

## Journey of the Lotus Sutra: Khotan to Tunhuang

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### Khotan and Jade

JADE symbolized human perfection and all that is of supreme excellence in the Chinese civilization. Protective powers were also attributed to it and it was believed that if a person was wearing a piece of jade, it prevented him being thrown from his horse. Furthermore, it was crucial to the imperial rites. Confucius said, “Anciently superior men found the likeness of all excellent qualities in jade.” The 12 excellent qualities were benevolence, intelligence, righteousness, humility of propriety, music, loyalty, good faith, heaven, earth, virtue, truth and duty.<sup>1</sup> The main source of jade for the imperial court was Khotan. The Chinese encyclopedia *Tiangong Kaiwu* documents jade harvesting from the rivers of Khotan. The ancient capital of Khotan was situated between two rivers named Kara-kash (Black Jade) and Yurungkash (White Jade). The Iranian beauties of Khotan were famed as ‘jade ladies’. King Mu (r. 956–918 BCE) visited the Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wang-mu) in her dwelling palace in the Kunlun Mountains and she presented him with objects of jade. She became one of the most popular deities of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), worshipped by the imperial family, aristocracy, literati and common people.<sup>2</sup>

Hsüan-tsang (Xuanzang) says that the Buddha prophesied on Mount Gośṛṅga about the foundation of Khotan. The Tibetan Prophecy of Liyul calls it Gośīrṣa. On this mountain was the Gomāśālagandha caitya. *Go* has been translated as cow in Tibetan (Glañ.ru/Gośṛṅga). Actually, Gośīrṣa was the guardian yakṣa of the Jetavana monastery. In Japan, he is known as Gozu-tennō ‘Gośīrṣa Devarāja’, the tutelary deity of Jetavana (Gion-shōja). He is enshrined in the Gion Shrine in Kyoto, as an incarnation of Bhaiṣajyuguru Tathāgatha (Yakushi Nyōrai). A major festival (Gion-e) is held to this day in his honour in Kyoto in which half a million people from all parts of Japan participate. His worship was introduced in Japan by Dharmabodhi (Hōdō) in 650 CE and his image was enshrined on Mount Hōkke. In 876, the monk Yennyō took the image to a monastery in Kyoto and a shrine was built for worship in

934 CE. A devastating epidemic was said to have been overcome by special ceremonies on June 14, 970. Since then, a grand annual festival is held in Kyoto. The Guardian Deity of Jetavana, Gośīrṣa, is believed to have the sacred power to ward off epidemics. The Gośīrṣa festival seems to have been transmitted from Khotan to China to Japan.

The Prophecy of the Li Country says that the Buddha sat on the Gośṛṅga hill and appointed guardians to protect this place of worship and the land of Khotan. The Gomasālagandha stūpa and a great image of Śākyamuni were established on the hill. The Gośṛṅga hill is now called Kohmārī, whose popular etymology is *koh* ‘mountain’ and *mār* ‘snake’, which fits in with Gośīrṣa being described as a nāga king in the Kāraṇḍavyūha 2.12. According to the Sūryagarbha sutra, Gṛhapati Nāga inhabits this site.<sup>3</sup> The Gandhārī Dharmapada, acquired in 1892 by Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard, was found in a cave of Gośṛṅga hill. And discovered in Khadalik, at 56.18 cm, the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra of the eighth–ninth century is the largest manuscript of the period found in Khotan so far. The colophon in Khotanese names its donors.

