
A Review of Tangut Buddhism, Art and Textual Studies

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Dr. Saren Gaowa

China Research Coordinator for the Ford Foundation project, National Library of China

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Introduction

Tangut studies began with the excavation of artefacts and documents at Kharakhoto (in present-day northwest China) in the early twentieth century. Currently more than ten countries have institutes specializing on Tangut studies and have published a large corpus of scholarly work in the field. Following on from the pioneering work of former scholars, many new scholars are turning to Tangut studies and have achieved important advances in recent years. At the same time, new materials have been discovered, providing a wealth of information for research purposes. Various international conferences on different themes of Tangut studies have been held worldwide.

Excavations

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Review of international Tangut studies up to 1980

In China, significant research has been done on Buddhism and Tangut art. Tangut Buddhism took elements from the Buddhism practiced at the time among Chinese and Tibetans. Chinese histories including the *Liao History*, *Jin History*, and especially the *Song History* records six cases of the Tanguts seeking Buddhist sutras from the Song dynasty (960–1279), and then making the woodblocks. In addition, evidence of exchange between the Tanguts and the Song dynasty can be seen from Tibetan documents, such as the *Mkhas Pavi Dgav Ston* (A Feast for Scholars), *The Red Annals*, *Biographies of Tibetan Emperors and Ministers*, and *The Sakya Hereditary History*. The history of the Tibetan Buddhist monks who were appointed as royal tutors and other important positions in the Tangut kingdom is outlined in detail in Sun Changsheng's paper(1) [foot1] . A large amount of work has been done on Tangut Buddhism. A seminal text in this field is Shi Jinbo's *Historical Sketch of Tangut Buddhism*(2) [foot1] , which contains a detailed description of the development of Tangut Buddhism, Tangut sutras, Tangut temples and monks. In the chapter entitled 'Tangut Buddhist Art', Professor Shi discusses Tangut Buddhist painting in grottoes and temples, scroll paintings on silk or paper, wooden engraving on printed sutras, sculptures in grottoes and statues in temples, calligraphy of sutras, and Buddhist art from the perspective of temple structures. Professor Shi's research on the influences from the cultures of Tibet and the central plains of China on Tangut culture has been widely recognized by scholars of Tangut.

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Clear links exist between Tangut art and Buddhism. Tangut art is mostly concentrated in Buddhist temples or paintings; in Buddhist documents; in sculpture and architecture in Buddhist grottoes. Scholars such as Duan Wenjie, Zhang Baoxi, Liu Yuquan, Sun Changsheng and Han Xiaomang have continued to work on Tangut art, focusing on the representation and artistic merits of cave wall painting (see Appendix 1). The Tangut Kingdom, the Chinese Song dynasty and Tibetan Empire coexisted in roughly the same historical period, see the *Chronology of Chinese History* in Appendix 2. An important characteristic of Tangut art is the deep influence from Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. Professor Shi Jinbo has mentioned this in his work. Professor Xie Jisheng from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has also contributed important work on this topic. His paper(3) [foot3] and book(4) [foot3] have



Mahasthamaprapta, 13th century
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introduced the history and research of *tangkas* found in Kharakhoto, the contents and style of the images, the origin of the *tangka*, the form of *tangas* found in Kharakhoto, Tangut *tangas* and their origin in Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. Professor Xie has also analysed the influence from Tibetan Tantric Buddhism.

With the development of Tangut studies, the demands for collation, publication, and digitization of Tangut materials are significantly greater than before. In order to meet the needs of scholars, the holding institutions of the Tangut documents from Kharakhoto have published these materials. In 1993, the Shanghai Classic Publishing Company and the St Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Russian Academy of Sciences collaborated to edit and publish all the Kharakhoto documents held in Russia. Chinese scholars and editors went to Russia twice, and together with Russian scholars they worked to collate, catalogue and photograph these materials. Around 8,000 Russian Tangut documents have been published in eleven volumes since 1996. In 2002, the Northwest Second National Minority College (Now the Northern National Minority University) started a project entitled 'Collation of Kharakhoto Documents Held in Britain'. They have cooperated with the Shanghai Classic Publishing Company since 2005 and published the four-volume *Documents from Khara-Khoto* in the British Library.⁽⁵⁾ [#foot5]

