⁶

In Chapter 6 (*Caturmahārāja-parivarta*) of the *Suvarṇabhāsottama*, the Four Great Kings address the Buddha:⁷

ayaṃ bhadanta bhagavan suvarṇabhāsottamaḥ sūtrendrarājo
'nāgate 'dhvani yatra grāmanagaranigamajanapadarāṣṭrarā-
jadhāniṣu pracariṣyati | yasya yasya manuṣyarājñāś ca viṣaye
'nuprāpto bhaviṣyati | yaḥ kaścid bhadanta bhagavan manuṣya-

⁵ For an English translation of the Sanskrit see R.E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light, being a Translation of the Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, London: Luzac & Co., 1970. As Emmerick (p. ix) notes, “any work concerning the *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra* must owe a great deal to Johannes Nobel (1887-1960), who devoted much of his life to its study”.

⁶ See Emmerick, pp. ix-xii.

⁷ Johannes Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra, Das Goldglanz-Sūtra, ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus, nach den Handschriften und mit Hilfe der tibetischen und chinesischen Übertragungen herausgegeben*, Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1937, p. 69.15. For Tibetan see Johannes Nobel (ed.), *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra, Das Goldglanz-Sūtra, ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus, die tibetischen Übersetzungen mit einem Wörterbuch, erster Band, Die tibetischen Übersetzungen*, Leiden: E.J. Brill/Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1944, pp. 52-53.

*rājā bhaved yenānena devendrasamayena rājasāstreṇa rājatvaṃ
kārāyet | asya suvarṇabhāsottamasya sūtrenrarājasya śrotā
bhaven mānayitā vā bhavet pūjayitā vā bhavet tās ca
sūtrenradhārakā bhikṣubhikṣuṇyupāsakopāsikāḥ satkuryād
gurukuryān mānayet pūjayet satatasamitaṃ suvarṇa-
bhāsottamaṃ sūtrenrarājānaṃ śṛṇuyāt |*

... [70.11] *yatra grāmanagaranigamajanapadarāṣṭrarājadhānīṣu
upasamkramayiṣyāmaḥ | tatrāyaṃ suvarṇabhāsottamaḥ
sūtrenrarājāḥ **pracariṣyati** | teṣāṃ ca manuṣyārājñāṃ asya
suvarṇabhāsottamasya sūtrenrarājasaya śrotṛṇāṃ mānayitrṇāṃ
pūjayitrṇāṃ ārakṣāṃ kariṣyāmaḥ paritrāṇaṃ parigrahaṃ parip-
ālanaṃ daṇḍaparihāraṃ śastraparihāraṃ śāntiṃ svastyayanaṃ
kariṣyāmaḥ |*

Sir, Blessed One: in future, wherever this *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtrenrarāja* circulates—in villages, cities, towns, regions, countries, and royal capitals—in the realm of whatever human king it is available, whatever, Sir, Blessed One, human king rules according to the *Treatise on Royal Statecraft* [entitled] *Devendrasamaya*, he will be one who listens to, venerates, and worships the *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtrenrarāja*. He will respect, honour, venerate, and worship the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who hold the *Lord of Sūtras*, and will constantly listen to the *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtrenrarāja*.

... Wherever, in the villages, cities, towns, regions, countries, and royal capitals that we visit, there the *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtrenrarāja* will circulate. And those human kings who listen to, honour, and worship the *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtrenrarāja*, we will extend protection to them ... and offer peace and security.

3. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-dharmaparyāya*

The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is not only well-attested textually but well-known up to the present day. It was translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in 286, by Kumārajīva in 405/6, and by Jñānagupta and Dharmagupta in 601/2. Kumārajīva's translation has remained the perennial favourite. The *sūtra* was translated into Tibetan and many Central Asian languages, and is now available in modern translations into many of the world's languages.

