

The Tangut Version of the Lotus Sutra and the Study of the Tangut Language

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1. Introduction

THE East Asian Library at Princeton University (New Jersey, USA) has a complete edition (printed matter and concertina-book type) of the Tangut version of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka sūtra* (hereafter referred to as the Lotus Sutra), volume 4. I published a research volume on this material at the end of 2018 (Arakawa 2018b, Figs 1 and 2). The volume includes a philological bibliography of the material, linguistic study of the Tangut language, the whole text with captions and index, and colour photos of all the pages.

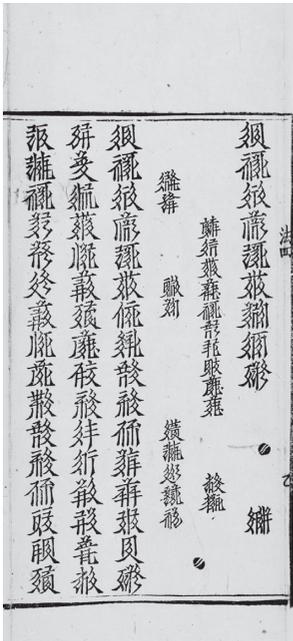


Fig.1 First page of the material



Fig. 2 Title page of the publication

2. The Lotus Sutra in the Tangut Period and in Tangut Buddhism

The Xixia (Tangut) dynasty occupied a dominant position in the north-western part of China between 1038 and 1227. Many Tangut documents written in Tangut script, mainly Buddhist documents, still survive.

The Lotus Sutra is an important early Mahāyāna sutra. It was translated into many East Asian languages including Chinese, and has been read by many generations. The three famous Chinese translations, including Kumārajīva's version, spread widely, reaching Japan as well. The sutra has also been translated into many Eurasian languages including Tibetan, Uyghur and Mongolian, showing how widely it has been treasured. From archeological finds in Khara-khoto it is clear that the Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra and its Tangut translation were popular among the Tanguts as well.

For a detailed account of the Lotus Sutra in Tangut one may consult Nishida (2005a, 2012), so here I limit myself to an introduction to the sutra during the Tangut period as discussed in my own previous work (Arakawa 2014: 3–4).

The sentence below is a part of 天盛旧改新定禁令 *Tiansheng Codex*, volume 11.¹ The author's translation is provided again here. The underlines and <omission> have been added by me.

Teachings to be learned by monks and (Dharma) seekers in a temple
<omission>

Next, gāthās and sutras which should be read by the Tangut and Tibetan (people) are: 仁王護国 *Renwanghuguo* (*Humane King sutra*), 文殊真実名 *Wenshuzhenshiming* (*Ārya-mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgīti*), 普賢行願品 *Puxianxingyanpin* (*Samanthabhadra-praṇidhāna*), 三十五仏 *Sanshiwufo*, 聖仏母 *Shengfomu*, 守護国吉祥頌 *Shouhuguoji xiangsong*, 觀世音普門品 *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara*, 竭陀般若 *Jietuopore*, 仏頂尊勝總持 *Fodingzunsheng zongchi* (dhāraṇī), 無垢淨光 *Wugoujingguang*, and the gāthās and all texts of 金剛般若 *Jingangpore* (*Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā*)

Next, gāthās and sutras which should be read by the Chinese (people) are: 仁王護国 *Renwanghuguo* (*Humane King sutra*), 普賢行願品 *Puxianxingyanpin* (*Samanthabhadra-praṇidhāna*), 三十五仏 *Sanshiwufo*, 守護国吉祥頌 *Shouhuguoji xiangsong*, 仏頂尊勝總持 *Fodingzunsheng zongchi* (dhāraṇī), 聖仏母 *Shengfomu*, 大供順 *Dagongshun*, 觀世音普門品 *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara*, 孔雀經 *Kongquejing* (*Mahāmāyūrī*), 廣大發願頌 *Guangdafayuan song*, 釈迦讚 *Shijiazan*

Some of the Buddhist texts valued by the Tanguts appear in these sentences. For example, 薩能耨鞞鞞 appears twice in the original sentence. Although not per se the Lotus Sutra, a literal translation would be ‘the chapter of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’, which is obviously translated from the Chinese 妙法蓮華經觀世音菩薩普門品 ‘the Lotus Sutra, the chapter of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’.