The ancient name of the Kara-kash river was Gomatī. Fa-hsien (Faxian) mentions the monastery of Gomatī. The national palladium of Khotan was Gomasālagandha, and its annals are Gośṛṅga-vyākaraṇa. Khotan was called Gostana, which is found in Khotanese documents as Gaustana, Gāmstana, Gāmstam and Gāmstama, and in Chinese texts as Ja.sa.dan.na. P.O. Skjærvø says that “[t]he origin and meaning of the element *Go*-remains unknown”.<sup>4</sup> *Gō-* is jade and *stana* is the toponymic *-stan* ‘land’ (as in Hindustan), thus it means ‘The Land of Jade’. The ancient Chinese pronunciation of *yü* ‘jade’ was *Go* (\*Giou), and it is still *gyoku* in Japanese. The Tibetan name of Khotan is *Li.yul* ‘the country of *li*’ where *li* is bell metal. The Sanskrit name of Khotan includes the element *ratna* for jade. It is Ratnadvīpa in Khotanese Text 5.64–67 and Ratnajanapada in the panegyric of Viśa Saṃgrāma in P 2787. In Sanskrit, *gostanī* is a kind of red grape in the Bhāvaprakāśa 5.6.105 and a kind of wine in the Nighaṇṭu-prakāśa. *Gostanī* is a reference to Gostana or Khotan.

Fa-hsien says that Khotan had four (or 14) great monasteries. The greatest of them was Gomatī from which a procession of a colossus of the Buddha was carried to the city gates. On arrival, the King of Khotan and his entourage would pay homage by scattering flowers and burning incense. The monastery housed 3000 monks. The Gomatī monastery should have been a major trade centre of jade (*go*) whence its name. It ensured the prosperity of the kingdom, while the prosperity and security of Khotan were ensured by contacts with China which had a flourishing trade with it in jade.

## Foundation of Khotan

The foundation of the kingdom of Khotan has links to India and China. A legend has it that Aśoka exiled minister Yaśas to god-forsaken Khotan for the heinous crime of blinding his darling eldest son Kuṇāla. When he arrived there, the Chinese were already established. Conflict ensued and Yaśas was not successful. They worked out an agreement that the first king of the Khotanese dynasty would be a son of the soil. The king of China had prayed to Vaiśravaṇa for a son to complete his thousand sons. There was a castaway son Sa.nu (Earth Breast). Vaiśravaṇa gave him as a son to the Chinese king. When grown up, he quarrelled with his Chinese brothers, who said to him, “You are no son of the Chinese King.” The king tried to pacify him, but he quarrelled with him, too, assembled a force of 10,000 and went to Khotan. He became the very first king of Khotan. The Khotanese attributed their royal origins to Vaiśravaṇa from whom emanated their first king, who was assigned the name Kustana. Kustana was explained as a Sanskrit word: *ku* ‘earth’ and *stana* ‘breast’. It corresponds to the Tibetan Sa.nu: *sa* ‘earth’ Skt. *ku* + *nu* ‘breast’. According to the Travels of Hsüan-tsang, Kustana was the local name of the kingdom, but *The Life of Hsüan-tsang* by Hui-li says that it is the boy who was called Kustana. In the Tibetan Gośṛṅga-vyākaraṇa, the king is called Sa.las.nu.ma.nu, which has been translated as “he whose mother-breast is a breast from earth” by P.O. Skjærvø.<sup>5</sup> This is a mistranslation resulting from taking the second element of the compound as *ma.nu* ‘mother-breast’. Actually *nu.ma* means ‘breast’, and the last *nu* is the verb *nu.ba* ‘to suck’.<sup>6</sup> So the name means ‘one who sucked (*nu*) the breast (*nu.ma*) arisen from (*las*) the earth (*sa*)’. The word has to be understood in its original Sanskrit context. The Tibetan *nu.ma.nu* is *stanamdhaya* ‘suckling, infant’ of the kāvya text and the Mantrabrāhmaṇa, or *stanapa* ‘one who sucks the breast’ of the Jātakamālā. Thus *sa.las.nu.ma.nu* denotes the political concept of *bhūmiputra* (*sa.las* ‘bhūmi’ + *nu.ma.nu* ‘putra’) or rule by a son of the soil. Bhūmiputra became an important element in governance and affected historical developments in early Korea and Japan. It is enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution, where the Chinese are only citizens but the indigenous Malaysians are citizens and bhūmiputra. The first king of Khotan was a bhūmiputra or son of the soil and the eponymous founder of the Vijaya dynasty, born in the land, speaking its language and inheriting its mores. Legends based on popular etymologies reflect historical events.

