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From *sūtra* to practice: discovering the liturgy of the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru in Old Tibetan manuscripts¹

Enbo Hu

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Germany
Email: enbo.hu@lmu.de

Abstract

This paper focuses on a group of Old Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang that are currently in the Stein and Pelliot Collections, some of which will be reordered and reunited. These texts were previously believed to concern the offering to the seven Tathāgatas or the texts about the former aspirations of the seven Buddhas. However, as my study shows, they actually pertain to liturgies for the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru. Based on earlier studies, this research seeks to establish a stronger connection between “pre-canonical” texts and canonical works in Tibetan and Chinese, and to establish a hitherto unknown link in the chain of the textual transmission of this liturgy. After revealing the structure of the liturgy, it seeks to fill the gap between the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra* itself and the religious practices of worshipping the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru. These are done through a two-dimensional textual analysis, i.e.: 1) identifying the connection between the Old Tibetan materials and the Tibetan canonical version; and 2) analysing the process of the liturgicalization of the *sūtra*.

Keywords: Saptatathāgata; Seven Tathāgatas; Bhaiṣajyaguru; Old Tibetan manuscripts; Liturgicalization; ITJ 433; D 3132

1. Introduction

The present paper focuses on one group of Old Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang: IOL Tib J (henceforth ITJ) 433 and 434, located in the Stein Collection in London, and Pelliot tibétain (henceforth PT) 179, 247, and 248, located in the Pelliot Collection in Paris. Due to a mix-up in the order of the folios, the manuscripts were separated and have then been stored in different locations. Here they will be reordered and reunited according to recently identified parallel texts in the Tibetan and Chinese *Tripiṭaka*.

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Upon scrutinizing the Tibetan and Chinese *Tripitaka*, it becomes evident that several texts deal with the liturgies for the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru,² which encompass the liturgy of reciting (*gzungs bklaḡ cho ga*) the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra* (*Sūtra of Bhaiṣajyaguru*, henceforth Bhg), and the liturgy of offering to the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru (previously known as the “Medicine Buddha”³), all sharing a common structure in their rituals.

Bu ston records in his *Chos ’byung* that Śāntarakṣita authored three versions of the liturgies of the seven Tathāgatas, described as follows:

slob dpon zhi ba ’tshos mdzad pa’i de bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi mchod pa’i cho ga rgyas ’bring bsdus gsum ’di mdo sde’i phyogs su gtogs par sems so || (*Chos ’byung*: 180b)

Ācārya Zhi ba ’tsho (i.e. Śāntarakṣita) made the *Liturgy of the Venerating of the Seven Tathāgatas* [in] three [versions], extensive, medium and brief, which I think should be included in the section of the *sūtra*.

It can be inferred that the three versions (extensive, medium, and brief) produced by Śāntarakṣita refer to the “original” versions of D 3132, D 3133, and D 3134, respectively.⁴ These are the only existing works in the Tibetan *Tripitaka* that address the same subject matter and have been attributed to Śāntarakṣita.

² The seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru are listed as follows:

- 1) Suparikīrtitanāmadheyaśrī, mTshan legs yongs bsgrags dpal gyi rgyal po, Shan mingcheng jixiang wang 善名稱吉祥王;
- 2) *Ratna-candra-padma-svalaṃkṛtakūśalatejonirghoṣa, Rin po che dang zla ba dang padmas rab tu brgyan pa mkhas pa gzi brjid sgra dbyangs kyi rgyal po, Baoyue zhiyan guangyin zizai wang 寶月智嚴光音自在王;
- 3) *Suvarṇabhadravimalaratnaprabhāsavratasiddhi, gSer bzang dri med rin chen snang brtul zhugs grub pa, Jinse baoguang miaoxing chengjiu 金色寶光妙行成就;
- 4) *Aśokottamaśrī, Mya ngan med mchod dpal, Wuyou zuisheng jixiang 無憂最勝吉祥;
- 5) *Dharmakīrtisāgaraghoṣa, Chos bsgrags rgya mtsho’i dbyang, Fahai leiying 法海雷音;
- 6) *Dharmasāgarāgramativikrīḍitābhijñā, Chos rgya mtsho mchog gi blos rnam par rol pa mngon par mkhyen pa’i rgyal po, Fahai shenghui youxi shentong 法海勝慧遊戲神通;
- 7) Bhaiṣajyaguruvaīḍūryaprabha (short as Bhaiṣajyaguru), sMan gyi bla bai ḍūrya’i ’od kyi rgyal po, Yaoshi liuliguang(wang) 藥師琉璃光(王).

The Sanskrit names of the seven Tathāgatas are reconstructed based on the English translation of D 503 by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee, and Chen 2013: their Tibetan names are based on D 503, D 504 and so forth; their Chinese names are based on T 451, tr. Yijing 義淨.

³ The full name of *Bhaiṣajyaguru*, i.e. *Bhaiṣajyaguruvaīḍūryaprabha*, bears the meaning of “the Buddha as one who possesses the radiance – or royal radiance – of beryl (not lapis lazuli!) which is the best of medicines” (Ding, Fan, Harrison et al. *Forthcoming*).

⁴ However, these three works have not been recorded by any catalogues earlier than Bu ston’s *Chos ’byung*, such as *lHan kar ma* (ed. Herrmann-Pfandt 2008) and *’Phang thang ma* (ed. Kawagoe 2005). The reason remains a desideratum for further study. We must acknowledge that there are various possibilities and potential scenarios regarding the relationship between the texts ITJ 433, D 3132, D 3133, and D 3134. For instance, one possibility is that Śāntarakṣita may have authored ITJ 433, and the later texts D 3132, D 3133, and D 3134 could have been derived from ITJ 433. Another perspective is that there might not have been a strictly linear development of the texts, and the canonical texts could be edited versions originating from a tradition different from that of the manuscript ITJ 433. To explore these possibilities further and reach more definitive conclusions, additional evidence and scholarly investigations are required. (Possibilities mentioned by Dr Markus Viehbeck during the Doctoral Colloquium.)

Before commencing my investigation of the Old Tibetan manuscripts pertaining to the rituals of the *Saptatathāgatas* (seven Tathāgatas) and identifying the parallel texts in the Tibetan and Chinese *Tripitāka*, I had initially assumed that these liturgies might have been transmitted from Tibet to China. Consequently, the chain of their textual transmission appeared to be: Classical Tibetan → Chinese.

However, this raised questions about the period preceding the authorship of these texts as Classical Tibetan works and their compilation into the Tibetan *Tripitāka*. I became curious about the possible existence of a “pre-canonical” version of these texts. There appeared to be a question mark at the starting point of their textual transmission: ? → Classical Tibetan → Chinese.

