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## **Pilgrimage in Western Xia: Research on Tangut Wall Inscriptions in the Mogao and Yulin Caves**

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DOI: 10.55512/wmo569219

*Abstract:* The Tanguts who established Western Xia (982–1227) were active and devoted Buddhist pilgrims. They visited the Buddhist cave complexes of Mogao and Yulin in the Greater Dunhuang area and left several hundred lines of wall inscriptions. The paper examines various types of the remaining Tangut pilgrimage inscriptions and formulates their common textual formula. The comparative study of the resemblant Chinese, Tangut, and Uyghur inscriptions reveals their structural and vocabulary similarities and suggests the existence of the multilingual “inscriptional discourse” in the greater Dunhuang area in the 10th–14th cc. Finally, the content analysis of the inscriptions illuminates the features of the Buddhist pilgrimage as a local social and religious phenomenon and provides a precious primary textual source for the study of Western Xia.

*Key words:* Western Xia, Dunhuang, Tanguts, inscriptions, pilgrimage

### **Introduction**

The Greater Dunhuang area is located in the western part of the Gansu Corridor and includes the Buddhist cave complexes of Mogao (MG) 莫高窟, Yulin (YL) 榆林窟, and East Qianfodong 東千佛洞. The Mogao caves, located in the proximity of the town of Dunhuang 敦煌, not only preserved an abundant number of scrolls, booklets, and pieces of early medieval Chinese art but also thousands of inscriptions. These were left by pilgrims and donors from the Sixteen Kingdoms period (304–439) up to the Republican time (1911–1949).

Evgeny Kychanov pointed out that although the toponym “Dunhuang” is not attested in the Tangut sources, the city was depicted on a Xixia map created in the second half of the 11th c.<sup>1</sup> Paul Pelliot believed that no Tangut

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<sup>1</sup> KYCHANOV 2012: 127.

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manuscripts and xylographs were discovered in the Dunhuang library cave (Cave 17) because the cave was sealed prior to the Tangut invasion around the year 1035.<sup>2</sup> This date is based on a passage from *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 [*Extension to the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*], where Li Tao 李濤 states that, “[Li Yuanhao] changed the third year of Guangqing to the first year of Daqing (1036), once again raised [his] army and attacked Uighurs, occupied Gua[zhou], Sha[zhou]<sup>3</sup>, and Su[zhou]”.<sup>4</sup> In addition, *Songshi* 宋史 [*History of Song*] lists Shazhou 沙州 (Dunhuang) among the prefectures that were under Tangut control in 1036.<sup>5</sup> Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 agrees on the date of the Tangut occupation of Dunhuang but suggests that the power of the Tanguts was not strong, because the Guiyijun 歸義軍 administration of Dunhuang continued to send envoys to Northern Song up to the fall of 1052.<sup>6</sup> After a careful onomastic analysis of the envoys, Liu Yuquan 劉玉權 suggested that they comprised members of diverse ethnic origins — Sinitic, Uighur, and Tibetan, but not Tangut. This testimony was recorded in *Song huiyao* 宋會要 [*Institutional History of the Song Dynasty*], and it justifies Rong’s argument for Tanguts’ insufficient control over the area.<sup>7</sup> Another piece of evidence that supports the hypothesis of the late Tangut dominance in Dunhuang is the use of the Northern Song reign period Qingli 慶歷 (1041–1048), specifically the year 1046, in the inscription in Mogao cave 444.<sup>8</sup> Okazaki Seirō 岡崎精郎 provides an even later date of the establishment of the Tangut control of the Dunhuang region — 1073 — based on the mention of the Tangut reign period *Guoqing* 國慶 (1069–1073) in a Yulin inscription.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that only in the 1070s did the Tanguts finally obtain stable political and military control of the Dunhuang region.

Inscriptions in the Tangut language preserved in the greater Dunhuang area were first studied by Chinese scholars, Shi Jinbo 史金波 and Bai Bin 白濱, who conducted initial fieldwork in the area in the fall of 1964. Their research group aimed to specify the dating of individual Buddhist caves, define the characteristics of mural art, and record the remaining inscriptions.

<sup>2</sup> PELLIOU 1909: 506.

<sup>3</sup> I.e. Dunhuang.

<sup>4</sup> XZZTJCB, vol. 9, juan 119: 2813.

<sup>5</sup> SS, juan 485: 13994.

<sup>6</sup> RONG 2013: 47.

<sup>7</sup> BAI 1984: 213.

<sup>8</sup> DHMGKGYRTJ: 169.

<sup>9</sup> OKAZAKI 1972: 274–275. Inscription: MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 359.