This is some evidence of the popularity of the Lotus Sutra. In addition, many of the Tangut editions of the chapter have illustrations upon the body and are of a portable size.² Thus it seems the sutra was circulated for private use. It can also be seen from other materials of the time that the Lotus Sutra was widely known and highly regarded among the Tanguts.

3. Tangut Materials Preserved at Princeton University Library and in the Russian Collection

The East Asian Library at Princeton University holds 83 manuscripts from 敦煌 Dunhuang, including some Tangut documents (Figs 3 and 4). The history of their acquisition and an overview of the collection are provided by Bullitt (1989) and Heijdra (2010, 2017). Although the number of Tangut documents is small, their state of preservation is good and some items of the collection are very important. They can be divided into three categories: (1) Fragments of Tangut Buddhist texts;



Fig. 3 Building where the library is located



Fig. 4 Entrance to the East Asian Library

Peald (Princeton East Asian Library, Dunhuang), (2) Volume 77 of the Tangut version of the 大方廣佛華嚴經 ‘Avatamsaka’ and (3) Volume 4 of the Tangut version of the 妙法蓮華經 Lotus Sutra. I have already described categories (1) and (2) in earlier works (Arakawa 2011, 2012).

The collection has a complete edition (printed matter and concertina-book type) of the Tangut version of the Lotus Sutra, volume 4. It is a xylograph version with six lines per page. Each line has 16 characters. The page size is 33.3×10.7 cm. The opening page of the volume showing a Buddhist illustration and the names of the royal family is followed by another 103 pages. The corresponding Chinese parts are as follows: Taisho No. 262, Taisho vol. 9, 27b, 1.10–34b, 1.22. This covers the Lotus Sutra from Chapter 8 ‘Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples’ to Chapter 11 ‘The Emergence of the Treasure Tower’ in entirety. This is the most complete Tangut version of the Lotus Sutra yet known. Even the version held in Russia has only 90 pages and has the latter part of Chapter 11 missing, as shown in the facsimile publication which Nishida edited (2005) with colour reproductions of No. 2317. Nishida’s corresponding study of the work was first published as a series (2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b) which was revised in 2012.

Thus, although Russia holds some versions of volume 4 of the Lotus Sutra in Tangut, there is no complete version. This means that the version held at Princeton University is all the more precious. However, the materials in Russia are important in that they allow comparison of the differences among versions. In the text part of the volume, I note each of these differences.

4. Princeton Tangut Lotus Sutra Buddhist Illustration

Let me begin with the famous Buddhist illustration which is known as the first page of the Tangut Lotus Sutra in Russia (Fig. 1). Actually, it is a collection of illustrations of the main episodes from the entire text of the Lotus Sutra (from volume 1 to volume 7). Therefore, it can serve as the frontispiece of every volume. It is an illustration “suitable” for all volumes.

On the other hand, the Buddhist illustrations in the Princeton version are sketches of episodes from volume 4 alone. That means they relate only to volume 4, and are not universally relevant for all volumes. The Buddhist illustrations in the Chinese versions of the Lotus Sutra which are found at Khara-khoto also reflect the contents of each volume separately. One of them is for volume 4 (Fig. 5).

The Buddhist illustration in the Chinese version is simpler than the one in the Princeton Tangut version. Only two pages long, it is shorter than the Princeton Tangut version. There are some motifs in common, but the number of pictures is fewer on the whole. The illustrations in the Chinese version are drawn on a strip of paper and have no captions.

As for the Buddhist illustration in the Princeton Tangut version (Fig. 6), while only the volume 4 part is extant, it does not have any defect, and the letters are all readable. Besides, the following features make it very important:

- 1) It is four pages long, so it includes many pictures from each episode.



Fig. 5 Buddhist illustration for volume 4 in the Chinese version (*HMR* 1: 32)



Fig. 6 Tangut (Princeton) Lotus Sutra Buddhist illustration (*Arakawa* 2018b: 41)