To address this uncertainty, I sought to identify extant Old Tibetan manuscripts related to these liturgies that could be dated to the era of the so-called “*bstan pa snga dar*” (earlier spread of Buddhism). This would allow us to elucidate a “pre-canonical” form covered in these manuscripts, representing the earliest stage of the tradition. This would then enable a deeper understanding of how the worship of a single Bhaiṣajyaguru, as depicted in the Sanskrit text of Bhg, developed into the worship of the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru. Moreover, this investigation could shed light on the rituals in these liturgies, their significance, and the broader context of the early introduction of Buddhism into Tibet.

With these questions in mind, I embarked on my investigation of the Old Tibetan manuscripts. Through this research, I hope to have now filled the gap in the chain of textual transmission of these liturgies, and have also addressed several related questions.

For the purposes of this paper, the focus is primarily on the investigation of the Old Tibetan manuscripts concerning the liturgies for the seven Tathāgatas and their connection to canonical texts, particularly in the Tibetan and Chinese *Tripitāka*.

2. Previous studies of IOL Tib J 433 and other Old Tibetan manuscripts

In Louis de La Vallée Poussin’s catalogue (de La Vallée Poussin 1962: 140–41), ITJ 433 is described as comprising folios 9–100, with dimensions of 6.1 × 24.5 cm, presented in the form of a *poṭhī*, and folios are scribed by two different hands. This manuscript contains the *pūjā* (veneration) to the *Saptatathāgatas*.

As for other Old Tibetan manuscripts concerning the same topic, Lalou (1939: 68–9) identified PT 248 as a fragment of the *abhiṣeka* ritual of Tathāgata Bhaiṣajyaguruvaīḍūryaprabha. However, she did not provide specific information about the content of PT 247 that seemed to be related.

Later, Dalton and van Schaik (2006: 177–8) observed the correlation between ITJ 433 and the canonical text Q 135 [= D 503 *De bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, *Sūtra of the Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*], Q 3955 [= D 3134], ITJ 434 and Pelliot tibétain 179, which are texts about the former aspirations or vows of the seven Buddhas (*De bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam*, *Saptatathāgatapūrvapraṇidhāna*). They also mentioned that an additional folio from ITJ 433 can be found in ITJ 434, but their attempt to insert ITJ 434 after “ITJ 433/1: 35v” (folio 35 of ITJ 433) led in the wrong direction, and they expressed uncertainty about the nature of the correspondence with the canonical version: “once again the nature of the correspondence with the canonical version is obscure” (Dalton and van Schaik 2006: 178).

In his study, Schopen (1978: 73) stated that there are “only two small fragments of a Tibetan translation of this ‘text’ [i.e. *StP = D 503; my addition] from Tun-huang [i.e. Dunhuang]”, and he was unsure “whether these fragments come from Bhg (D 504 *bCom ldan 'das sman gyi bla bai ḍūrya'i 'od kyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pas zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*) or *StP [D 503]”.

While these previous studies have provided important information, the correspondences they have pointed out between the Old Tibetan manuscripts and the Tibetan canonical texts can now be clarified. The correspondence between ITJ 433 and the canonical texts Q 135 [= D 503] and Q 3955 [= D 3134] does not appear convincing, and the link between ITJ 433 and ITJ 434 is incorrect. Moreover, those studies have not explored the correspondences between the manuscripts and the Chinese canonical texts.

Here, I will rectify Lalou 1939 and Schopen 1978 by identifying PT 247 and PT 248. Furthermore, I will reunite other manuscripts related to the same topic that have been separated in the Stein Collection and Pelliot Collection. It should be noted that both of Schopen's presumptions (Bhg and *StP) are misleading, since the two fragments he mentioned (PT 247 and PT 248) belong together with ITJ 433, rather than being Bhg and *StP as presumed. And PT 247 is, in fact, just a missing folio of ITJ 433.

The field of studies on the *sūtra* and the worship of the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru is extensive and diverse. There are now many excellent studies which are not, however, directly relevant to the focus of this paper and therefore will not be discussed here in detail. For those interested in exploring further research on this subject, Schopen's 1978 work serves as an excellent starting point. It offers a comprehensive overview of the available sources and scholarly interpretations, shedding light on various aspects of this field of study.

3. Remarks after the comparison of parallel texts

3.1. Remarks on the manuscripts

After the correct parallel texts of the Old Tibetan manuscripts had been identified, it became evident that the sequence of the folios was in disorder, with some folio numbers evidently being wrong. So, with the help of the parallel texts, the "original" order of the folios of the manuscripts is reconstructed, just like putting a chaotic puzzle together piece-by-piece to get a full view of the picture.

Normally, the folio numbers offer reliable information about the order of a manuscript. However, in the case of ITJ 433, the folio numbers were written in a very cursive way, leading to mistakes in their sequence. For instance, the folio number 33 (*so sum*) was mistakenly written after 62 (*ro nyis*), most likely due to the similarity of the characters *so* in 33 (*so sum*) and *ro* in 63 (*ro sum*). Consequently, the folio order of ITJ 433 is as follows: [61 missing], 62, and then it continues with 33 after 62, i.e. [61 missing], 62, 33, 34. The folio numbers appear to have been added later and were incorrect.

Furthermore, it is clear now that PT 247 in Lalou's catalogue belongs to the same manuscript as ITJ 433, and it can even be identified as one of the missing folios of ITJ 433, i.e. folio 45. The majority of the folios of PT 179 could also be inserted into ITJ 433 as its missing folios.⁵ Therefore, the "original" folio numbers of the whole text might be as follows: 3, [4–21],⁶ 22, [27], 28–30, [31], PT 179 (32), [33, 34], ITJ 433 (35), 36, [37], PT 179 (38), ITJ 433 (39), 40–44, [45], 46–49, 52r,⁷ 50v, [51], 52, [53], PT 179 (54), ITJ 433 (55), [56–8], 59, 60, [61], 62, 33 [*sic*], 34, [35, 36], PT 179 (37), [38–40], ITJ 433 (41), [42], 43, PT 247 (44), [45], 46–48, [49], 50–53,⁸ 55, [56], 57, [58, 59], 60, [61], 62, [63], 64–74, ITJ 434 (75), [76], ITJ 433 (77), (no number = 78), 79–83, [84], 85–91.⁹

⁵ Folio 66 of PT 179, however, could not be inserted into ITJ 433. I find no clear explanation of this, perhaps PT 179 is a later patch-up for ITJ 433, the text in PT 179 therefore does not fully match the original text in ITJ 433.

⁶ [] signifies missing folios.

⁷ The folio number seems to be wrong here, it should be 50r.

⁸ Folio 54 is missing, but the corresponding text D 3132 here is continuous.

⁹ The text of ITJ 433 ends after folio 91 according to the parallel canonical text.

There is one potential problem with the pagination. According to the parallel canonical text, the folios 90 (*dgu bcu tham*), 91 and 92 [missing] of PT 179 could be inserted at the very beginning of ITJ 433, followed by ITJ 433 folios 93–99 and folio 3. It could also be possible that after folio 91 of ITJ 433, which is the end of the liturgy according to the canonical version, there is a further text dealing with the preparation of the liturgy, corresponding to folio PT 179 (folio 90), 91, [92], ITJ 433 (93), 94–99 and 3. These two assumptions obviously require further evidence and explanation.