Compared to the publication of Tangut documents held worldwide, the collation and publication of Tangut documents in China has been slow. The Tangut documents are held in Beijing, Ningxia, Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Xinjiang and other places. Some scholars have collated these documents and made catalogues, although this work has not been published in its entirety. Ningxia University set up a project for the collation of Tangut manuscripts in China in 2001, and began to work with the Gansu Research Centre for Collating Chinese Classics in 2004. Later on, another ten institutions took part in this project too. Now the Gansu Renmin Publishing Company and the Dunhuang Wenyi Publishing Company have published *Tangut Manuscripts Collected in China — Beijing* in twelve volumes. The digitization of the Tangut documents took place just before the publication. The National Library of China, as a major holding institution of Tangut documents, digitized 121 Tangut documents in 2002, as well as organizing an exhibition on Tangut culture and cataloguing all the papers on Tangut studies. These resources can be freely searched and used at the website of the National Library of China [<http://res2.nlc.gov.cn:9080/wenxian/>]. The detailed references concerning Tangut documents held at the National Library of China are listed in Appendix 3.

Although the Tangut documents are now being rapidly collated and digitized in China, web resources are being developed individually and in isolation. Institutions, whether in Beijing or Ningxia, have digitized the documents according to their own standards without sharing information or resources. Thus to date there is no complete resource including the original images of the documents, catalogues or full texts of the research papers and books on Tangut studies, historical records of the Tanguts and the achievements of scholars of Tangut and holding institutions. Scanning PDF articles can no longer satisfy user requirements. The creation of some kind of knowledge database is needed to allow more in-depth analysis into the results of research already undertaken. The National Library of China digitization of the catalogues of Tangut documents and research is an example of pioneering work in this area. The database has not been maintained or updated however, resulting in no new data since 2002.

Funded by the Ford Foundation, the symposium on 25–27 April, 2007 on Tangut civilization will also propose the construction of a web resource of Tangut studies. Similar to the knowledge database mentioned above, we suggest that the database should be based upon the existing Internet resources and full-text images, with useful links added. Information on the related institutions and scholars should also be included, and all the historical records related to the Tangut kingdom should be included in the database, so as to set up a functional knowledge base. At this stage, we are just creating a simple homepage displaying references on Tangut Buddhism and art. We believe that all scholars present at the symposium are the experts who are able to comment on what should be included in the database on Tangut Studies, thus promoting further research. Your valuable opinions and suggestions are therefore welcomed.