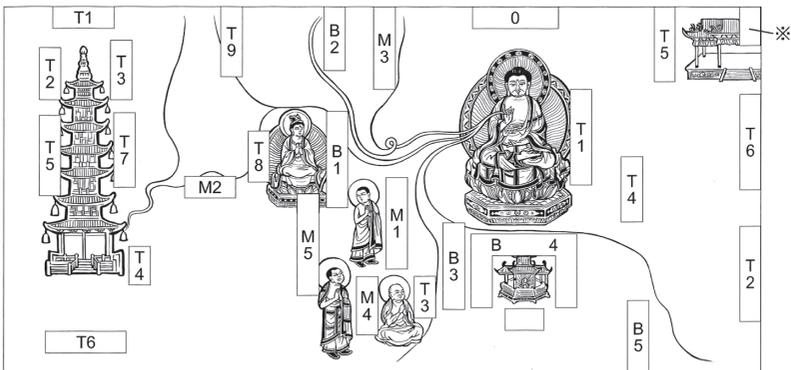
- 2) A caption for each picture is given on a vertical or horizontal frame for the convenience and easy understanding of readers.
- 3) The captions use wording different from the text of the Lotus Sutra while talking of the same episodes, owing to the need for brevity in captions. Matching them to their main text versions is material for study in itself.

However, there are some drawbacks:

- 4) Because the episodes and captions are not arranged in a linear manner, their order is difficult to understand.
- 5) The Tangut text is difficult to read because the letters are smaller than in body of the text and the margin text is a little worn down.
- 6) The meaning of the captions is sometimes difficult to understand because of their brevity.

Figure 7 shows the layout of the Princeton Buddhist illustration. Motifs are grouped by related episodes. The frame without number is referred to as '0', for convenience. Frames and pictures from page 1 to 4 can be sorted into five parts.

0. Frames without numbers on the upper part of page 2: relate to the entire contents of volume 4 which are placed above a large image of the 釈迦 Buddha
1. Top (上) 1–6 on pages 1–3: Chapter 8 'Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples'



Traced by KURANISHI

Fig. 7 Tracing of the Princeton Buddhist illustration (Arakawa 2018b: 41)

2. Middle (中) 1–5 on pages 1–3: Chapter 9 ‘Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adepts’
3. Bottom (下) 1–5 on pages 1–3: Chapter 10 ‘The Teacher of the Law’
4. Top (上) 1–9 on pages 3–4: Chapter 11 ‘The Emergence of the Treasure Tower’

Figure 8 shows an enlarged image of one episode and English translation of the Tangut text follows.

“上五 Top 5” is written on the top right on the first page. The caption in Tangut is, “When 大通智 *Datongshi* was superior, he entered into the causality (=karma), for example, he sleeps and does not search (treasure jewel).” There are two people: the person on the right is sleeping and another one is sitting on the floor. It is thought to be the 衣裏繫珠 *Yilijizhu* (sewing jewel into friend’s clothes) scene, when a gem is sewn into the robes of a sleeping person. It seems like the person on the left has a jewel in his hand.

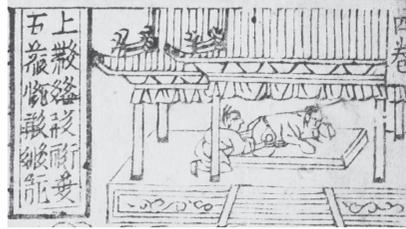


Fig. 8 Enlarged Princeton Buddhist illustration (Arakawa 2018b: 12)

5. Linguistic Study of Tangut, Based on the Lotus Sutra as Source Text

Tangut belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family (hereafter referred to as TB), and is the north-westernmost of the TB languages. Although Tangut seems to be close to Rgyalrongic, there is no confirmed direct descendant of Tangut.

In terms of linguistic typology, Tangut has an SOV (subject-object-verb) order for the sentence and “demonstrative-noun-adjective” order for the noun phrase. Tangut has non-obligatory case-marking. Certain verbal forms have directional prefixes, which indicate the direction of motion with motion verbs, but are lexicalized perfective aspect markers with other verbs. The verb also has a demonstrative prefix and person agreement suffixes. The verb phrase can be complicated in some cases. Tangut has unique linguistic features, which are not found in either Old Tibetan or Old Burmese, for example: the “agreement” between personal pronouns and personal suffixes. Previous studies show that there is a correlation between independent pronominal forms and agreement suffixes in Tangut. A comparison of the two forms, following previous works, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Set of Independent Pronouns and Agreement Suffixes

	Independent Pronouns	Suffix
1sg	𐺗 ² nga	𐺗 ⁻² nga
2sg	𐺗 ² ni:	𐺗 ⁻² na:
3sg	𐺗 ¹ tha:	-Ø
pl	N- 𐺗 ² ni:	𐺗 ⁻² ni:

In the Lotus Sutra, we observe (a) only independent forms, (b) only pronominal suffix, and (c) co-occurrence of both. (1) shows “first person, singular” and (2) shows “first person, plural”.