If we put the Sanskrit *sūtra*, i.e. Bhg, into the history of the textual transmission of worshipping Bhaiṣajyaguru, a process of liturgicalization from *sūtra* to practice is evident. The relations between the Old Tibetan manuscripts, the canonical versions, and the “foundational text”, i.e. the Sanskrit text of Bhg, have been established as follows (see Table 1).

3.2. The result of the comparison

The comparison has yielded significant findings. It is now evident that the majority of the manuscripts deal with the liturgy of the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru, and one Tibetan parallel text in the Tibetan *Tripitaka* has also been found. ITJ 433 (or, more precisely, most of it¹⁰) contains an Old Tibetan version of D 3132 *De bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad pa rgyas pa'i mdo sde'i man ngag* (*Personal Instructions on the Sūtra of the Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*). Additionally, since D 3133 shares most of its passages with D 3132, we can consider a major part of D 3133 as derived from the Old Tibetan version represented by ITJ 433. This Old Tibetan version later “developed” into the Classical Tibetan version D 3132, as evident in the Tibetan *Tripitaka*, and was also copied and preserved in Dunhuang (see Figure 1).

From the perspective of textual transmission, a series of texts containing the liturgical method (*chog sgrigs*, *jin gui* 經軌; or *vidhi*, *cho ga*, *yi gui* 儀軌) of the seven Tathāgatas can also be traced back to a common source, i.e. an Old Tibetan version containing the same topic as ITJ 433. These texts share almost the same structure and ritual procedures, leading us to presume that the tradition of worshipping the seven Tathāgatas originated from this Old Tibetan version found in ITJ 433 and other Old Tibetan manuscripts.¹¹ Notable texts in this tradition include Panchen IV bLo bzang Chos kyi rgyal mtshan's (1570–1662) *bCom ldan 'das sman bla'i mdo chog snying po bsdus pa yid bzhin nor bu* (*Bojiāfan yaoshi jinggui xinyao lüeshe ruyi moni* 薄伽梵藥師經軌心要略攝·如意摩尼, *Extracted Essential Liturgical Method of Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Wish-fulfilling Jewel*),¹² Ye shes rgyal mtshan's (1713–93) *sMan bla'i mdo mchog gi snying po'i chog sgrigs rin po che'i them skas* (*Yaoshi jinggui xinyao huibian baoti* 藥師經軌心要彙編·寶梯, *Compiled Essential Liturgical Method of Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Jewel-ladder*), 'jam mgon 'ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's (1846–1912) *sMan bla'i mdo chog bsdus pa bdud rtsi'i bum bzang* (*Yaoshi jingwang luexiu yigui ganlu shengping* 藥師經王略修儀軌·甘露聖瓶, *Extracted Liturgical Method of Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Auspicious Vessel of Amṛta*) and so forth.

3.3. The purpose of ITJ 433 / D 3132, 3133 and their affiliation

The purpose of authoring the text becomes evident from the colophon of D 3132:

dbang phyug dam pa'i mnga' bdag dpal lha btsan po lha sras khri srong lde'u btsan
gyi sku tshe bsring ba dang | dbu rmog btsan pa dang | chab srid mtho ba dang | las

¹⁰ ITJ 433 contains more texts except the liturgy of Bhaiṣajyaguru, which are not closely relevant to the topic of this paper and therefore will not be covered here.

¹¹ For further details see Chen 2010, who took Śāntarakṣita as the founder of the worship of Bhaiṣajyaguru in Tibet.

¹² For the study of this text, see Jamyang Kaichao 2012; for the Chinese translation, see Chen 2021.

Table 1. Overview of the structure and relationship between *sūtra*, liturgy, and practice

Sūtra		Liturgy				Practice ¹³		Structure ¹⁴
Sanskrit ¹⁵	Old Tibetan manuscripts ¹⁶				Tibetan canonical text	Chinese canonical text		
Bhg	ITJ 433	ITJ 434	PT 179	PT 247	D 3132	T 925 ¹⁷		
					246b1–3 ¹⁸	33a29–b2	I. The beginning / preparation	i. Taking a bath
					246b4	33b2–3		ii. Keeping a fast
			90r1–91v4		246b4–248a5	33b3–15		iii. Arranging the <i>maṅḍala</i>
	93r1–96v2				248a5–b7	33b2 ¹⁹		iv. Generating the four immeasurables
	96v2–97v2				249a1–7	33b16–c8	II. The main action	i. Four empowerment (a. ground
	97v2–98r2				249a7–b4	33c8–17		b. palace
	98r3–v4				249b4–7	33c17–27		c. teaching thrones
	98v4–99v4				249b7–250a3	33c27–34a7		d. offering)
	3r1–v4				250a3–252a6	34a8–c8		ii. Inviting the noble ones

¹³ The content of the practices follows D 3132 since the text in ITJ 433 is not complete.

¹⁴ This refers to the corresponding structure of the seven-branch offering, which I will explain in section 4.1.

¹⁵ The division of the text follows Schopen 1978.

¹⁶ Here we presumably inserted PT 179 (folio 90), 91, [92], ITJ 433 (93), 94–99 at the beginning of ITJ 433 in order to show the whole structure more clearly.

¹⁷ T 925 *Yaoshi liuliguang wang qifo benyuan gongde jing niansong yigui* 藥師琉璃光王七佛本願功德經念誦儀軌 (*Liturgy of Reciting the Sūtra on the Merit of the Original Aspirations of the Seven Buddhas including King Bhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabha*) is translated from D 3133 by Shaluoba 沙羅巴 (1259–1314); for more detail of T 925, see Chen 2010.

¹⁸ The part deals with keeping the mind calm and pure and free from afflictions, which is named later as the “inner bath” in other liturgies, while the normal bath is the “outer bath” for “taking a bath”.

¹⁹ The procedure of the rituals about preparation in T 925 differs slightly from D 3132.