The group was headed by prominent early Dunhuang and Tangut scholars, such as Chang Shuhong 常書鴻, Wang Jingru 王靜如, and Su Bai 宿白. By the end of their research, Shi Jinbo and Bai Bin published a decipherment and analysis of 92 Tangut inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> In the 2010s, Arakawa Shintarō 荒川慎太郎 conducted four field trips to Mogao and Yulin caves to carry out detailed research on the remaining inscriptions. The results of his work were published in 2017 in collaboration with Matsui Dai 松井太 in the volume *Tonkō sekkutsu tagengo shiryō shūsei* 敦煌石窟多言語資料集成 [*Multilingual Source Materials of the Dunhuang Grottoes*]. This work contains decipherment and translation of Uighur-Mongolian, Tibetan, Tangut, and Chinese inscriptions from the 11th to the 14th cc. Arakawa provided a detailed decipherment and annotated translation of 527 lines of Tangut inscriptions from Mogao, Yulin, and Dong Qianfodong, attempting to record all the remaining Tangut inscriptions, including many single Tangutgraphs and scribbles.<sup>11</sup> Due to the poor preservation of some inscriptions, which makes it impossible to decide the exact frames of a complete inscription, the Japanese scholar approached the issue by counting the inscriptions by lines (columns).

The activities of pilgrims and donors at the destination point of pilgrimage were significantly influenced by their religious beliefs, social status, and surrounding cultural context. Their behavioristic mode is to a certain extent formed by the *pilgrimage culture* that was prevailing in the Dunhuang area in the 10th–13th cc. Most of the remaining multilingual inscriptions from this period do not indicate significant variations or extreme derivations from the conventional formulas and Buddhist vocabulary. The comparative study of the Tangut inscription corpus displays multiple similarities with Uighur and Chinese counterparts. Therefore, research on Tangut inscriptions is impossible outside the context of the *inscription culture* of Mogao and Yulin, which has been forming and developing since the 4th c. CE.

### The “Anatomy” of Tangut Inscriptions

Tangut inscriptions can be classified by three criteria: physical characteristics, location in a cave, and content. Tangut inscriptions exist in two main physical forms: written with ink and scratched by a sharp tool (scribbles). Since the walls of many Buddhist caves were covered with

<sup>10</sup> SHI & BAI 1982; SHI & BAI 2007.

<sup>11</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017.

straw-mud plaster, which is not an ideal surface for scratched inscriptions, scribbles were usually executed quite clumsily, leading to detachment of some pieces of stucco from the surface. The preservation state of the remaining ink inscriptions, which were mostly executed in cursive or semi-cursive script, varies from faded grey to richly preserved black. There is also one interesting example from the northern Mogao Cave 56 that displays two graphs with the frames of the characters delineated and the brushstrokes left hollow.<sup>12</sup> This example may suggest that some of the inscriptions may have been scratched and then filled with ink.

Spatial distribution of the wall inscriptions is quite different. A large number of inscriptions are seen in the corridor leading to the inner chamber(s) but concentrating predominantly on the northern wall. In the inner chamber(s), the inscriptions are fewer but cover the walls and the ceiling more evenly. The statistic suggests that the fraction of inscriptions is higher in the front chamber and the corridor than in the inner chamber. A wandering pilgrim may have preferred to leave an inscription in the front part of the cave because it was better illuminated than the inner spaces. Nevertheless, if a pilgrim was determined to perform certain rituals in front or in the vicinity of the particular icon or mural then he or she proceeded into the inner chamber and left the inscription in the main chamber.

Shi and Bai suggested dividing the Tangut inscriptions into three categories according to their content: merit vow inscriptions *gongde fayuan wen* 功德發願文, donor cartouches *gongyangren bangti* 供養人榜題, and pilgrim dedicatory inscriptions *xunli tikuan* 巡禮題款.<sup>13</sup> Pilgrim dedicatory inscriptions are the most intriguing and informative category due to their content and size. Usually, they contain valuable information about the date when the inscription was made, the name and the origin of the maker, or the person on whose behalf the inscription was made. In most cases, they also contain supplications, records about donations, and vows.

A typical formula of a pilgrim dedicatory inscription may be divided into three core parts, some of which may be partly or completely omitted. The first part *Introduction* contains information about the date the event (pilgrimage) took place as well as the name, social position, and provenance of the main protagonist. In the vast corpus of Tangut inscriptions, only eight can be dated precisely. The time scale of the inscriptions covers the period from 1085 to 1128,<sup>14</sup> which does not exceed the time of the Tangut rule in

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<sup>12</sup> ZGCXXWX, vol. 18: 231.

<sup>13</sup> SHI & BAI 1982: 368.

<sup>14</sup> SHI & BAI 1982: 370.