- (1) 𐺗²nga 𐺗²yu 𐺗²thI: 𐺗¹e: 𐺗¹tsyer 𐺗¹tshe: 𐺗²dzwo: 𐺗¹kha 𐺗²zi: 𐺗²phyu 𐺗²tseu 𐺗²ngwu 𐺗¹I: 𐺗²nga
 1sg always Dem CM dharma teach man between best be say S1
 (I) was able to become the foremost among the teachers of the Dharma. (Chapter 8, the Lotus Sutra)

- (2) 𐺗²nga 𐺗¹nI: 𐺗¹tha 𐺗¹e: 𐺗²cha: 𐺗¹o" 𐺗¹tshe: 𐺗¹mI: 𐺗²nwi: 𐺗²ni:
 1sg pl Buddha CM charity tell Neg able Spl
 We will never fully be able to explain all of the Buddha’s merits. (Chapter 8, the Lotus Sutra)

In Chinese and Tibetan there is no such correspondence between personal pronouns and agreement suffixes. As such, care must be taken when handling translation Buddhist texts (meaning and function must be judged within context).

Here, we turn our attention to the “dual” suffix of Tangut which has been the subject of investigation by a few scholars (Nishida 2004, 2012 and Arakawa 2018a).

- (3) 𐺗²nga 𐺗¹nI: 𐺗¹nyI' 𐺗²dzwo: 𐺗¹leu 𐺗²thI: 𐺗¹vi:q' 𐺗¹ny'e: 𐺗²byi 𐺗²lheu 𐺗¹nwI 𐺗¹kl:
 1sg pl two person only Dem illusion live release know Sdu
 We, two persons, know this enlightening liberation of illusoriness. (AV vol. 77, Arakawa 2018a: 76)

As explained in my previous work (Arakawa 2018a), since the example sentence (4) appears in the descriptive (not conversational) part, the dual suffix does not appear. Besides, after the descriptive sentence, the sentence in which “two persons” act has no suffix for dual. That is, since the sentences are very short, it is easy to find the “dual” agents.

Acknowledgements

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for the support of Professors Tatsuo Nishida, Masahiro Shogaito, and Evgenij Ivanovich Kychanov, who have now left us. I deeply regret that I am unable to show them the publication which benefited from their work and encouragement. I also express my heartfelt appreciation to all who have cooperated for this publication. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 16H03414.

Abbreviations

HMR: *Heishuicheng Manuscripts Collected in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Heishuicheng Manuscripts Collected in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences)*. For details, see catalogue as described later.

AV: *Avatamsaka* (Arakawa 2011)

CM: case marker

Dem: demonstrative

du: dual

N: noun

pl: plural

S1, Sdu, Spl: suffix for first person singular, dual and plural

1sg: first person singular

2sg: second person singular

3sg: third person singular

Notes

- ¹ The facsimile reprints of volume 11 can be seen in *HMR* 8, 244–45 and so on.
- ² The manuscript and printed matters are kept in Russia. The original title in Tangut is 𑖀𑖂𑖄𑖆𑖈𑖊𑖌𑖎𑖐𑖒𑖔𑖖𑖘𑖚𑖜𑖞𑖠𑖢𑖤𑖥𑖧𑖩𑖫𑖭𑖮𑖰𑖲𑖴𑖶𑖸𑖺𑖼𑖾𑖿 ‘Lotus Sutra, the chapter of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’. Until now, ten printed versions and one manuscript are confirmed. Illustration of those materials can be seen in *HMR* 23, 301–16.
- ³ Refer to Cleary (1993: 1445).

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Catalogues

- St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of National Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House (俄羅斯科學院東方研究所聖彼得堡分所·中國社會科學院民族研究所·上海古籍出版社) ed. 1996 & 1998. 《俄羅斯科學院東方研究所聖彼得堡分所藏黑水城文獻》上海：上海古籍出版社 (*Heishuicheng Manuscripts Collected in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 1 & 8. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House).
- The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House (俄羅斯科學院東方文獻研究所·中國社會科學院民族學與人類學研究所·上海古籍出版社) ed. 2014. 《俄藏黑水城文獻》第23卷，上海：上海古籍出版社 (*Heishuicheng Manuscripts Collected in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 23. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House).

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