§5.1–12, §7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15; §10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21	(4–21 missing); 22r1–85r2 (32, 38, 45, 54, 37, 75 found in other mss.)	75	32, 38, 54, 37	45	252a6–273b5	34c09–41b9		iii. Paying homage to and taking refuge in the “Three Jewels” and expressing aspirations	<i>vandanā</i>
	85r2–89r1				273b5–274b4	41b10–28	III. The end	i. Offering	<i>pūjana</i>
	89r1–90v3				274b4–275a2	41b29–c8		ii. Confession	<i>pāpa-deśanā</i>
	90v3–91r2				275a2–4	41c8–12		iii. Sending the noble ones back to their places	
	91r3				275a4			iv. Dedication	<i>pariṇāmanā</i>

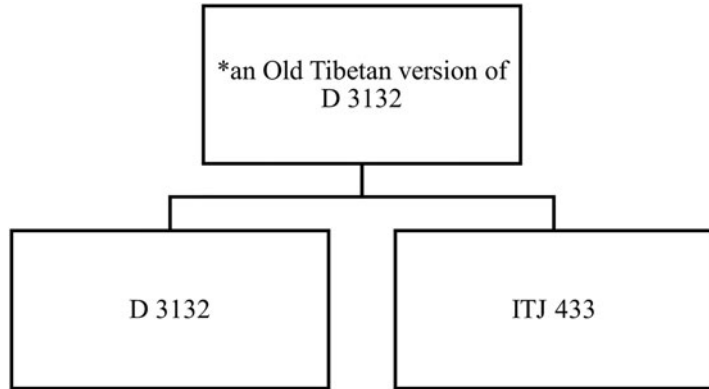


Figure 1. Presumed process tree of D 3132 and ITJ 433

sgrib sbyang ba dang | tshogs gnyis spel ba'i ched du | de bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pa'i mdo sde'i man ngag | slob dpon bo dhi satvas mdzad || (rgyud, pu 275a4–275a5.)

For the sake of the longevity of the Lord of the noble lords, the Auspicious Heavenly bTsan po, the Heavenly Son Khri Srong lde'u btsan (r. c. 754–97), the might of [his] helmet [= authority], the supremacy of the reign, the purification of [his] stained [= bad] *karman*, and the development of the two accumulations [of his gnosis and merit]... Ācārya Bodhisattva made the *Personal Instructions on the Sūtra of the Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*. (Slightly changed based on van der Kuijp 2004: 5.)

It is also worth mentioning that mKhas grub rje noted that:

[...] because the ācārya Śāntarakṣita has composed a rite [based on them] (Toh. 3133, no author listed).²⁰ He composed it consistent with the structure of Kriyā-Caryā rites, in that he has the preliminaries of observing the Sabbath (*upośadha*), and so on. [...] (tr. Lessing and Wayman 1978: 109).²¹

Given the above information, we are informed that Ācārya Śāntarakṣita composed D 3133 following the structure of Kriyā-Caryā (*bya spyod*, action-tantra) rites, which implies that it might not be unreasonable to categorize D 3132 similarly, suggesting that D 3132 also belongs to Kriyā-Caryā (*bya spyod*) rites.

From the perspective of practitioners, there is a need to put the *sūtra* (in this case, the Sanskrit Bhḡ) into practice, which necessitates the creation of instructions that are more suitable and comprehensible to practitioners. Thus, various forms of elucidation have been developed, such as commentaries (*vṛtti*, 'grel ba), expositions (*bhāṣya*, *bshad pa*), perpetual commentaries (*pañjikā*, *dka' 'grel*), personal instructions (*upadeśa*, *man ngag*), manuals (*vidhi*, *cho ga*), liturgical method (*chog sgrigs*), ritual for *sūtra* (*mdo chog*) and so forth.

²⁰ Although D 3133 itself is unattributed, the Chinese translation based on D 3133, i.e. T 925, does attribute it to a text written by Shan hu zun zhe 善護尊者 (lit. the honourable well protecting), whom we could easily identify as Śāntarakṣita. Chen 2010 also leads us to the same conclusion.

²¹ mKhas grub rje's *Rgyud sde spyi'i mam par gzhag pa rgyas par brjod*: [...] slob dpon zhi ba 'tshos [i.e. Śāntarakṣita] cho ga mdzad cing de yang sngon du gso sbyong blang ba sogs bya spyod kyi cho ga'i sgrigs dang mthun par mdzad pa'i phyir [...] (cf. Lessing and Wayman 1978: 108). The question about whether Śāntarakṣita is the author of D 3132, D 3133, and D 3134, will be addressed in a further paper.

4. The liturgicalization of the texts

This section focuses particularly on the process of worshipping the seven Tathāgatas that is covered in ITJ 433 and other Old Tibetan manuscripts. It shows the difference between the *sūtra* itself and the rituals, i.e. how the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra* was transformed into a religious practice of worship through liturgy, which I would like to define as “liturgicalization”. That is to say, the *sūtra* itself is liturgicalized into religious practice.

As for the “ritual”, I follow the definition given by Tambiah:

Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition) (Tambiah 1985: 128).

As we see later in the main structure of ITJ 433, rituals such as the four empowerments and the act of paying homage to and taking refuge in the seven Tathāgatas align well with Tambiah’s definition.

In this paper, I try to distinguish between the terms “ritual” and “liturgy”. To be exact, the term “ritual” is used to designate performance-centred rituals, while “liturgy” designates the entire text as a manual for worship (*pūjā*). The liturgy includes a series of well-choreographed rituals and certain collective formulas for the conduct of worshippers. As for the term “practice”, I take it in a narrow sense of “religious practice”.

4.1. The main structure of the text as liturgy

In light of the previous explanation, the text of ITJ 433 (thus also D 3132) is considered to be the liturgy of the seven Tathāgatas, structured as follows:

- I. The beginning/preparation (*pūrvagama*, *sngon 'gro*, *qian xing* 前行)
 - i. Taking a bath
 - ii. Keeping fasting
 - iii. Arranging the *maṇḍala*
 - iv. Generating the four immeasurables (*catvāry apramāṇāni*, *tshad med pa bzhi*, *si wuliang* 四無量).²²
- II. The main action (*spyod pa*, *zhengxing* 正行)
 - i. Four empowerments (*adhiṣṭhāna*, *byin gyis rlob pa*, *jiachi* 加持)
 - a. Empowerment of the ground (*sa gzhi byin gyis rlob pa*, *jiachi dadi* 加持大地)
 - b. Empowerment of the palace (*khang bzang byin gyis rlob pa*, *jiachi gongdian* 加持宮殿)
 - c. Empowerment of the teaching thrones (*gdan khri byin gyis rlob pa*, *jiachi fazuo* 加持法座)
 - d. Empowerment of the offerings (*mchod pa byin gyis rlob pa*, *jiachi gongpin* 加持供品)
 - ii. Inviting the noble ones (*spyan 'dren pa*, *yingqing shengzhong* 迎請聖眾)
 - iii. Paying homage to and taking refuge in the “Three Jewels” and expressing aspirations
 - a. Paying homage to and taking refuge in the Buddhas, i.e. the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru and Śākyamuni
 - b. Paying homage to and taking refuge in the *dharmā*

²² i.e. loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*mudītā*), and impartiality/equanimity (*upekṣā*).

