

Universalizing the Particular:

Nanjō Bunyū’s Role in Placing Japanese Buddhism among World Religions.

Paride Stortini

1. Lost in Translation: Nanjō Bunyū’s Mission at Oxford.

In his autobiographical *Record of Reminiscences* (*Kaikyūroku*), Nanjō Bunyū (南条文雄 1849-1927) recalls a particular moment of his period of study at Oxford, when in the last days of December 1879 he received from his German mentor Friedrich Max Müller the Sanskrit version of the *Infinite Life Sutra* (*Sukhāvatīvyūhaḥ sūtra*). Nanjō had started only a few months earlier to study Sanskrit at that university, after spending the first few years in London mastering English, and he could not contain his excitement at the idea of finally reading the original version of one of the foundational sutras of his own faith, Pure Land Buddhism.¹

It is while reading this sutra that Nanjō had for the first time the strong experience of realizing the discrepancies between the Sanskrit texts, that his master Müller had taught him to consider the original sources of Buddhism, and the Chinese translations that since his childhood had been the basis of his faith. He discovered that whereas the Chinese version of the *Infinite Life Sutra* contained 48 vows of Amida, the Sanskrit original had only 46, and that the difference concerned exactly the central and most important vows, from the 18th to the 21st. His reaction to such discovery was that he spent the following several days painstakingly working on the sutra, sometimes forgetting to sleep and eat.

The mastering of philology and Sanskrit played an essential role in Nanjō Bunyū’s scholarship, and today he is remembered as one of the pioneers of modern Buddhist studies in Japan. This paper analyzes Nanjō’s work and contribution to the development of Japanese Buddhist scholarship by focusing on his reception and reconception of nineteenth century Western philology,

¹ Bunyiu Nanjio, *Kaikyūroku : Sansukuritto Kotohajime*, Toyo Bunko (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1979), 127-28.

with particular reference to the approaches elaborated by Max Müller. Whereas one-way modernization theories have explained the Indological turn in modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship as the result of a unidirectional importation of scientific knowledge from the West favored by mediators such as Nanjō, the aim of this paper is to complicate such view, by stressing the agency, mediating role and active reconception to which the Japanese scholar-priest subjected his reception of Western concepts and methods.

Nanjō Bunyū was born in 1849 in the village of Ōgaki in central Honshū.² He was the third son of the abbot of the Seiunji temple, a local branch of the Higashi Honganji sect of Jōdo Shishū Buddhism. He received a traditional education focused on the knowledge of the Chinese classics and very soon excelled in classical Chinese. Such skills paved the way for his academic and bureaucratic position within the sect, after he was adopted in the more influential family of the Okunenji temple abbot in Echizen prefecture.

In his youth he experienced the turbulences of the Meiji restoration (1868), and was particularly affected by the early Meiji religious policy of Buddhist-Shintō separation (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) and of the subsequent wave of anti-Buddhist violence (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈). The determinant event in his life came a little later, when he was chosen by the future head of his Higashi Honganji sect, Ōtani Kōei, to travel to Europe to study Sanskrit.

During his mission to Europe in 1872, Ōtani had realized the advanced knowledge that European scholars of Buddhism had of South Asian traditions, and he had found Sanskrit texts with no apparent correspondence with Chinese or Japanese translations. This is why he decided to send

² In addition to Nanjō's autobiography *Kaikyūroku*, information for this biographical sketch have been taken from: M. Zumoto, "Bunyiu Nanjō: His Life and Work," *Pacific World* 6 (2004). Another interesting source, especially for his years in England, is the short biographical sketch written by Max Müller, which also contains an autobiography in English of the young Nanjō: F. Max Müller, *Biographical Essays* (London: Longmans, Green, 1884), 178-203.

two young Jōdo Shinshū priests, Nanjō Bunyū and his colleague Kasahara Kenju, to study Sanskrit and collect texts in Europe.³

The two sailed from Yokohama on board of a French mail ship on June 14, 1876, and reached London on August 11. The first few years in the capital were spent gaining the necessary English language skills to enter British academia, and then, thanks to the London network of Japanese expatriates, Nanjō and Kasahara were accepted at Oxford University to study under the academic celebrity Friedrich Max Müller.

