

# The Sacred Sites and the Pilgrimage of Tantric Buddhism in India

by Masahide MORI

This article investigates into the sacred sites and the pilgrimage, which include both existent and fictitious ones, belonging to the Tantric Buddhist period (ca. 6-13 century) in India.

One of the most famous and significant listings of the sacred sites should be the “twenty-four *pīṭhas*” elaborated in the Buddhist canons of Mother Tantra class. “*Pīṭha*” means the sacred site where the tantric practitioners visit, and it is a common term found in both the Hindu and the Buddhist texts. It is noteworthy that the order of the *pīṭhas* in the different Buddhist texts do not accord with each other, although they shares the same sites. It is also important that the similar list can be found in the Hindu Tantric texts, and, through careful comparison, the Buddhist’s copying can be proved. These facts lead to the conjecture that the “twenty-four *pīṭhas*” are not necessarily the existent sacred sites and that their pilgrimage is not real.

Some Buddhist canons recommend the pilgrimage of the eight sites that are connected with the eight great events of Śākyamuni, such as his birth, enlightenment, first sermon and *nirvāṇa*. The scenes of these legends are widely represented in the reliefs of the Gupta and the Pāla periods. However, most of these eight great sites had already become devastated by the time of Tantric Buddhism and had lost their positions of pilgrimage sites, according to the records of Chinese pilgrim monks, such as Xuanzang.

In the period of Tantric Buddhism, Bodhgaya is one of the limited sites where the pilgrims could actually visit. A Tibetan monk, Dharmā-

svāmin is reported to visit this traditional Buddhist site in the first half of the thirteenth century. His biography shows that the pilgrims worshipped the miraculous statues and the famous relics there. The inscriptions found in Bodhgaya indicate that the pilgrims, who came from various areas of India including Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Konkana etc., donated a sculpture or facility to the monastery depending on their financial possibility to accumulate the merits. These activities are not particular to Tantric Buddhism, but common to non-Tantric Buddhism.