- c. Paying homage to and taking refuge in the *saṃgha* (including Mañjuśrī, Trāṇamukta, Vajrapāṇi, the 12 Great Generals of Yakṣas)
- III. The end (*mjug*, *jiexing* 結行)
 - i. Offering
 - ii. Confession
 - iii. Sending the noble ones back to their places
 - iv. Dedication

Some of the rituals above (II. iii and III. i, ii, also listed in Table 1) roughly correspond to the structure of the *saptavidhānuttara-pūjā* (the seven-branch offering, Tib. *yan lag bdun pa*, Chin. *qi zhi gong* 七支供).²³ The standard form consists of the following seven branches:

- i. Obeisance (*vandanā*): Reciting the formula of the Three Refuges and praising the excellent qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.
- ii. Offering (*pūjana*): It includes elaborate offerings to each of the senses and, in tantric rituals, so-called inner and secret offerings.
- iii. Confession of wrongdoing (*pāpadeśanā*): Acknowledging and repenting any unvirtuous deeds.
- iv. Admiration or rejoicing (*anumodana*): Taking delight in and admiration for the merits and virtues of others.
- v. Requesting the Buddhas to turn the wheel of *dharma* (*dharmacakrapravartanacodana*): Beseeking the Buddhas to teach the Dharma for the benefit of all beings.
- vi. Requesting the Buddhas not to pass into *parinirvāṇa* (*aparinirvṛtādhyeṣaṇa*): Beseeking the Buddhas to remain in the world and continue benefitting all sentient beings.
- vii. Dedication of merit (*pariṇāmanā*): Mentally or ritually dedicating/directing the accumulated merit (*puṇya*) to the welfare and enlightenment of all beings (based on PDB 2014: 776, 52, etc.).

This sevenfold ritual form is “a common liturgical legacy that cut across the bounds of individual sectarian and cult interests and functioned as an integrative basis for Chinese Buddhist devotion as a whole” (Stevenson 1987: 436). It is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition,²⁴ and later became a standard practice in many Mahāyāna traditions. It also became a common element in tantric *pūjās*.

The origins of the seven-branch offering are closely connected with the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-mahāvaiṣṭya-sūtra* (*The Sūtra of the Ornament of the Buddhas*, Chin. T 293 *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經, Tib. *Sangs rgyas phal po che zhes bya ba shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo*), particularly with the chapter known as “the chapter of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra” (*Puxian pusa xingyuan pin* 普賢菩薩行願品), which covers the Ten Aspirations of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (*Puxian(pusa) shida xingyuan* 普賢(菩薩)十大行願).²⁵

(1) to worship the buddhas 禮敬諸佛, (2) to praise the tathāgatas 稱讚如來, (3) to make offerings 廣修供養, (4) to repent sin 懺悔業障, (5) to rejoice in the merits attained by others 隨喜功德, (6) to ask the buddhas to teach 請轉法輪, (7) to ask the buddhas to stay in the world 請佛住世, (8) to follow the buddhas for study 常隨佛學, (9) to be friends with all beings 恆順衆生, and (10) to devote one’s merits to the salvation of others 普皆迴向 (DDB).

²³ Admittedly, the structure of this liturgy does not fully match the structure of the seven-branch offering. However, in the later liturgies of the seven Tathāgatas, the structure corresponding to the seven-branch offering becomes quite clear, especially in the Tangut sources, which I examine in another paper.

²⁴ For more details about the seven-branch offering, see Stevenson 1987: 441–64d.

²⁵ For the connection between the seven-branch offering and the Ten Aspirations of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, see Teiser 2022.

The following paragraphs will provide details of the rituals that are contained in ITJ 433 and other Old Tibetan manuscripts.

4.2. The popular ritual: prolonging life with banners and lamps

It is noteworthy that *mchod pa'i sbyor ba ni* (“the method of offering”) is added by the author of the text to specify the exact method conducting this ritual to achieve one of the prominent purposes in the mundane world, i.e. to prolong life. The sentences following *mchod pa'i sbyor ba ni* were named by the practitioners as “prolonging life with banners and lamps”, and achieved extreme popularity.²⁶

ITJ 433: mchod pa'i sbyor ba ni btsun ba kun dga' bo gang dag nad chen po (r2) las yongsu thar par 'dod pa	D 3132: mchod (270a2) pa'i sbyor ba ni btsun pa kun dga' bo gang dag nad chen po las yongs su thar par 'dod pa	D 503: byang chub sems dpa' skyabs grol gyis smras pa btsun pa kun dga' bo gang dag nad chen po las (268a5) yongs su thar bar 'dod pa
[...]	[...]	[...]
tshon sna lnga'i ba dan bzhi bcu rtsa dgu las lhag par bya'o	tshon sna lnga pa'i ba dan bzhi bcu rtsa dgu las lhag par bya'o	tshon sna lnga pa'i ba dan bzhi bcu rtsa dgu las lhag par bya'o

The same ritual, with identical details on how to offer to Bhaiṣajyaguru, is also present in another Old Tibetan manuscript fragment, PT 248:

PT 248: (a1) dge 'dun la zas dang skom dang | yo byad thams chad ci nus su mchod
cIng g.yog byos shig | (a2) nyin gcig la lan gsum bcom ldan 'das sman gyi bla be du
rya'i 'od gyi rgyal po de bzhin gshegs pa'i mtshan (a3) yid la dran bar byos shig || mye
mar bzhi ○ bcu rtsa dgu bud pas la | gzugs re re la yang mye mar bdun (a4) bdun
zhog ste | mye mar gcig gyang shing ○ rta'i 'khor lo tsham du byos la || zhag
bzhi bcu rtsa dgu'i (a5) bar du od ma zhil bar bya || tshon sna lnga la lha'i ba dan
bzhi mtho bzhi bcu rtsa dgu pa byos shig ||
a2. nyin gcig la lan gsum] nyin mtsan lan gsum du ITJ 433, nyin lan gsum mtshan lan
gsum du D.

4.3. Other rituals recorded in ITJ 433 and ITJ 434

4.3.1. Offering to the seven Tathāgatas

In addition to the rituals of offering banners and lamps, ITJ 433 and ITJ 434 contain several other rituals of worshipping the seven Tathāgatas. They involve the offering of

²⁶ Some scholars argue that this particular method is influenced by the similar method in Taoism, see Xiao 1996 and 2013. The full ritual of this paragraph is stated in the parallel text D 503: the bodhisattva Trāṇamukta replied, “Venerable Ānanda, those who want to free someone from a grave illness should observe the eightfold purification vows for seven days and seven nights to benefit the sick person. They should make as many offerings as possible to the monastic saṅgha of food, drink, and provisions, and offer service. They should focus on the name of the blessed Thus-Gone Bhaiṣajyaguruvaīḍūryaprabharāja three times each day and three times each night. They should recite this discourse 49 times, offer oil lamps for 49 days, and make seven statues. They should place seven oil lamps in front of each statue, and each of the oil lamps should be as large as a chariot wheel to ensure that the oil lamps will not go out during the 49 days. They should make more than 49 five-coloured flags”. (tr. The Dharmachakra Translation Committee, via 84000.co).

perfumes, incense, oil lamps, garlands, ornaments, songs, musical instruments, drums, and chanting the *dhāraṇī/mantra*, among other practices.