It was during his years of study at Oxford that Nanjō realized the discrepancies between the Chinese texts he had based his faith on and the Sanskrit sources he had learnt to value as the originals. How did Nanjō react to such discovery, that challenged the way in which his Buddhist faith had been built? The answer Nanjō gave himself can be found in a poem he composed precisely while working on the Pure Land sutras:

“For the first time I felt the need to learn the ancient teaching [...]
Even if you put all your effort in studying the texts though, there are mistakes in the translations that have been transmitted[...]
I came here, a foreign land thousands of miles far from my country
I copied texts that are thousand year old
The translation has lost the original meaning
The original texts are so many [...]
When am I going to achieve such task?
I am thirty years old, and I will dedicate all my time to it”⁴

Philology was the answer, and Max Müller was Nanjō’s fellow traveler on this journey to the original meaning.

³ Yūsen Kashiwahara, *ShinshūShi BukkyōShi No Kenkyū* (Kyōto-shi: Heirakuji Shoten, 1995), 190.

⁴“*Kodō hajime wo shiran to yōsu.*

Bunkē choshitareri to iedomo, denyaku rogyo ooshi.

Tazunekitaru banri no soto.

Utsushietari sennen no sho.

Honyaku shinmi nashi.

Genbunmo mata da yo.

Mui itsunohi ni ka tassen.

Sanjūssai kyōsho wo tsuyasu”

Ibid., 130-131.

2. The Role of Language in Max Müller and Nanjō Bunyū.

In a series of lectures titled *On Progress* (*Kōjōron* 向上論) published in 1914,⁵ Nanjō reveals his awareness of the historical process in which he became involved by becoming disciple of Müller. He traces a long history of the contact between India and the West, whose turning point was the discovery of the common origins of Sanskrit and European languages.

In the context of the nineteenth century domination of natural sciences as the model for the production of knowledge, language, being at the same time a natural fact and the instrument of expression of the human mind, was very soon associated with a scientific approach to religion. Despite the positivist claims of the scientific nature of such linguistic approach to religion though, the philological effort of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concealed a theological quest for the origins: every nation tried to establish its own primordial language as the most ancient, the “closest to Eden.”⁶

In such a quest for the original language, the discovery of Sanskrit’s close resemblance to the classical Western languages and their modern offspring justified the German Romantic turn to India as the cradle of Western civilization, overcoming the dependence from Jewish biblical traditions. The combination of Enlightenment scientific approaches to language with the Romantic quest for the beginning of nations produced what Raymond Schwab defined the “Oriental Renaissance:” the effort to collect and translate Sanskrit texts accompanied by a reimagining of an Indo-European mythical golden age.⁷

Max Müller’s approach to religion as based on the science of language can be interpreted as the legacy of such a long period process. He was influenced by a progressive conception of history inherited from the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, but at the same time, his German Romantic background encouraged him to focus on the origins instead of the development.

⁵ Bunyiu Nanjo, *Kōjōron* (Tōkyō: Tōadō Shobō, 1914), 526-49.

⁶ Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise : Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁷ Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance Orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950).

Max Müller argued for a scientific basis to the study of language, in an era dominated by natural science as the model for the production of reliable knowledge.⁸ In the same way in which fossils were useful to the geologist to give a chronology of Earth strata, Müller analyzed words in order to go back to the original roots, which had a perfect correspondence in meaning to the object they indicated.

The etymological approach allowed Müller to invert the process of conceptual corruption and loss of original meaning produced by the metaphorical use of language and myth. He launched himself in the effort to uncover strata of language, which correspond to strata of meaning, specifically religious meaning, accumulated during centuries of phonetic decay, dialect use and mythological creation. He chose Sanskrit because such language had the oldest written religious documents in a language so close to ancient Greek and Latin, and because it was preserved in a state of formal perfection, due to a long tradition of grammatical analysis.⁹

It is within the context of Max Müller's theory of the science of language and his search for Sanskrit manuscripts that his initial relation with Nanjō Bunyū and Kasahara Kenju must be understood. When the sinologist and missionary Joseph Edkins gave Müller a text he had found in Japan that contained a Sanskrit-Chinese vocabulary with Japanese transliteration, Japan became a new source of hope to find other Sanskrit texts lost in India or China.

The arrival of the two young Japanese priests at Oxford in 1879 became for the German scholar the occasion to build a bridge to their homeland and explore monastic libraries in search for Sanskrit manuscripts that nobody could read any longer there.

Despite the pride expressed by Nanjō for the contribution that his country gave to the achievements of the Buddhist studies efforts by sending Sanskrit texts found in Japanese

⁸ On the issue of the scientific value of the study of language according to Müller, and more in general for an in depth study of Max Müller, see Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller : A Life Devoted to Humanities* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2002). Particularly pp. 185-278.