## The State and Mahayana Sutras

The Prophecy of the Li Country says, “At a time of the arising of evils in the Li country such as pestilence and foreign foe, when one has read the Mahāyāna-sūtra *Mahāsaṃnipāta* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, the conflict becomes calm.”<sup>7</sup> The two important sutras of the Mahāsaṃnipāta class are the Candagarbha and Sūryagarbha sutras. Before his nirvāṇa, Lord Buddha preached the Candragarbha sutra and appointed guardians for various lands. He appointed Vaiśravaṇa, Saṃjñāya the General of the Yakṣas, Princess Vimalaprabhā and Prince Vajrasena, Devakanyā Susthiramati and Devī Hāritī as guardians of Khotan.<sup>8</sup> The Candragarbha and Sūryagarbha sutras were translated into Chinese by Narendrayaśas in 566 CE. According to Emmerick, the Skihi.broñ vihara was dedicated to Ākāśagarbha (Thoms 1.310 n.21).<sup>9</sup> There are four Ākāśagarbha sutras (K 61, 62, 63, 64 = T 408, 405, 407, 409) in the Mahāsaṃnipāta class. A queen of Khotan practised *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* with full concentration.<sup>10</sup> This *samādhi* comes from the sutra named Bodhisattva buddhānusmṛti samādhi (Nj 71, K 60. T414) translated into Chinese by Guṇaśīla in 462 CE.

The Suvarṇabhāṣottama sūtra (hereafter Suv.) had a major influence in appointing guardians of monasteries in Khotan. Elsewhere, I have detailed its role in securing the defence of Khotan.<sup>11</sup> Guardians of some monasteries are also mentioned in this sutra. Mañibhadra yakṣa guards the vihāras of Hgu.zhan.ta (Hgu-žan-ta),<sup>12</sup> Bḥabaña<sup>13</sup> and Byi.zha.gre.rma (Byi-ža-gre-rma).<sup>14</sup> He is spoken of thrice in the Suv. (Tib. 63.29, 68.23, 126.3).

Vaiśravaṇa and Śrī Devī were worshipped as the guardians of the country.<sup>15</sup> Chapter eight of the Suv. on Śrī Mahādevī says that when one utters the name of the excellent Suv., the goddess will watch over his residence and provide him all blessings.

Prṭhvī Devatā is the protector of the state’s territory in chapter 10 of the Suv. (Dṛḍhā mahāprṭhvī-devatā).<sup>16</sup>

The name of General Saṃjñāya occurs only in the Suv. with chapter 11 devoted to him. All the references to him in the Prophecy of the Li Country are based on the deep faith of kings of Khotan in the Suv. He was appointed the protector of Khotan by Śākyamuni.<sup>17</sup> He guards the monasteries of Bzhah.señ.gre.re.ma (Bžah-saṅ-gre-re-ma),<sup>18</sup> Ma.na.hdi (Ma-na-hdi),<sup>19</sup> Tra.ke.hjo (Tra-ke-hjo), Po.lo.na.jo (Po-lo-na-jo)<sup>20</sup> and Gus.sde.re.ma (Gus-sde-re-ma).<sup>21</sup> Āṭavaka guards the Bzhah.ser.ma (Bžah-ser-ma) monastery.<sup>22</sup> He occurs in the list of yakṣa guardians in Suv. (161.15) who will protect all those who hear its recitation (*teṣāṃ*

*rakṣām kariṣyanti yebhiḥ sūtram idaṁ śrutam*, 161.15). Kapila and Āṭavaka are guardians in Suv. (161.3). Kapila guards the monasteries of Sam.ña (Sam-ña),<sup>23</sup> Dharmakīrti,<sup>24</sup> Dro.mo.mdzah (Dro-mo-mjah),<sup>25</sup> Her.mo.no ('Er-mo-no),<sup>26</sup> and Khye.śo.no (Khye-śo-no).<sup>27</sup> Devī Hārītī was appointed to guard Khotan by Śākyamuni,<sup>28</sup> and she made a promise to guard Khotan with her retinue in the presence of the Bhagavān.<sup>29</sup> Hārītī is one of the Five Great Goddesses who are guardians of Dharma.<sup>30</sup> Her mural in shrine D.II at Dandan-uiliq is an outstanding representation, as Dandan-uiliq was the military headquarters of the Chinese General.

