

The Role of Buddhist Monastic Libraries in Cultural Heritage Conservation

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Buddhist monastic libraries, since time immemorial, have been custodians of cultural heritage through conservation of holyscripture, palm-leaf manuscripts and historical papers underpinning tradition and education for Buddhism. As much as these libraries contain religious literature, these are dissemination centers for philosophy and ethics as well. This study brings to light how Buddhist monastic libraries safeguard cultural heritage, both through traditional and modern technologies to underpin calls for an integrated conservation process. Using a qualitative research process, textual research, site monitoring at large centers of monasticism such as Sri Dalada Maligawa, surveys and interviews with Buddhist scholars and custodians underpin the research. The study showed that methods of conservation historically utilized, including herbal treatments of palm-leaf manuscripts, word-of-mouth memorization to safeguard textual remembrance and housing to protect textual material, continued to be utilized. However, climate, pest attack and unavailability of resources raised serious issues. Many of these libraries offset these with adoption of digital technology: digital repositories creation, AI script recognition utilization, metadata cataloging and utilization of blockchain for digital provenance. With these developments, issues with digital obsolescence, ethical issues with open-source provision of holy literature and loss of tangible heritage were identified as challenges. The research justifies an equilibrium approach to conservation balancing harmoniously traditional expertise with probable technologies. It calls for enhanced partnership for action between centers of monasticism and academic or archival bodies and training programs for custodians with specific targets for sustainable governance of heritage.

Keywords: *Buddhist monastic libraries; Cultural heritage conservation; Digital archives; Manuscript preservation; Religious knowledge management*