⁹ F. Max Müller, *India, What Can It Teach Us? A Course of Lectures Delivered before the University of Cambridge* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 22-30.

monasteries to Oxford, it must be stressed that the knowledge of Japanese Buddhism was not Müller's aim: at this stage, Japan was only a means to get to Sanskrit originals. The reason can be found already in the comments that Müller attached to the publication of the Amidist sutras just mentioned: the content of the text revealed a teaching that is very far from the original message of the historical Buddha.¹⁰ The Pure Land to which his two Japanese disciples belong represents for Müller one of the many forms in which the original teaching of Buddhism was corrupted once it spread to East Asia.

The problem with East Asian Buddhist traditions according to Müller did not simply lie in the degeneration of the original message due to popular needs and devotional attitudes, but also in the linguistic transmission of the founder's teaching itself. Sanskrit and Chinese being so deeply different languages, the translation of the original texts was inevitably compromised. Nanjō acknowledged the fact that Japan had only but a few scattered Sanskrit texts, while the entire Buddhist tradition in the country was based on texts that were Chinese translations. This is why the acquisition of Sanskrit became for him not only a means to get to the roots of the Buddhist teaching, but also to understand its development in his spread to East Asia.

English, having the inflectional grammar in common with Sanskrit, came to play an essential mediating role between the modern Japanese reader and the ancient Sanskrit text, revealing the mistakes made by the early Chinese interpreters. In the series of lectures on progress, Nanjō gives a clarifying example of how knowing English has been helpful for him in making sense of inconsistencies between Sanskrit original and Chinese translation.¹¹ Both in English and in Sanskrit the words for the numbers 13 and 30 begin with the root that indicates the number 3 (thirteen – *trayo dasaou* ; thirty- *trim sat*), whereas in Chinese as well as in Japanese the ideographic *kanji* system inverts the place for the units and the tens to distinguish 13 from 30 (十三 for 13 and 三十

¹⁰ "On Sanskrit Texts Discovered in Japan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 12, no. 2 (1880): 174.

¹¹ Nanjō, *Kōjōron*, 536-7.

for 30). The difference explains why in translating Sanskrit sources sometimes the Chinese interpreters misunderstood a 13 for 30 and vice-versa.

The study of Sanskrit through the medium of European scholarship was essential in Nanjō's attempt to rethink his approach to Buddhism, to produce a renovation able to make sense of the drastic changes in Meiji Japan, that would not have been possible using only the Chinese canonical tradition and its language. If we analyze the development of Indology and Sanskrit study as a major turning point in the birth of modern Buddhist studies in Japan as an example of transfer of scientific knowledge, the role played by language is essential. As noted by the German historian Jürgen Osterhammel, modern science as the authoritative form of knowledge production in the nineteenth century necessary relied on a system of symbols that made it transmittable, and language was sure essential in the mobility of scientific knowledge.¹² Such process of transfer of knowledge between cultures happened in a context of unequal power relations, which forced the colonized countries to learn European languages and favored the one-way transmission of scientific knowledge from the West to the colonized world.¹³ Nanjō's travel to learn Sanskrit at Oxford can be interpreted under such model, as a result of colonial aggression to Japan and reaction of Meiji political, religious and cultural élite by learning Western languages to appropriate modern scientific knowledge and redeploy it for the modernization of the country.

The exportation of the modern Western approach to the study of Buddhism could have supplanted local forms of knowledge, such as the Japanese traditional study of Buddhism. Western colonizers claimed the inherent superiority of their modern scientific production of knowledge as the reason why it was rapidly adopted in other cultures, becoming the universal model against local and particular ones. The use of a global and multi-perspective approach to history, as Osterhammel does, entails a reconsideration of such claim: systems of knowledge are always local, and their success in being adopted in other contexts depends on asymmetric power issues, as well as on

¹² Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 779-81.