Pra-car is used three times in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, in all cases with the phrase “in this Jambudvīpa” (*asmiñ jambudvīpe*):⁸

[420.12] *tasmāt tarhi nakṣatrarājasamkusumitābhijña
anuparind-āmy ahaṃ imaṃ sarvasattvapriyadarśanasya
bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya pūrvayogaparivartaṃ yathā
paścime kāle paścime samaye paścimāyāṃ pañcaśatyāṃ
vartamānāyāṃ **asmiñ jambudvīpe pracaren** nāntardhānaṃ
gacchen na ca mārāḥ pāpīyān avatāraṃ labhen na mārakāyikā
devatā na nāgā na yakṣā na gandharvā na kumbhāṇḍā avatāraṃ
labheyuḥ. tasmāt tarhi nakṣatrarājasam kusumitābhijña
adhitiṣṭhāmīmaṃ dharmaparyāyam asmiñ jambudvīpe.*

(The Buddha to Bodhisattva Nakṣatrarājasamkusumitābhijña)
Therefore, Nakṣatrarājasamkusumitābhijña, I entrust this
Pūrvayoga-parivarta to the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva
Sarvasattvapriyadarśana in order that in the last age, in the final

⁸ References are to H. Kern and Bunyiu Nanjio, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, St. Petersburg: Imprimerie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1912 (Bibliotheca Buddhica X).

period, when the final five hundred years are passing, it will circulate in Jambudvīpa, and it will not be lost; Māra the Wicked One will have no opportunity [to do harm], and deities of Māra's realm, *nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, kumbhāṇḍas* will have no opportunity [to do harm]. Therefore, Nakṣatrarājasamkusumitābhijña, I empower this *dharmaparyāya* in this Jambudvīpa.

[477.7] *ayaṃ ca bhagavan saddharmapuṇḍarīko dharmaparyāyo 'smiñ jambudvīpe pracaramāṇo yeṣāṃ bodhisattvānaṃ mahāsattvānāṃ hastagato bhaviṣyati tair bhagavandharmabhāṇakair evaṃ veditavyam | samantabhadrasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyānubhāvena yad asmākam ayaṃ dharmaparyāyo hastagataḥ samantabhadrasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya tejasā |*

(Samantabhadra Bodhisattva to the Buddha) Blessed One, when this *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-dharmaparyāya* circulates in Jambudvīpa, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattvas into whose hands it falls, those *dharmabhāṇakas* should know this: It is by power of the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Samantabhadra that this *dharmaparyāya* has come into our hands, by the might of the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Samantabhadra.

[479.7] *tasmāt tarhi bhagavann aham api tāvad imaṃ dharmaparyāyam adhiṣṭhāsyāmi yathā bhagavan mamādhiṣṭhānenāyaṃ dharmaparyāyo 'smiñ jambudvīpe pracariṣyati ti.*

(Samantabhadra Bodhisattva to the Blessed One) Therefore, Blessed One, I empower this *Dharmaparyāya* in such manner that by my empowerment this *Dharmaparyāya* will circulate in

Jambudvīpa.

4. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*

In Chapter 10 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the verb is used in a passage that is often cited with regard to the geographical origin and spread of the *Prajñāpāramitā*:⁹

*ime khalu punaḥ śāriputraṣaṭpāramitāpratisaṃyuktā sūtrāntas
tathāgatasya atyayena **dakṣiṇāpathe pracariṣyanti**. dakṣiṇāpat-
hāt punar eva **virtanyāṃ pracariṣyanti**, virtanyāḥ punar
uttarapathe pracariṣyanti. navamaṇḍaprāpte dharmavinaye.
saddharmasya antardhānakālasamaye samanvāhṛtāste śāriputra
tathāgatena kulaputrāḥ kuladuhitaraś ca. tasmin kāle ya imāṃ
prajñāpāramitāṃ udgrahīṣyanti dhārayiṣyanti vācayiṣyanti
paryavāpsyanti pravartayiṣyanti deśayiṣyanty upadekṣyanty
uddeḥsyanti svādhyāsyanti **antaśo likhitvā pustakagatām api
kṛtvā dhārayiṣyanti**, jñātās te śāriputra tathāgatena, adhiṣṭhitās
te śāriputra tathāgatena, drṣṭās te śāriputra tathāgatena,
vyavalokitās te śāriputra tathāgatena buddhacakṣuṣā.*

śāriputra āha iyam api bhagavan prajñāpāramitā

⁹ P.L. Vaidya (ed.), *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā with Haribhadra's Commentary Called Āloka*, Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960 (Buddhist Sanskrit Texts No. 4), p. 112.1. For discussions of the theory of the southern origin of *Prajñāpāramitā*, see e.g. Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, Tome I, Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1944, pp. 24-26; Edward Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, 'S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1960, pp. 9-12.

