

**On the textual transmission of Mahāyānasūtras
as exemplified by the Ratnakūṭapariṣat**

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It is a well-known fact that Mahāyānasūtras have shown a tendency to grow and change over the centuries. This is evident from such cases where a sūtra has been translated several times into Chinese; usually the translations differ to a certain degree, and the differences in length and wording between these translations appear to increase with a difference in time. Such changes are generally interpreted as a process of textual modification, mostly as a growth, and one of the basic premises underlying such interpretations has been the idea of an *urtext*. Such a perspective is supported by the fact that in many cases only one Sanskrit version or even one Sanskrit manuscript of a Mahāyānasūtra is available which is often supported by a closely corresponding Tibetan translation. This seeming uniformity easily suggests the idea of an original which then became modified in time and place. So far, there are few exceptions which throw direct light on the developments of the Sanskrit text of a sūtra. The admirable work of Hirofumi Toda demonstrated how complicated the situation is for the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra, and the divergences between manuscripts from different times and different regions forced him to give up the idea of a reconstructable original text and to present only the manuscripts in synoptic editions. Similarly, Gregory Schopen demonstrated for the Saṃghāṭasūtra that even in one region, Gilgit, and at one time it is impossible to reconstruct an original version from several manuscripts. A similar case is the Ratnakūṭapariṣat, and the presentation will deal with the rather astonishing divergences and similarities between the version preserved in the Gilgit manuscript and the versions transmitted in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This raises questions about the textual transmission: Although the contents are clearly the same, the wording in many places is such that it becomes difficult to understand how the versions are connected and how the transmission could have worked.