¹³ Ibid., 784-812.

specific local reasons, such as the practical utility of adopting a foreign system of knowledge. The sociologist of science David Turnbull also explains what is the source of such power: “the source of the power of science lies not in the nature of scientific knowledge but in its greater ability to move and apply the knowledge it produces beyond the site of its production.”¹⁴ Mobility is a key feature that makes a particular system of knowledge universal, and it is reached through technical and social strategies that allow that specific science to connect and make equal other local systems.¹⁵

There was certainly an element of power asymmetry in the decision to send Nanjō Bunyū to study Sanskrit at Oxford, as the British Empire was a major colonizing force in Asia in the nineteenth century and Japan was struggling to get international recognition and to end the unequal treaties with Western countries. What was the role played by Max Müller’s Indology based on the science of language in this process? I argue that the role played by Sanskrit was that of the connective language, that assured the role of universal to the Western approach to Buddhism. Sanskrit and Pāli were the languages in which the ancient Indian sutras were written, and within the discourse of the search for the origins that informed nineteenth century philology, that gave it a prominent role.

Nanjō’s efforts were aimed at linking the Japanese particularity of Buddhism to the universal model of Buddhism, which was defined in Western Buddhist studies as essentially written in Sanskrit. Since the early nineteenth century development of modern Buddhist studies, Sanskrit had a central role in the formation of the concept of Buddhism as a world religion.¹⁶ This is the reason why it became the universal language in which to translate the particular variety of Japanese Buddhism. Pre-Meiji approaches to the Indian legacy of Buddhism, such the one by Jiun Onkō, had failed in making sense of Sanskrit texts, and their terminology and methods had to be replaced. This process is symbolically represented by the change in terminology in the Meiji period Buddhist

¹⁴ David Turnbull, *Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers : Comparative Studies in the Sociology of Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 2000), 38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19-32.

¹⁶ On the formation of the model of world religions, with particular reference to the role played by Max Müller in it, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Particularly chapter 7.

studies: from the traditional definition of Sanskrit as *bongo* (梵語), especially used in the Japanese esoteric sects, to the neologism coined using the transliteration from English *sansukurittogo* (サンスクリット語). A page of Nanjō’s memories can be used to symbolically represent his contribution to such process of Sanskritization of Japanese Buddhism: he recalls how under Müller’s supervision he prepared the new edition of the *Amida Sutra* by replacing the traditional Japanese *shittan* script (悉曇, *siddham*), with the *devanagari* used in modern Indology.¹⁷

The mediating role of Western Buddhist studies, as well as Müller’s approach to Sanskrit, undeniably shaped the Indological turn in the development of modern Buddhist studies in Japan, and Nanjō was a protagonist of such process. The eastward transfer of knowledge though did not imply in Osterhammel’s terms a total suppression of the local knowledge. Sanskrit and the sutras written in such language did not replace the Chinese canonical tradition or *kanbun* (漢文 classical Chinese) as the dominant language for Buddhism in Japan. If learning English for Nanjō had been an essential tool in mastering Sanskrit grammar, at the same time his knowledge of the Chinese canon and of the language used in it played an essential role in the appropriation of Max Müller’s Indology and provided Nanjō with an active role in the master-disciple relation. Nanjō Bunyū did not simply import Indology from England and applied it to the study of Japanese Buddhism. He also used his “indigenous knowledge”—classical Chinese and the Chinese canon—to correct and supplement the Sanskrit sutras on which the modern and universal Buddhist studies developed in Europe were based.

In several passages of his *Record of Reminiscences*, Nanjō Bunyū stresses how his early education was steeped in the study of the Chinese classics and knowledge of *kanbun*. He learnt them mostly at home under the direction of his father, himself a Jōdo Shinshū priest and a lover of Chinese poetry. A particular emphasis is given in Nanjō’s English autobiography to an episode

¹⁷ Nanjō, *Kaikyōroku : Sansukuritto Kotohajime*, 150.

mentioned also in the *Record of Reminiscences*:¹⁸ according to his mother, the day Nanjō was born there was a gathering of priests and local intellectual élite at his father's temple, and they were reading and composing *kanbun* poetry when his birth was announced.¹⁹ The presents saluted the good news with the wishes that the child would become a renowned scholar. Knowledge of the Chinese classics constituted an indispensable pillar of the education of the early Meiji élite, still formed in the Tokugawa system,²⁰ and Nanjō's skills in *kanbun* helped him through his career in the Higashi Honganji administration. It is possible to imagine that his early period as a student at Oxford was not an easy one,²¹ as his linguistic skills did not help him with learning English and Sanskrit and his teacher Müller had such a low consideration for the Chinese translations of the Indian sutras.