*evaṃgambhīrā paścime kāle paścime samaye vaistārikī bhaviṣyaty
uttarasyāṃ diśi uttare digbhāge? bhagavan āha ye tatra
śāriputra uttarasyāṃ diśy uttare digbhāge imāṃ gambhīrāṃ
prajñāpāramitāṃ śrutvā atra prajñāpāramitāyāṃ yogam
āpatsyante te vaistārikīm kariṣyanti.*

Moreover, Śāriputra, these *sūtrantas* associated with the six perfections will, after the passing away of the Tathāgata, circulate in the South. From the South they will circulate in the East, and from the East they will circulate to the North – from the time when the Dharma-Vinaya is like freshly made cream right into the period when the good law disappears.¹⁰ Those sons of the family or daughters of the family who at that time take up, hold, recite, master, propagate, teach, instruct in, explain, or chant this *Prajñāpāramitā*, who at the least write it down in the form of a book and preserve it, they, Śāriputra, are borne in mind by the Tathāgata, they are known by the Tathāgata, they are seen by the Tathāgata, they are watched over by the Tathāgata with the vision of an Awakened One.

Śāriputra asked: “Blessed One, in the last age, in the final period, will this *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is so profound, be wide-

¹⁰ Cf. Edward Conze (tr.), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary*, Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973, p. 159: “Moreover, these Sutras associated with the six perfections will, after the passing away of the Tathagata, appear in the South. From the South they will spread to the East, and from there to the North – from the time when the Dharma-Vinaya is like freshly made cream right into the period when the good law disappears.” I am not convinced that Conze’s interpretation of *navamaṇḍ-aprāpte ... antardhānakālasamaye* is correct, but follow it for now for want of a better solution.

spread in the Northern direction, in the Northern region?¹¹ The Blessed One replied, “Those, Śāriputra, in the Northern direction, in the Northern region who listen to the *Prajñāpāramitā* and devote themselves to it there will spread it widely.

In Chapter 28, we find *Prajñāpāramitā* circulating amongst humans and in the Tuṣita Heavens:¹²

*ye hi kecid ānanda bodhisattvā mahāsattvāḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ
carīṣyanti, niṣṭhā tatra gantavyā-manuṣyebhya evaite cyutā
bhaviṣyanti te ihopapannās tuṣitebhya eva vā devanikāyebhyaś
cyutā bhaviṣyanti manuṣyeṣu evopapannāḥ. tat kasya hetoḥ. tathā
hi manuṣyeṣu tuṣiteṣu ca deveṣu iyaṃ prajñāpāramitā vistareṇa
pracarīṣyatī ti.*

One can conclude with certainty, Ānanda, that the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas who course in the *Prajñāpāramitā* have been reborn here from [previous lives as] humans, or that or they have been reborn as humans from [previous lives in] the Tuṣita Heavens. Why? Because it is among humans and the Tuṣita gods that this *Prajñāpāramitā* will widely circulate.

In Chapter 32, the last chapter, the word occurs in a passage of immense significance, the final statement of the entire text, which identi-

¹¹ That Haribhadra, who worked at Trikūṭakavihāra ca. CE 800, glosses *uttare dig-bhāge* with *cīna-deś' ādau* perhaps reflects the transregionalism of the age: see U. Wogihara, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra'ālokā Prajñāpāramitāvyaḥkhyā*, Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, [1932] 1973, p. 488.18.