The ninth chapter of the Candragarbha sutra enumerates 16 Great Protectors: Viśvakarmā, Kapila, Dharmapāla, Amsalocana, Virūpākṣa, Guptasena, Mañibhadra, Pūrṇabhadra, Vidyādhara, Āṭavaka, Vāsuki, Sumana, Pūṣavima, Hārītī, Elavāśa and Locanā.

The first Chinese translation of the Suv. was done by Dharmakṣema (385–433 var. 436) who lived in Jibin (Bactria)<sup>31</sup> and Kucha, and also came to Khotan. The Khotanese must have recommended its translation. The Khotanese were Iranians like the Yüeh-chih who were the backbone of the Chinese state with their steeds. Moreover, the jade beauties of Khotan also find mention in Chinese translations of the Mahayana sutras. This can be seen in Dharmarakṣema's translation of the Lotus Sutra completed on September 15, 286 CE. It promises the believer that he will be reborn in the Tuṣita heaven, where a host of 84,000 *jade maidens* will come to him, making music and singing praises of his virtues.<sup>32</sup> Kumārajīva's version has: "He will be reborn there [in Tuṣita] with hundred thousand myriad millions of *heavenly maidens* about him."<sup>33</sup> Dharmarakṣa came from a Yüeh-chih family of Tunhuang (Dunhuang), was known as 'Tunhuang Tripiṭaka' (Tun huang san tsang), and naturally rendered "heavenly nymphs" (*apsaras*) of the Sanskrit text as "jade beauties" (jade refers to Khotan). Both the Suv. and the Lotus Sutra reached China via Khotan where they were national palladia.

The Prophecy of the Li Country says that the reading of the Mahāsaṃnipāta and the Lotus Sutra each year in spring, summer and autumn inspired devotion and widespread blessing.<sup>34</sup> The kings performed worship on a large scale in the first month of the four seasons without interruption for pestilence to subside and foreign foes to be becalmed. Prabhūtaratna is the only Tathāgata associated with ratna, which refers to jade in the context of Khotan. King Vijaya Dharma built the Pa.ri.tha stūpa for his Indian (ārya) guru (kalyāṇamitra)<sup>35</sup> Dharmānanda and sanctified it with relics: "He himself procured original intact relics of the Buddha Prabhūtaratna."<sup>36</sup> The Gomasālagandha stūpa

on Gośṛṅga hill had relics of “four generations of departed Buddhas”. As already pointed out, the stūpa was meant to ensure the economy of *go* ‘jade’ and *masālagandha* which is one of the seven precious stones. The correct reading of the second element of the latter is *galva* and not *gandha*. The Smaller Sukhāvātī-vyūha says that Sukhāvātī paradise has seven glittering ponds of gold, silver, beryl (*vaiḍūrya*), crystal (*sphaṭika*), red pearls (*lohita-muktā*), *aśmagarbha* and *musāragalva*.<sup>37</sup> Bhaiṣajyarāja Bodhisattva is one of those who made a vow (*samaya*) to guard Khotan in the presence of Lord Buddha.<sup>38</sup> He is the teacher of Dharma (*dharma-bhāṇaka*) in the 10th chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha delegates its preservation and propagation to him:

Medicine King (Bhaiṣajyarāja), now I say to you  
I have preached various sutras  
And among those the Lotus is the foremost.<sup>39</sup>