Very soon though, Nanjō and Kasahara's knowledge of classical Chinese, as well as their familiarity with the Chinese canonical tradition, turned out to be helpful in Max Müller's effort to reconstruct both the text and the meaning of Sanskrit sutras. The complexity of Buddhist Sanskrit sometimes required the comparison with Chinese translations of the same texts, that Müller could access only through the mediation of his two Japanese pupils.²² Of particular significance is the collaboration of Nanjō and Kasahara in collecting, editing and translating the Sanskrit manuscripts published under the title *Buddhist Texts from Japan* between 1881 and 1884.²³

Despite Müller's biases against East Asian Buddhist traditions clearly reiterated in the introductions to these works, it is possible to find how the collaboration with Nanjō and Kasahara

¹⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹ Müller, *Biographical Essays*, 198.

²⁰ For considerations on the role of *kanbun* in another case of early Meiji intellectual and traveler, Narushima Ryūhoku, see Ryūhoku Narushima, *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi and Diary of a Journey to the West : Narushima RyūHoku Reports from Home and Abroad*, ed. Matthew Patrick Fraleigh and Ryūhoku Narushima (Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2010). Particularly pp. ix-lvii. On the *kanshibun* literary culture in Meiji Japan, see also: Matthew Fraleigh, "Songs of the Righteous Spirit: 'Men of High Purpose' and Their Chinese Poetry in Modern Japan," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, no. 1 (2009); "Kanshibun in the Meiji Period and Beyond," in *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, ed. Suzuki Tomi and Lurie David Shirane Haruo (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²¹ In his *Record of Reminiscences* he sometimes remember how hard was to learn Sanskrit and to work on original texts at the beginning, Nanjō, *Kaikyūroku : Sansukuritto Kotohajime*, 121.

²² Ibid., 150.

²³ F. Max Müller, *Buddhist Texts from Japan*, ed. Bunyiu Nanjō and Georg Bühler, Anecdota Oxoniensia ... Aryan Series. ; (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1881).

raised Müller's interest in the Pure Land Sutras, which represented a living tradition for such a large part of humanity. The insistence of the two disciples, who placed so much importance in the possible accomplishment of a translation of the Sanskrit originals of the fundamental texts of their Buddhist sect, convinced the German scholar to work on the Amidist sutras.²⁴

The translation of the *Sukhāvatīvyūhaḥ Sūtra* is significant for the important role played by Nanjō in it and for the interest expressed by Müller for its peculiar Sanskrit. The latter recognizes the difficulty of working with such an irregular form of Sanskrit, but at the same time states that “the more I see of this peculiar Sanskrit, the more I feel convinced that we have in it something really historical, a language not bent and fashioned according to the rules of grammatical schools, but a language such as it was really spoken in different parts of India, before the Renaissance of Sanskrit Literature, about 400 A.D.”²⁵

Nanjō's contribution to this publication was particularly relevant: first, in the Sanskrit edited text there are multiple footnotes in which Müller makes reference to a Chinese version in order to establish the meaning of unclear terms, which implies the necessary mediation of his Japanese disciples. In addition, the two editors included a series of *gāthas* translated from the Chinese version, again Nanjō's work. Finally, in order to familiarize the Western reader with a Buddhist tradition not very well-known at that time, Nanjō was charged with writing a short history of Pure Land Buddhism that significantly ends with a chart of the 1880 census of Japanese temples and preachers/students, which clearly showed how the Jōdo Shinshū sects counted the largest number of preachers and students in the country.²⁶

In addition to these early collaborations with Müller, the work with which Nanjō gave an internationally-recognized contribution to the field of Buddhist Studies is his *Catalogue of the*

²⁴ Müller F. Max; Bunyiu Nanjio, *Sukhāvatī-Vyūha. Description of Sukhāvatī* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), xii-xiii.

²⁵ Ibid., xvii.

²⁶ Ibid., xviii-xxiv.

Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka, the Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan (1883).²⁷

Particularly meaningful is the fact that Nanjō's catalogue was meant to correct a previous one realized by the British sinologist Samuel Beal (1825-1889). The British had worked on the Japanese Edo-period version of the Chinese Ming canon. His approach to such hard task had been informed, according to Nanjō, by biases against Chinese culture, to which Beal had attributed a lack of order in the list of the sutras. Nanjō instead understood that part of the disorder was due to the way in which the canon had been copied and arranged for transport to England, and by rearranging the texts according to the original index he managed to restore the original order of the canon.