¹² Vaidya (ed.) p. 227.2. Cf. Conze (tr.) p. 266.

fies *Prajñāpāramitā* with the Tathāgata.¹³

*tasmāt tarhi ānanda yathaiva tvayā mamaitarhi tiṣṭhato dhriyamāṇasya yāpayato 'smin samucchraye prema ca prasādaś ca gauravaṃ ca kṛtam, tathaiva tvayā ānanda mamātyayād asyāṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ kartavyaṃ. dvir api trir api te ānanda parīndāmi anuparīndāmi enāṃ prajñāpāramitām, yatheyaṃ nāntardhīyet, yathā nāsyāṃ tvam anyāḥ puruṣaḥ syāḥ. yāvad ānanda iyaṃ prajñāpāramitā **loke pracariṣyati**, tāvat tathāgatas tiṣṭhatī ti veditavyam. tāvat tathāgato dharmaṃ deśayati ti veditavyam. avirahitās te ānanda sattvā buddhadarśanena dharmāśravaṇena saṃghopasthānena ca veditavyam. tathāgatāntikāvacarās te ānanda sattvā veditavyāḥ, ya enāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ śroṣyanty udgrahīṣyanti dhārayiṣyanti vācayiṣyanti paryavāpsyanti pravartayiṣyanti deśayiṣyanty upadekṣyanty uddeṣyanti svādhyāsyanti likhīṣyanti satkariṣyanti gurukariṣyanti mānayiṣyanti pūjayiṣyanty arcayiṣyanty apacāyi-ṣyanti puṣpadhūpagandhamālyavilepanacūrṇacivaracchatradhvajaghaṇṭāpatākābhiḥ, samantāc ca dīpamālābhiḥ, bahuvīdhābhiś ca pūjābhir iti.*

Therefore, Ānanda, just as at present you have acted with love, faith, and respect towards my body while I have lived, stayed, and continued, just so, Ānanda, after my passing you should act towards this *Prajñāpāramitā*. A second time, a third time, Ānanda, I entrust and I bequeath to you this *Prajñāpāramitā*, that it will not be lost ... This should be known: As long, Ānanda, as this

¹³ Vaidya (ed.) 260.25. Cf. Conze (tr.) p. 300. Here Conze renders the phrase “be observed in the world”.

Prajñāpāramitā circulates in the world, so long the Tathāgata remains, so long the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma: this should be known. It is to be known that those beings, Ānanda, will not be deprived of the sight of the Buddha, the hearing of the Dharma, the serving of the Saṃgha. Those beings, Ānanda, are to be known as in close range of the Tathāgata, who listen to, take up, hold, recite, master, teach, instruct in, explain, chant, write down, honour, revere, and worship this *Prajñāpāramitā*, with flowers, incense, perfumes, garlands, ointments, aromatic powders, robes, sunshades, banners, bells, streamers, and from all sides with lamps and garlands, and many types of offerings.

II

These passages point to a self-consciousness and a concern for circulation amongst the individual textual communities of the *sūtras*, and the sharing of a common vocabulary by the different communities. How did the texts circulate? Orally, or as books? The answer is, most probably, both, and in fact the two need not be separated. Manuscripts were not sent by post or as attachments: the journey of a text was a process involving recitation, explanation, and adoration.

The frequent use of the term *dharmabhāṇaka* in important Mahāyāna *sūtras* suggests that these “reciters of the Dharma” played a central role in their dissemination. *Dharmabhāṇakas* are to be protected, cherished, and worshipped – indeed, the *dharmabhāṇaka* was to be seen as the Buddha himself. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* devotes an entire chapter to them (Sanskrit Chapter 18, *Dharmabhāṇakānuśaṃsā-parivarta*). The same text repeatedly lauds the merits of writing the *dharmaparyāya* down or having others write it down. The merit of the worship of the *dharmaparyāya* as a book (*pustakagataṃ vā satkuryād*

gurukuryāt, etc.) and of carrying the manuscript of the *dharmaparyāya* on one's shoulder (*ya imaṃ dharmaparyāyaṃ pustakagataṃ kṛtvā aṃsena parivahati*) is also applauded.¹⁴ The manuscript of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* functions as a relic.

