

REPORT ON THE XIVTH CONFERENCE OF
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHIST STUDIES

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The XIVth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (IABS) took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, from the 29th of August to the 3rd of September 2005. The conference, with an attendance of more than three hundred participants, was very capably organized by a committee composed of D. Seyfort Rugg (Honorary President), T. Skorupski (Chairman), U. Pagel, B. Quessel, M. Willis (Secretaries) and A. Leduc-Pagel (Administrative Assistant).

The conference began with the Plenary Session, during which the President of the IABS, Professor J. Takasaki, delivered his address, “Between Translation and Interpretation: Cases in the Chinese Tripiṭaka”, examining some aspects of the translations of Paramārtha (Zhen di). Subsequently Professors J. Silk and N. Aramaki delivered an address in memory of the late Professor Gadjin Nagao, a founding member of the IABS and one whose contribution to Buddhist Studies was particularly outstanding in its breadth and profundity.

As in previous IABS conferences, the presentations by participants were grouped according to panels and sections. Thus there were fourteen panels, concentrating on specific topics, and seventeen sections in which papers were grouped according to general thematic affinities. A list of the topics of the panels and sections gives some idea of the current interests pursued in contemporary Buddhist Studies as well as the wide range of approaches.

Panels:

1. Ancient Champa to Modern Siam: Perspectives on Buddhist Art in Southeast Asia (Convener: P. Chirapravati)
2. Buddhism and Modernity in Korea (J.P. Park)

3. Buddhist Art: Historical Evidence from Gandhāra (K. Behrendt)
4. Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts from Central Asia and Afghanistan (J.-U. Hartmann)
5. Disputed Authorities: Authenticity and Efficacy in Buddhist Scriptures (L. Kuo and P. Skilling)
6. Dunhuang Tantric Buddhism (S. van Schaik and J. Dalton)
7. Issues in the Art History of Early Indian Buddhism (R. DeCaroli)
8. Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature (J. Silk)
9. Meanings of the Lotus Sūtra for Contemporary Humanity (T. Kubo)
10. Newar Buddhism (W. Tuladhar-Douglas)
11. Social and Intellectual History of Buddhism in Tibet (D. Maher)
12. Studies in Chinese Buddhist Historiography (E. Morrison)
13. Studies of Gandhāran Buddhist Manuscripts (R. Salomon)
14. Vernacular Texts and Textual Communities in South and South-east Asia (J. McDaniel)

Sections:

1. Abhidharma and Schools of Buddhist Philosophy (Chairperson: R. Gethin)
2. Buddhism and Brahmanism (T. Proferes)
3. Buddhism in China (T. Barrett)
4. Buddhism in the Himalayan Area and Inner Asia (T. Skorupski)
5. Buddhism in Japan (L. Dolce)
6. Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (K. Crosby)
7. Buddhism in the West (E. Harris)
8. Buddhist Arts (M. Willis)
9. Buddhist Hermeneutics, Language and Commentarial Techniques (T. Tillemans)
10. Contemporary Developments in Buddhism (M. Bingenheimer)
11. Early Buddhism in India (A. Tilakaratne)
12. Logic and Epistemology in Buddhism (S. Katsura)
13. Manuscripts and Codicology (C. Scherrer-Schaub)
14. Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka (E. Steinkellner and D. Seyfort Ruegg)

15. Shin Buddhism (A. Saito)
16. Vajrayāna Buddhism (B. Cuevas)
17. Vinaya Studies (R. Gombrich)

A brief comment. What was evident to the present observer was the importance of manuscript studies in this conference, with several panels and sections consecrated to Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts from diverse sources. There were also striking new publications of edited materials, including the first installment of the long-awaited Sanskrit text of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* of Dignāga and its commentary by Jinendrabuddhi. It is clear that with the astounding richness of the material yet to be edited and analyzed, philological research will remain vital for the foreseeable future, providing that conscientious researchers are not hamstrung in their efforts. (See Appendix below for the relevant IABS resolution.) Not only are new materials on sūtra texts becoming available, but also key śāstras that once remained obscure, imprecise or even unapproachable without the Sanskrit are now becoming readable to competent modern interpreters. It is to be hoped that with the philological advances, philosophical understanding will follow suit.

The conference ended with a General Assembly and a reception at the British Museum. The organizers are to be thanked for their excellent work in arranging practical and scholarly matters, as well as a stimulating set of entertainment programs. The success of the XIVth Conference bodes well for Buddhist Studies.

Appendix

In the months preceding the XIVth conference, controversy arose about the propriety of scholarly work on material relevant to Buddhist Studies, especially when manuscripts were of uncertain provenance or of disputed ownership; indeed charges of impropriety had on occasion been formulated in the media and elsewhere in extreme terms that arguably created more heat than light on what is, in fact, a complex set of ethical and legal issues. Accordingly, the IABS, as the major professional association representing Buddhist Studies, felt the need to take a position on these matters, if future research was not to be negatively affected or even rendered impossible. The following resolution was adopted unanimously by the Board of the International Association of Buddhist Studies at their meeting on Aug. 29, 2005:

Resolution concerning the scholarly study of manuscripts, inscriptions, etc. of uncertain provenance and/or title of ownership

“It is resolved that when manuscripts, inscriptions, art works or other documents and materials relevant to Buddhist Studies are available in public or private collections, scholars in Buddhist Studies should be free to undertake work on these materials for the purposes of research as well as publication and translation unless legally debarred from so doing in a specific case.

“No ethical opprobrium or stigma should attach to a scholar who engages in such work.

“It is understood that this scholarly work is conducted with due care and conscientiously. It is also understood that it is engaged in without prejudice to legal title of ownership to the said cultural materials, which may be subject to eventual determination in their respective jurisdictions by the competent judicial authorities and courts of law.

“This resolution is therefore not intended to impinge on binding laws or international agreements and conventions concerning legal title to cultural material, its export and import, or transfer of its ownership.”

This resolution is also to be found on the web page of the IABS (www.iabsinfo.org) and can be cited as the position and guidelines of the Association in future disputes on these matters.