Regarding the placement of ITJ 434, it has been clarified above that it is not to be inserted after ITJ 433/1:35v. Instead, it corresponds to one of the missing folios of ITJ 433, namely, to folio 75 (*don lnga*).

ITJ 433: gal te des bdag mthong bar 'tsal na ||
chos gyi rnam grangs 'di yi ger 'drir stsal par
bgyi | (don zhi 74r1) \$:/: de bzhin gshegs pa 'di
dag gyi sku gzugs bdun yang bgyi ||

[...]

re ba thams chad kyang yongsu

(IOL 434) (don lnga 75r1)

bskang bar bgyi'o zhes bgyi ba la stsogs pa |
'phags pa'i bka' myi 'bab pa | tshad mar gyur
pas (r2) zhal gyis bzhes pa bzhin du | deng 'dir
yang mchod pa'i tshogs sbyar pa'i pho brang gi
dkyil 'khor 'dir (r3) bzhugs te | mchod pa bzhes
shing ○ gdan 'tshom bas mdo sde'i cho ga
yongsu rdzogs par bskang (r4) ba'i prin las
mdzad de | phan yon ji skad bka' stsal pa thams
cad bdag cag la stsogs pha²⁷

(IOL 434) (don lnga 75v1)

thams cad kyis thob par byin gyis brlab par ji
gang ||

r1. bgyi ba la stsogs pa] *om. D*; 'bab pa] 'gyur
ba ; pas] par D; r3. te] shing D; shing] te D;
'tshoms bas] 'dzom pas D; v1. sems can] *om. D*;
par ji gang] tu gsol D.

D 3132: gal te des bdag mthong bar 'tshal na chos kyi
rnam grangs 'di yi ger 'drir stsal bar bgyi | de bzhin
gshegs pa 'di dag gi sku gzugs bdun yang bgyi |

[...]

re ba thams cad yongsu

bskang bar bgyi'o zhes 'phags pa'i bka' mi 'gyur ba tshad
mar gyur par zhal gyis bzhes pa bzhin du | deng 'dir yang
mchod pa'i tshogs sbyar ba'i pho brang gi (271b7) dkyil
'khor 'dir bzhugs shing mchod pa zhes te | gdan 'dzom pas
mdo sde'i cho ga yongsu rdzogs par bskang ba'i phrin
las mdzad de | phan yon ji skad bka' stsal pa thams cad
bdag cag la sogs pa

sems can thams cad kyis thob par byin gyis brlab tu gsol ||

4.3.2. Empowerment of the palace

In the ritual of the empowerment of the palace, which is part of the preparation process, the comparison is made between the Old Tibetan manuscript ITJ 433 and the canonical version D 3132. It becomes evident that D 3132 contains more detailed information and is longer than ITJ 433. For instance, the term “*sgo gsum*” (three gates) in ITJ 433 is fully explained in the canonical version D 3132, where it is described as “*stong pa nyid*” (emptiness), “*mtshan ma med pa*” (signlessness), and “*smon pa med pa*” (wishlessness). The

²⁷ The linguistic evidence found in the Old Tibetan manuscripts is indeed significant for understanding the phonological features of the language used in these texts. The use of “*stsogs pha*” instead of “*sogs pa*” and “*ts-*” instead of “*tsh-*” are notable examples of these phonological distinctions. Li Fang-kuei (1933) argues that *s-<s-tsh-*, *sog-pa*, “to gather, to heap up” while *tshogs pa*, *tshogs* “to assemble”; Hill (2007) further points out that “The Tibetan script distinguishes the unaspirated consonant series *k, c, t, p, ts* from the aspirated consonant series *kh, ch, th, ph, tsh* ... According to the prescriptive rules of Written Tibetan, some initials of a consonant cluster may only be followed by unaspirated stops” and gives us examples like “*s-*: *sk, st, sp, sts*” and so forth. I express my gratitude to Prof. Guillaume Jacques for bringing these articles to my attention and enriching my understanding of the linguistic features found in the Old Tibetan manuscripts. It is also worthy of note that the *stshog pa* and *stsog pa* are indeed interchangeable in the Old Tibetan manuscripts according to OTDO.

additional details in D 3132 provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ritual of the empowerment of the palace compared to ITJ 433:

ITJ 433: rin po che mchog du 'bar ba bkod pa |

kham (3) gsum pa las yang dag par 'das ○ pa'i
spyod yul ||

byang cub sems dpa' dang | lha klu gnod (4) sbyin
la stsogs pa

mtha' yas pa rnam par rgyu ba | chos gyi ro'i dga'
ba dang | bde ba chen pos brtan pa || (go brgyad
98r1) \$:/ sems chan thams chad gyi don thams
chad yang dag par thob par byed par nye bar gnas
pa ||

rnam par (2) thar pa'i sgo gsum nas 'jug pa |○|

v4. brtan] brten D.

r1. par] pa D.

r2. gsum] chen po stong pa nyid dang | mtshan ma
med pa dang | smon pa med pa D.

D 3132: rin po che sna bdun mchog tu 'bar bar
bkod pa | 'jig rten gyi khams dpag tu med par
rgyas par 'od zer chen po rab tu 'byung ba | gnas
tha dad pa shin tu rnam par phye ba mtha' yas
par rnam par gnas pa | (249b1) rgya yongs su ma
chad pa **kham gsum las yang dag par 'das pa'i
spyod yul** | 'jig rten las 'das pa de'i bla ma'i dge
ba'i rtsa ba las byung ba shin tu rnam par dag
cing dbang sgyur ba'i rnam par rig pa'i mtshan
nyid | de bzhin gshegs pa'i gnas |

byang chub sems (249b2) dpa' dpag tu med pa'i
dge 'dun dang ldan pa | **lha** dang | **klu** dang | **gnod
sbyin** dang | dri za dang | lha ma yin dang | nam
mkha' lding dang | mi'am ci dang | lto 'phye chen
po dang | mi dang mi ma yin pa **mtha' yas pa
rnam par rgyu ba | chos kyi ro'i dga' ba dang
bde ba chen pos brten pa | (249b3) sems can
thams cad kyi don thams cad yang dag par
thob par byed pa | nye bar gnas pa** | nyon mongs
pa'i dri ma'i gnod pa thams cad dang bral ba |
bdud thams cad yongs su spangs pa || thams cad
kyi bkod pa las lhag pa | de bzhin gshegs pa'i bkod
pa'i gnas dran pa (249b4) dang blo gros dang |
rtogs pa chen pos nges par' byung ba | zhi gnas
dang lhag mthong chen po'i bzhon pa yin pa |
rnam par thar pa'i sgo chen po stong pa nyid
dang | mtshan ma med pa dang | smon pa med pa
nas 'jug pa |

4.4. Adding of mantras

Mantras hold significant importance and are utilized for a wide range of purposes in various cultural and religious contexts. They are considered sacred and potent in many spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and other belief systems. Just as Burchett (2008) pointed out that “[H]ealers chant mantras to cure illness; a worker may mutter a *mantra* as he lifts a heavy load; others may speak mantras in order to attain success in business or love, to protect themselves from evil spirits and enemies, or to ensure conception or safe childbirth”.