Dharma-bhāṇaka does not seem to have been a vocation as such, and the *sūtras* use other terms, for example “the *bhikṣu* who holds this *sūtra*”.¹⁵ A revealing passage at the beginning of the *Anumodanāpuṇyanirdeśa-parivarta* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* Sanskrit, Chapter 17) points to attempts to propagate the *dharmaparyāya* throughout society, by male and female monastics, by lay men and women, and even young men and women, down to the family level:¹⁶

*yaḥ kaścīd ajita kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā tathāgatasya
parinirvṛtasya imaṃ dharmaparyāyaṃ deśyamānaṃ
prakāśyamānaṃ śṛṇuyād bhikṣur vā bhikṣuṇī vā upāsako vā
upāsikā vā vijñapurūṣo vā kumārako vā kumārīkā vā śrutvā
cābhyanumodet | sa ca tato dharmāśravaṇāt utthāyya prakrāmet
| sa ca vihāragato vā gṛhagato vā araṇyagato vā vīthīgato vā
grāmagato vā janapadagato vā | tāṃ hetuṃs tāni kāraṇāni ca
dharmaṃ yathāśrutam yathodgṛhītam yathābalam aparasya
sattvasy' ācakṣet mātur vā pitur vā jñāter vā sāmmodikasya vā
saṃstutasya vā anyasya vā kasyacit so 'pi yadi śrutvā 'numodet |
anumodya ca punar anyasmai ācakṣen so 'pi taṃ śrutvā*

¹⁴ Haruaki Kotsuki (ed.), *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkam: Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from University of Tokyo General Library (No. 414), Romanized Text*, Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2003 (Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series 5), p. 165.3 and 165.19, respectively.

¹⁵ *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Kern & Nanjio) p. 421.5, *evaṃrūpaṃ sūtrāntadhā-rakaṃ bhikṣuṃ*.

¹⁶ *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Kotsuki) p. 169.9.

*anumoded anumodya ca so 'pi aparasmai ācakṣet so 'pi taṃ śrutvā
 'numodet ity anena paryāyeṇa yāvat pañcāsat paramparāya|| atha
 khalu ajita yo 'sau pañcasattamaḥ puruṣo bhavet
 paramparaśravaṇānumodakas tasyāpi tāvad aham ajita
 kulaputrasya vā kuladuhitur vā anumodanāsahagataṃ
 puṇyābhisamśkāraṃ abhinirdekṣāmi ...*

(The Blessed One to Bodhisattva Maitreya) Ajita, a son of the family or daughter of the family – whether a monk, a nun, a layman, a laywoman, an intelligent person, a young man, or a young woman – who, after the Tathāgata has passed away, hears this *dharmaparyāya* being taught and proclaimed, and having listened to it rejoices, and then leaves that dharma-lecture and returns to the monastic residence, to the home, to the forest, to the roadway, to the town, or to the countryside, and announces the causes and reasons, the Dharma as they have heard it, as they have remembered it, according to their ability, to another being – mother or father, relative or one who rejoices or praises, or to any one else – and that person rejoices upon hearing it, and, after rejoicing, proclaims it to another; and that person too rejoices upon hearing it, and having heard it, rejoices, and in this fashion up to a succession (*parampara*) of fifty ...

This passage is given as an ideal situation, and is followed by an extravagant simile to explain the vast merit to be gained in this manner. But it also suggests that a thorough-going ideology of propagation stimulated the circulation of Mahāyāna *sūtras* in India and abroad. The comparative reading of similar passages in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and other Mahāyāna *sūtras* should help us to understand further the ideologies of propagation, oral and written,

and thereby contribute to our understanding of the remarkable spread of Mahāyāna ideas, practices, texts, and artefacts.

*President,
Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation
Research Fellow,
Lumbini International Research Institute
Guest Professor,
International College
for Advanced Buddhist Studies*