The first Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra, as mentioned before, was completed by the Yüeh-chih Dharmarakṣa on September 15, 286 CE during the reign of Ssu-ma Yen (Wu-ti), the founder of the Western Chin dynasty (265–317 CE). The abdication of the Eastern Han emperor Hsien-ti in 220 CE had left China divided into three principalities ruled by three former imperial generals. In 265 CE, Ssu-ma Yen had deposed the last figurehead of the Wei dynasty and ascended the throne. In 280 CE, he annexed Wu, the last of the Three Kingdoms, and created a united South China. After 60 years of division, the empire was united as if the great days of the Han had returned.<sup>40</sup> But soon, the princes and members of the imperial family were quarrelling and fighting. Ssu-ma Yen was “tossed to and fro between the conflicting interests and was himself powerless”.<sup>41</sup> By shrewd countermeasures, he succeeded in playing off one against the other and continued in power. It was a period of darkness. To put the dynasty on firm foundation, the translation of the Lotus Sutra played the role of a ritual empowerment of the state. The 26th chapter of the Sutra affirms that Samantabhadra will take care of the safety of those who follow the Sutra, avert blows and destroy poison for them, so that no one laying snares for them may surprise them, neither Mara the Evil One nor his sons, as he will protect them.<sup>42</sup>

The 25th chapter on Samantamukha Avalokiteśvara specifies 10 woes from which he saves those who utter his name. He rescues them from attacks by thieves and brigands. The Khotanese had a thriving trade in jade with China, went on pilgrimages to Wu-t’ai-shan and transmitted Sanskrit texts, and jade beauties on the long and inhospitable route had

to be protected against bandits. The invocation of Avalokiteśvara as the saviour from the 10 perils was a must.

Emperor T'ang Jui Tsung (r. 710–13 CE) sent Hvashang to invite 16 arhats from Khotan. The arhats were given the martial escort of the pious layman Dharmatāla for a safe journey. The legend says that the arhats revealed to him, as he was sweeping the temple, and a tiger issued from his right knee.<sup>43</sup> The terror of the ever-looming risks of the route could be offset by the recitation of the Avalokiteśvara sūtra.

Dharmarakṣa, the translator of the Lotus Sutra, was from a Yüeh-chih family of Tunhuang and used to collect Sanskrit texts from various kingdoms of Central Asia. The catalogue of Seng-yu attributes the translation of 154 texts to him, amongst which, the Lotus Sutra and Lalitavistara were the most important.

As mentioned before, Dharmarakṣa must have translated the Lotus Sutra into Chinese to strengthen the Western Chin Emperor Wu-ti (265–89 CE). It was in consonance with its role of pre-empting foreign foes in Khotan. Khotan played a positive part in Chinese polity and piety from the days of the Queen Mother of the West to the first Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra.

Ākāśagarbha occurs in the Kāraṇḍavyūha 1.10, but it has to be verified if Kṣitigarbha is also mentioned. Nāgarāja Hu-lor guards the Po.yen.do (Po-yen-do) monastery<sup>44</sup> and Ho.ron.hjo (Ho-ron-hjo) monasteries.<sup>45</sup> This name occurs only in the Kāraṇḍavyūha 2.11 (variants: Hullura, Hulura, Hulluḍa, Hulūḍa). The [Avalokiteśvara-guṇa] Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra must have been prevalent in Khotan. It was translated into Chinese by Śāntideva who was in China from 980 to 1000 CE.<sup>46</sup>

The Sanskrit text of the Avataṃsaka sutras was obtained from Khotan and translated into Chinese by Buddhahdra in 422 CE. Empress Wu Tsö-t'ien sent a special envoy to Khotan for the Sanskrit text and invited Śikṣānanda therefrom. She took part in its translation, as the Avataṃsaka was meant to strengthen her rule.