These *mantras* are integrated into the liturgy to bestow blessings, invoke the power of the Tathāgatas, and aid practitioners in their spiritual journey. The repetitive chanting of *mantras* during the ritual plays the role of creating a sacred and transformative experience for the worshippers, enhancing their connection with the divine and facilitating the fulfilment of their aspirations and wishes.

There are several *mantras* included in ITJ 433, D 3132, and D 3133. Here I present three of them. One of the *mantras* present in ITJ 433 is known as “*Mantra of dispelling the karmic veil said by the Buddha Stainless Gold*” (*jinse baoguang miaoxing chengjiu rulai shuo chuyezhang shenzhou* 金色寶光妙行成就如來說除業障神咒), but is also named “rDo rje'i ri 'joms pa”

r4. ka] kā DP; ba] bha DP; ni] ñi DP; bud
 dha a] buddhā D; dhi] ṣṭhin] dhiṣṭhi te DP; ra
 ksha na] rakṣaṃ DP; du] tu DP.
 v1. dhe ba] de bā DP; nba] nwā DP; ran du]
 rantu DP; me] add. DP; dhi] dhe P; sad dha]
 satwa D, sa twa P; man du] mantu DP.
 v2. ba] pa DP; bā] ba DP; dā] dha DP; ya] yaḥ
 D; pu'u ra ñe] pūrṇe D;²⁸ pu'u ra ñe] pūrṇe D,
 om. P; pu'u] pū DP; shām] sha DP; be du rya]
 bai ḍūrya DP; pā] paṃ DP; ksha] kṣa DP.
 v3. yang] yaṃ DP.

The third example is the “*Mantra of remembrance spoken by Vajradhara, Īśvara, Indra and the Four Great Kings*” (*zhijinggang shifan sitianwang shuo yinian zhou* 執金剛、釋梵四天王說憶念咒):

ITJ 433: bcom ldan 'das bdag cag gyis rang gi (71v4) bor ba dang dam bcas pa 'di dag rigs gyi bu dang rigs gyi bu mo des rjes su dran bar bgyi'o	D 3132: bcom ldan 'das bdag cag gis rang gi bor bor ba dang dam bcas pa 'di dag rigs kyi bu'am rigs kyi bu mo des rjes su dran par bgyi'o
(don nyis 72r1) \$:/: tad ya thā <<a>> ghu ma ghu me da ra ghu ma ma ghu ghu re ha hu he mra mra mra mra dzu dzu re dzu re swā hā	tadya thā a ghu ma ghu ta ra ghu ma ma ghu ghu re ha hu he mra mra mra mra dzu dzu re dzu re swā hā

The presence of various versions and transcriptions of the same *mantra* across different texts and languages is not uncommon in religious and spiritual traditions. The translation and transcription of mantras from one language to another, especially when dealing with esoteric or sacred texts, can be challenging and may lead to variations in expression. In the case of the “*Mantra of being free from all troubles and being fulfilled what is wishing for, spoken by the Bodhisattva Vajradhara*” (*zhijinggang pusa shuo ling wuwei zhongnao suoyuan manzu zhou* 執金剛菩薩說令無眾惱所願滿足咒), it appears that different translators and scribes have approached its rendering differently. It is noticeable that Shaluoba 沙羅巴 has transcribed, rather than translated, one sentence of the Tibetan text D 3133 in T 925, which thus seems quite esoteric:

ITJ 433: yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas bdun po dag la phyag 'tsal lo || rdo rje
 'dzin thams (73r3) chad la phyag 'tsal lo ||

Pay homage to seven fully awakened Buddhas! Pay homage to all Vajradharas!

This sentence in ITJ 433 is the same in D 3132 and D 3133, but when transcribed into Chinese in T 925, Shaluoba 沙羅巴 took a different approach and condensed the sentence into a *mantra*-like form: *nanwu saduonan sanmiao sanputuonan nanwu saliva(erhe) variluo(erhe)tuonan* “南無馱多喃 三藐三菩陀喃 南無薩哩囉(二合)囉日囉(二合)陀囉喃”, which seems to have been influenced by a Sanskrit sentence: **namaḥ saptānām samyaksambuddhānām namaḥ sarvavrajadharaṇām*.²⁹ This transcription may have been an attempt to encapsulate the essence of the original sentence in a *mantra* format suitable for recitation and meditation. Comparably, the translator of T 927 *Yaoshi qifo gongyang yigui ruyiwang jing* 藥師七佛供養儀

²⁸ The vocal sign of *ṇe* on the Ms. seems like a reversed *e*, according to the canonical version, it should be a normal *e*.

²⁹ Fan 2020 mentions a similar situation between the Tibetan translation D 503 and Yijing's Chinese translation T 451.

軌如意王經 (*Sūtra of the Ritual Procedure for Making Offerings to the seven Buddhas including Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Wish-Fulfilling King*),³⁰ Gongbuzhabu 工布查布 (mGon po skyabs), translated the same sentence in the bDe gshegs bdun gyi mchod pa'i chog bsgrigs yid bzhin dbang rgyal (*Ritual Procedure for Making Offerings to the Seven Sugatas, the Wish-Fulfilling King, henceforth DChYB*) directly into normal Chinese: dingli qizun zhengdeng zhengjue dingli yiqie zhijingang “頂禮七尊正等正覺。頂禮一切執金剛”, which shows some similarities in sound and structure to the mantra-like form in T 925. Apparently Shaluoba 沙羅巴 took T 451 into consideration when he was translating T 925, since Yijing 義淨 did almost the same thing in T 451: nanmo saduonan sanmiao sanfotuonan nanmo sapobazheluo daluonan 南麼馱多喃 三藐三佛陀喃 南麼薩婆跋折囉達囉喃 (with only minor variations in sound change):

ITJ 433: [...] yang byang cub sems dpa' phag na rdo rjes [...] bdagi gzungs gyi gsang sngags stsal par bgyis dgogsu gsol (don sum r2)	D 3132: de (271a7) nas byang chub sems dpa' phyag na rdo rjes [...] sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnams bdag la dgongs su gsol	T 925: 爾時執金剛菩薩 [...]我今為說陀羅尼曰:
yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas bdun po dag la phyag 'tsal lo rdo rje 'dzin thams chad la phyag (r3) 'tsal lo	yang dag (271b1) par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas bdun po dag la phyag 'tshal lo rdo rje 'dzin thams cad la phyag 'tshal lo	「『南無馱多喃(一) 三 藐三佛陀喃(二) 南無薩哩 嚩(二合)嚩日囉(二合)陀囉 喃(三)
tad yā thā [...] swā hā	tadya thā [...] swā hā	怛姪他(四) [...] 莎嚩(二 合)訶(十七)」 (CBETA 2022.Q4, T19, no. 925, p. 40b11–23)

It is possible that Shaluoba 沙羅巴 and other translators faced difficulties in translating certain passages, especially those that contained mantras or ritual elements, which are often highly symbolic and context-specific. The use of transcription without translation may also serve to acknowledge the uniqueness and sanctity of the original language, allowing the text to retain its ritual power and significance. It may also be an invitation for those who are initiated or trained in the specific tradition to interpret and understand the text within its intended religious or ritual framework.