The real contribution that the *Catalogue* gave to the study of Buddhism must be found though in the indices: by linking Sanskrit sutra titles with their Chinese translations, Nanjō could give a chronology to a vast amount of Indian sources previously not clearly placed in time.²⁸ Through the mediation of the Chinese and Japanese reception of Buddhism, it was possible for the modern Buddhist scholars to give a more accurate chronology of the vast amount of Sanskrit Buddhist literature, answering one of the very often complained problems of the study of Indian literature in the nineteenth century: the lack of a chronology.²⁹

Nanjō's *Catalogue* earned him a Master of Arts degree at Oxford University (1883), and also a membership in the Royal Asiatic Society. He thus became a peer of the orientalist élite in the West, whereas in Japan his work contributed to the increasing effort of Japanese Buddhist scholars to produce new versions of the entire Chinese canon, eventually realized in the 1920s by one of Nanjō's disciples, Takakusu Junjirō (1866-1945).³⁰ The international fame reached by Nanjō

²⁷ See also Hōkei Izumi, "Nanjō Sensei No Chosho Kaisetsu," *Ōtani Gakuhō* 9, no. 1 (1928): 159-61.

²⁸ Bunyiu Nanjio, *A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka : The Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan*, ed. Library India Office and Bunyiu Nanjio (Tōkyō-shi: Nanjō Hakushi Kinen Kankōkai, 1929), xiii.

²⁹ It must be noted though, as Michael Pye does, that Nanjō's catalogue rendering of sutra titles in Sanskrit was problematic, and his catalogue has been superseded. See Michael Pye, "Modern Japan and the Science of Religions," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 1 (2003): 16.

³⁰ On the production of modern Buddhist canons in Japan, see Greg Wilkinson, "Taisho Canon: Devotion, Scholarship, and Nationalism in the Creation of the Modern Buddhist Canon in Japan," in *Spreading the Buddha's Word in East Asia*,

through the *Catalogue* was also the premise for later collaborations with Western scholars of Buddhism. Nanjō's skills in English, classical Chinese and Sanskrit were also at the basis of his collaboration with the Chinese Buddhist reformer Yang Wenhui (1837-1911), with whom he exchanged correspondence and texts, indirectly participating in his attempt to revive Buddhism in China.³¹

Conclusion.

A recent edition of Nanjō Bunyū's autobiography, has been provided with the significant subhead “the beginning of Sanskrit” (*sansukurittokotohajime* サンスクリット事始め).³² The entire life of the Buddhist scholar has been reinterpreted as the introduction of the modern study of Sanskrit, *sansukuritto* not the traditional Japanese *bongo*, to Japan, and the mediating role played by Western Buddhist scholarship is visible in the frequent mentioning of Nanjō's study at Oxford. The “Sanskritization” of Buddhist scholarship in Japan was not a one-way transfer of knowledge from the West though. The knowledge of *kanbun* and the access to the Chinese canonical tradition became essential to the reconstruction of Sanskrit sutras. Using his skills, Nanjō actively intervened in the comparative philological efforts of his master Max Müller, and later became a leading Buddhist scholar who carried international collaborations and also played an important role in the introduction of modern Buddhist scholarship to China. It is possible to interpret Sanskrit as the language that allowed mobility to European Indology, and Nanjō's appropriation of it allowed to place Japanese Buddhism within the context of Western-dominated modern Buddhist Studies. At the same time though, the transfer of scientific knowledge did not bring about the dismissal of local

ed. Jiang Wu (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Jackie Stone, "A Vast and Grave Task: Interwar Buddhist Studies as an Expression of Japan's Envisioned Global Role," in *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals During the Interwar Years*, ed. Thomas J. Rimer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Silvio Vita, "Printings of the Buddhist "Canon" in Modern Japan," in *Buddhist Asia 1*, ed. Giovanni Verardi (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies 2003).

³¹ Gabriele Goldfuss, *Vers un Bouddhisme du XXe Siècle : Yang Wenhui (1837-1911), réformateur laïque et imprimeur*, Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises ; (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2001), 33-68.

³² Nanjō, *Kaikyōroku : Sansukuritto Kotohajime*.

knowledge, because the particular of *kanbun* and of the East Asian Buddhist tradition gained a new role in the construction of a universal image of Buddhism. The Sanskritization of modern Buddhist scholarship in Japan can be seen thus as an attempt to appropriate the discourse on the universality of the Western scientific approach to the study of Buddhism, while preparing to give a global resonance to another particular, Japanese Buddhism, and to the local knowledge of it.