The Yüeh-chih had been providing horses for the Chinese cavalry from the third century BCE to help the Chinese in their constant skirmishes with the Hsiung-nu. When they gave up horse trade and established their kingdoms, they started providing sutras for protection, especially from Khotan, the Land of Imperial Jade. Khotan became the source of (1) jade for imperial rites, (2) sutras for pre-empting foreign foes, (3) sutras for the protection of the kingdom, (4) the Lotus Sutra translated into Chinese, as the foremost text, at Tunhuang which had been established as a Chinese commandery against barbarians. The Lotus Sutra contained the eulogy of Avalokiteśvara who was said to



save people from the attacks of brigands on the Silk Route, and the promise of a host of jade maidens in Tuṣita heaven to a believer. Jade maidens refers to Khotanese beauties with their gilded thighs, heavy waists and snowy faces whirling in clouds. They are reminiscent of divine *houries* in the Holy Quran and young girls performing the ‘dance of Chāch’ during the reign of T’ang Emperor Hsüan-tsung (Xuanzong). The danseuse emerged “from the opening petals of two artificial *lotuses*, and danced to the rapid beating of drums. It was an amorous dance: the maidens ogled the spectators and, at the end, pulled down their blouses to reveal their bare shoulders.”<sup>47</sup> The Lotus Sutra in Chinese was a gift of Tunhuang to East Asia, to become its wonder world. “Maiden of the Black Eyebrows” from the South Seas, a girl of remarkable skills, had “the talent of embroidering the seven scrolls of the Lotus Sutra in tiny, perfectly formed characters on a single foot-length of artist’s taffeti”.<sup>48</sup> A monastery in Ch’ang-an had a thousand copies of the Lotus Sutra in a stūpa.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Legge 1964, 464.

<sup>2</sup> Little and Shawn (2000) illustrates a hanging scroll of Her Court of Qing dynasty (17th century) on page 36 and a tomb tile of the Eastern Han dynasty (second century) and a money tree of the same period on page 154.

<sup>3</sup> Lévi 1905, 256.

<sup>4</sup> Skjærvø 1987, 784. Pelliot 1959: 412f.

<sup>5</sup> Skjærvø 1987, 783.

<sup>6</sup> Jäschke 1949, 305.

<sup>7</sup> Emmerick 1967, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>11</sup> Chandra 2007, 175–85.

<sup>12</sup> Emmerick 1967, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59, 98, and 102.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 21 and 98.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 9, 13, 29, and 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 67.



- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 69.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 71.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 9.  
<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15.  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (Suv., 1).  
<sup>31</sup> Willemen (2012, 162) talks about the history of Sarvāstivāda in north-western India.  
<sup>32</sup> T9, no. 263: 133b–c.  
<sup>33</sup> T9, no. 262: 61c11–12. Soothill 1930, 262; Kern 1884, 436; Kern and Nanjio 1955, 478: *trayastrimśatām devānām sabhāgatāy-opapatsyante | sahopapannānām caiśām caturaśītir-apsarasām sahasrāṇy-upasaṃkramiṣyanti | te' dhiṃātṛeṇa mukuṭeṇa devaputrās tāsām apsarasām madhye sthāsiyanti |*  
<sup>34</sup> Emmerick 1967, 5.  
<sup>35</sup> Kalyāṇa-mitra means one who blesses his disciple or devotee with beneficence or munificence (*kalyāṇa*). Mitra in the north-western region of ancient India was used in the Iranian meaning of *mihir* “divine or spiritual grace” (*mihir* > *mithra* > *mitra*).  
<sup>36</sup> Emmerick 1967, 41.  
<sup>37</sup> Müller and Bunyiu 1883, 93.  
<sup>38</sup> Emmerick 1967, 13.  
<sup>39</sup> Watson 1993, 164.  
<sup>40</sup> Grousset 1953, 103.  
<sup>41</sup> Eberhard 1977, 117.  
<sup>42</sup> Kern 1909, 433.  
<sup>43</sup> Tucci 1949, 558.  
<sup>44</sup> Emmerick 1967, 67.  
<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 69.  
<sup>46</sup> T20, no. 1050.  
<sup>47</sup> Shafer 1963, 55. It is based on Hsiang Ta, *T'ang tai Ch'ang-an yü Hsi-yü wen-ming* (Peking, 1933: 61–62).  
<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 139.

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