

METROPOLIS

THE NAKANO FUJOSHI SISTERS HAVE A SECRET*



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ASIAN CLASSICS INPUT PROJECT

An international group teams up with a local partner to save ancient texts—and modern people

By JESSICA OCHELTREE

There's something tragic about a centuries-old manuscript moldering away on a forgotten shelf. The idea of a beautifully rendered, culturally significant object disintegrating into nothingness conjures up a vague grief.

Thanks to the Asian Classics Input Project (ACIP), however, many endangered Tibetan and Sanskrit texts will be rescued from a fate of slow decay. The New York-based NPO is dedicated to preserving ancient Asian philosophical texts

and making them available for free through digital media.

The process can be a long one. First, the ACIP must locate surviving copies in libraries, monasteries, archives and private collections around the world. Some of the texts they are currently working on—like a collection of ancient palm-leaf commentaries on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*—have never been scanned, published or translated.

The next step is to note the location and contents in catalogue form. A copy is then made of the book and sent to one of the ACIP's data input centers, where it will be digitized, translated and distributed all over the world on the web and in CD-ROM form. Since getting its start in 1988, the group has managed to digitize over 8,500 texts, comprising just under half a million pages.

The ACIP was started by the author and Buddhist monk Michael Roach, who was the first American to complete a 20-year program at a Tibetan monastery to earn the title of Geshe. During his studies, Roach was saddened by how much of the literature of Tibet was being lost—particularly through the actions of China—and set up the ACIP to preserve what he could.

"To get a feeling for the destruction," Roach writes in his latest book, *The Diamond Cutter*, "imagine that some powerful country has

attacked the United States, and burned almost every single college and university, and all the books in their libraries. Imagine that the only books left are those that have been carried out in their hands by refugees, journeying on foot for the several weeks or months it would take to walk to Mexico."

Let anyone think the preservation of these texts is solely an academic pursuit, the ACIP's data input centers also train and employ Tibetan refugees, many of them women. Not only do these workers earn a living wage and gain experience, but some of them go on to get jobs in related fields or start their own businesses. A few have even been hired to do cataloguing work for the US Library of Congress.

Much of the money to support these input centers is raised by a partner organization called the Global Family Project (GFP), which focuses on providing people in developing nations with jobs. The GFP has just opened a Tokyo office headed by Leza Lowitz, the American director of Sun and Moon Yoga in Meguro. "It's a great opportunity for people in Japan to sponsor a Tibetan refugee family and to make an important cultural contribution. When you sponsor a family, they become your family for life, and you develop a direct, personal relationship with them."

Terms like "family" are used a lot at the GFP, where the belief is that the interconnectedness of the modern world should be used to forge stronger bonds between people.

That's why the group prefers ongoing support in the form of monthly donations rather than one-time offerings—donors can think of the recipients as part of their global family. Options range from Heads of Family (who donate

\$100 a month) to Family Members (\$25

to Cousins, who donate whatever they can afford. "People have the opportunity to put the virtues of generosity, kindness and compassion into action through participating," says Lowitz. "Any amount is welcome."

The Global Family Project will be holding an information lecture and potluck dinner at Sun and Moon Yoga on Saturday, July 25, from 6:30-8:30pm. For more information, contact Leza Lowitz at info@sunandmoon.jp or see <http://sunandmoon.jp>.

For more information on the Asian Classics Input Project, see www.asianclassics.org. For more information on the Global Family Project, see <http://globalfamilyproject.org/en>.