(1) [#note1] Sun Changsheng 2006

(2) [#note1] Shi Jinbo 1988

(3) [#note1] Xie Jisheng 1997

(4) [#note1] Xie Jisheng 2001

(5) [#note1] *Yingguo guojia tushuguan cang Heishui Cheng wenxian 2005*

Review of Tangut studies in China

Timeline

朝代 Dynasty	帝王 Emperor	公元起讫 Dates (AD)	年号 Era names (<i>Nian hao</i>)
北宋 Bei song	宋太祖赵匡胤 song tai zu zhao kuang yin	960-963 963-968 968-976	建隆 jian long 乾德 qian de 开宝 kai bao
	宋太宗赵灵 Song tai zong zhao ling	976-984 984-987 988-989 990-994 995-997	太平兴国 tai ping xing guo 雍熙 yong xi 端拱 duan gong 淳化 chun hua 至道 zhi dao
	真宗赵恒 Zhen zong zhao heng	998-1003 1004-1007 1008-1016 1017-1021 1022	咸平 xian ping 景德 jing de 大中祥符 da zhong xiang fu 天禧 tian xi 乾兴 qian xing
	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1023-1032 1032-1033	天圣 tian sheng 明道 ming dao
西夏 Xi xia	景宗李元昊 Jing zong li yuan hao	1032-1034	显道 xian dao
		1034	开运 kai yun
		1034-1036	广运 guang yun
北宋 Bei song	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1034-1038	景祐 jing you
西夏 Xi xia	景宗李元昊 Jing zong li yuan hao	1036-1038	大庆 da qing
北宋 Bei song	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1038-1040	宝元 bao yuan
西夏 Xi xia	景宗李元昊 Jing zong li yuan hao	1038-1048	天授礼法延祚 Tian shou li fa yan zuo
北宋 Bei song	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1040-1041	康定 kang ding
		1041-1048	庆历 qing li
西夏 Xi xia	毅宗李谅祚 Yi zong li liang zuo	1049	延嗣宁国 yan si ning guo
		1050-1052	天祐垂圣 tian you chui sheng
北宋 Bei song	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1049-1054	皇祐 huang you
西夏 Xi xia	毅宗李谅祚 Yi zong li liang zuo	1053-1056	福圣承道 fu sheng cheng dao
北宋 Bei song	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1054-1056	至和 zhi he
		1056-1063	嘉祐 jia you
西夏 Xi xia	毅宗李谅祚 Yi zong li liang zuo	1057-1062	奢单都 she dan du
		1063-1067	拱化 gong hua
北宋 Bei song	仁宗赵祯 Ren zong zhao zhen	1064-1067	治平 zhi ping
	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xu	1068-1077	熙宁 xi ning
西夏 Xi xia	惠宗李秉常 Hui zong li bing chang	1068-1069	乾道 qian dao
		1070-1074	天赐礼盛国庆 Tian ci li sheng guo qing
		1075-1085	大安 da an
北宋 Bei song	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xu	1078-1085	元丰 yuan feng
西夏 Xi xia	惠宗李秉常 Hui zong li bing chang	1086	天安礼定 Tian an li ding
北宋 Bei song	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xu	1086-1094	元祐 yuan you
西夏 Xi xia	崇宗李乾顺	1086-1089	天仪治平 tian yi zhi ping
		1090-1097	天祐民安 tian you min an
北宋 Bei song	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xu	1094-1098	绍圣 shao sheng
		1098-1100	元符 yuan fu

西夏 Xi xia	崇宗李乾顺 Chong zong li qian shun	1098-1100	永安 yong an
北宋 Bei song	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xn	1101	建中靖国 jian zhong jing guo
西夏 Xi xia	崇宗李乾顺 Chong zong li qian shun	1101-1113	贞观 zhen guan
北宋 Bei song	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xn	1102-1106 1107-1110 1111-1118	崇宁 chong ning 大观 da guan 政和 zheng he
西夏 Xi xia	崇宗李乾顺 Chong zong li qian shun	1114-1118	雍宁 yong ning
北宋 Bei song	神宗赵顼 Shen zong zhao xu	1118-1119 1119-1125	重和 chong he 宣和 xuan he
西夏 Xi xia	崇宗李乾顺 Chong zong li qian shun	1119-1127	元德 yuan de
北宋 Bei song	钦宗赵桓 Qin zong zhao huan	1126-1127	靖康 jing kang
西夏 Xi xia	崇宗李乾顺 Chong zong li qian shun	1127-1134	正德 zheng de
		1135-1139	大德 da de
	仁宗李仁孝 Ren zong li ren xiao	1140-1144 1144-1148 1149-1169 1170-1193	大庆 da qing 人庆 ren qing 天盛 tian sheng 乾祐 qian you
	恒宗李纯祐 Heng zong li chun you	1194-1206	天庆 tian qing
	襄宗李安全 Xiang zong li an quan	1206-1209 1210-1211	应天 ying tian 皇建 huang jian
	神宗李遵顼 Shen zong li zun xiang	1211-1223	光定 guang ding
	献宗李德旺 Xian zong li de wang	1223-1226	乾定 qian ding
	末主李睨 Mo zhu li xian	1226-1227	宝义 bao yi

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