These variations in transcriptions and translations of *mantras* highlight not only the flexibility and adaptability, but also the susceptibility to errors in the transmission of sacred texts in different linguistic and cultural contexts. They also illustrate the importance of preserving the essence and meaning of these sacred verses while accommodating the nuances of different languages and scriptural traditions.

5. Concluding remarks

The findings of the two-dimensional textual analysis have provided valuable insights into the transmission of the liturgies of the seven Tathāgatas including Bhaiṣajyaguru. Based on this analysis, the following two preliminary conclusions have been drawn:

The Old Tibetan material discovered in the manuscripts ITJ 433, ITJ 434, PT 179, and PT 248 serves as a crucial and indispensable, but previously unnoticed, link in understanding the textual history of these liturgies, which fills a blank in the chain of the textual transmission of the liturgies of the seven Tathāgatas. It has revealed that the transmission

³⁰ For a study of T 927 and its Tibetan parallel DChYB, see Yang 2013.

chain of these liturgies is Old Tibetan → Classical Tibetan → Chinese, rather than the previously assumed Classical Tibetan → Chinese.

Moreover, the Old Tibetan language exhibits distinct features that are not present in the Classical Tibetan used in the Tibetan canonical version.³¹ The Old Tibetan version appears to be an earlier and more condensed form of the liturgy compared to the longer and more elaborate canonical version. This suggests that the liturgy underwent a process of liturgicalization over time, with the addition of blessing procedures, reciting procedures, and various mantras to the foundational text of the *sūtra*. The Old Tibetan manuscripts shed light on the liturgicalization of the *sūtra*, indicating that the tradition of worshipping the seven Tathāgatas was already established in early Tibet. This might also explain that there are no witnesses of any Old Tibetan version of D 503 and D 504, the official Tibetan translations of Bhg^{skt} and *StP^{skt}, since these two texts have already been transformed into liturgies such as D 3132 and so forth.

Roughly corresponding to the structure of the seven-branch offering (*saptavidhānuttara-pūjā*), the addition of the blessing procedure, the reciting procedure, and several *mantras* to the foundational text of the *sūtra* point to a liturgicalization of the *sūtra*. This liturgicalization, as seen in ITJ 433, D 3132 and other related texts, provided a practical and accessible way for practitioners to conduct their religious practices. So, the chain of transmission would be like this: *sūtra* + *saptavidhānuttara-pūjā* (or similar liturgical forms) → liturgy → practice. It allowed them to follow prescribed procedures and recite mantras, making the worship of the seven Tathāgatas more straightforward and meaningful. As a result, these liturgies became instrumental in the worship and practice of the seven Tathāgatas, facilitating the transition of the *sūtra* into the context of worship and devotion. Through liturgicalization, the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra* was transformed into worship and practice on its way from ancient India to Tibet.

This research has illuminated a dynamic and trans-regional transmission of the worship of the seven Tathāgatas, with the Old Tibetan material playing a significant role in understanding the early stages of this transmission. This study enriches our understanding of the religious and textual history of this specific worship and its development in the Tibetan context, and even in the broader context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. It also emphasizes the importance of considering diverse linguistic sources and their ritual implications in the study of religious texts and practices.

6. Abbreviations

Bhg	<i>Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra</i>
D	sDe dge edition of the Tibetan <i>Tripitaka bKa' 'gyur</i> and <i>bsTan 'gyur</i>
DChYB	<i>bDe gshegs bdun gyi mchod pa'i chog bsgrigs yid bzhin dbang rgyal</i>
DDB	Digital Dictionary of Buddhism (via http://www.buddhism-dict.net.emedien.uni-muenchen.de/ddb/)
ITJ	IOL Tib J, Stein's Collection of Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London (formerly in the India Office Library (IOL), via IDP (International Dunhuang Project): http://idp.bl.uk)
ИHB.	Eluosi, KDYSF, Zhongguo, SKMY. ed. 2015. <i>Heishuicheng Manuscripts Collected in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences</i> 俄藏黑水城文獻 <i>Ecang Heishuicheng Wenxian</i> . Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House 上海古籍出版社.
OTDO	Old Tibetan Documents Online (https://otdo.aa-ken.jp)
P (Q)	Peking (Qian Long) edition of the Tibetan <i>Tripitaka bKa' 'gyur</i> and <i>bsTan 'gyur</i>

³¹ Such characteristics of the Old Tibetan language include *my-* rather than *m-* before the vowels *-i* and *-e-*, the cluster *sts-* simplified to *s-* in Classical Tibetan, and a reverse form of the “*r*” vowel letter (*gi gu*) (Hill 2010). The language called Old Tibetan was spoken during the time of the Tibetan empire (seventh–ninth centuries) (Tournadre 2014). It is also known that the Tibetan language was still used as the *lingua franca* in Dunhuang for some time even after the fall of the Tibetan Empire, which involves other complex issues that could not be covered in this paper.

PDB	<i>The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism</i> . Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez (eds). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
PT	Pelliot tibétain, Pelliot's Collection of Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (via https://gallica.bnf.fr)
*StP	* <i>Saptatathāgata-pūrvaprañihāna-viśeṣa-vistāra-sūtra</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> (大正新修大藏經) (via CBETA: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/)
Chin.	Chinese
Skt.	Sanskrit
Tib.	Tibetan
Tang.	Tangut
tr.	translation
add.	added (<i>addit</i>)
om.	omitted (<i>omittit</i>)

7. Sigla

*	reconstruction
ṃ	<i>anusvāra</i> (<i>rje su nga ro</i>)
\$	page initial sign <i>mgo yig</i>
I	<i>gi gu rlog</i>
	<i>daṇḍa</i>
	double <i>daṇḍa</i>
{ }	erased/deleted by the scribe
{ }	deleted by the editor
<< >>	added by the scribe
< >	added by the editor
○	string-hole
□	supplements; illegible or disappeared, but supplied by the editor

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bDe gshegs bdun gyi mchod pa'i chog bsgrigs yid bzhin dbang rgyal

Tā la'i bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho. “bDe gshegs bdun gyi mchod pa'i chog bsgrigs yid bzhin dbang rgyal(sman bla bdun chog).” *gSung 'bum ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 12, Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1991–1995, pp. 585–694. Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC), purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW294_700B3B. [BDRC bdr:MW294_700B3B]

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