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this region. It indirectly supports Okazaki's assertion that Dunhuang was occupied by the Tanguts only after the 1070s. The time span of Chinese inscriptions attributed to the Tangut period is broader and covers the period from 1071 to 1219.<sup>15</sup> The dating consists of a reign period, a year, written in the sexagenary system of "heavenly stems and earthly branches" (Chin. *tiangan dizhi* 天干地支), a month and a day. It is worth pointing out that most inscriptions in the Tangut script employ either a sexagenary system in which a year is indicated by a combination of two graphs or only the twelve branch system which corresponds to the zodiac animals.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, Chinese inscriptions from the period of Tangut rule in the area (1073–1227) predominantly employ the reign period of Xixia's rulers.<sup>17</sup> Nikolay Nevsky pointed out that by translating Tibetan texts, the Tanguts became familiar with astrology, which was essential for compiling lunar calendars.<sup>18</sup> Presumably, the Tanguts inherited the Tibetan astrological tradition and often employed Tibetan zodiac symbols to indicate a specific year.

The seasonality of the dated inscriptions is also peculiar. The fourth and fifth months are predominant among the remaining records. Matsui Dai's research of Uighur and Syriac inscriptions from the Yuan dynasty indicates that many of them were made on the fifteenth day of the fifth month, which most likely was supposed to be auspicious.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the general overview of Tangut inscriptions indicates that this seasonal pattern does not apply to the Tangut inscriptional corpus. Among the remaining sources, only one inscription (YL 39)<sup>20</sup> was made on the fifteenth day of the fifth month. Presumably, this day did not possess any auspicious meaning for the Tanguts in the 11th–13th cc. as it did for the Uighurs during the Mongol period.

The name of the main contributor(s) and his/her/their rank and provenance usually follow the date. Extant Tangut and Chinese inscriptions indicate a wide range of pilgrims' origins: Ganzhou 甘州 (present-day Zhangye 張掖, Gansu province, 4 instances), Suzhou 肅州 (present-day Jiuquan 酒泉, Gansu province, 2 instances), Liangzhou 涼州 (present-day Wuwei 武威, Gansu province, 1 instance), and even Song Han state (Chin. Song Han guo 宋漢國), and Northern Mount Wutai (Chin. Bei Wutai shan 北五臺山) in

<sup>15</sup> SHI & BAI 1982: 371.

<sup>16</sup> MG 340, MG 464 — *hai* 亥 year (pig), MG 26 — *wei* 未 year (goat).

<sup>17</sup> Tianqing 天慶 MG 205, 229, Zhenguan 貞觀 MG 427, Guangding 光定 MG 443, Guoqing 國慶 MG 444, YL 16.

<sup>18</sup> NEVSKY 1960: 53.

<sup>19</sup> MATSUI 2018: 38.

<sup>20</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 325.

present-day Mount Helan 賀蘭山 in Ningxia. Among the Yulin inscriptions, names such as Shazhou 沙州 and Guazhou 瓜州 are also mentioned. This data indicates that pilgrimage in the greater Dunhuang area during the Tangut period was predominantly local and pilgrims' movements usually did not exceed the realms of the Gansu Corridor. Hamilton and Niu also noted this peculiarity among Uighur inscriptions, pointing out that the pilgrims usually came from the proximity of Dunhuang, such as Shazhou, Suzhou, and Qamil (Chin. Hami 哈密).<sup>21</sup> It is quite surprising that we hardly see any representatives from the Ordos region — the main area of Tangut habitation and the center of the Tangut state. This was probably due to the remoteness of the region from the Tangut metropolitan centers in the east. Another possible explanation was provided by Valerie Hansen's research on the functioning mechanisms of the so-called Silk Road, which played a crucial role in the life of the greater Dunhuang area. After careful analysis of the remaining material and textual evidence of several sites located on the Silk Road, Hansen concluded that a "particular site preserves little direct evidence of the Silk Road trade."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the trade and exchange of commodities between the cities on the Silk Road took place predominantly between the sites located in proximity to each other rather than between those far away from each other. Similar patterns have been recently discovered by the BuddhistRoad team regarding the spread and diffusion of Buddhism in Central and East Asia. Their concept suggests that major religious and cultural centers (*major node*) form *feedback loops* with minor centers (*minor node*) so that direct influences and interactions occur inside the loops, which are interconnected and constitute a chain-shaped thread.<sup>23</sup> By extrapolation of this approach to the remaining textual evidence of the Tangut pilgrimage, we observe that the pilgrimage in the greater Dunhuang area was predominantly a local phenomenon.

Nevertheless, the fact that one inscription in MG 297<sup>24</sup> mentions the term "Han state" *zar-lhjij* 鞏穰 indicates that the subjects of the Song court were traveling to Dunhuang during the Tangut rule. The bisyllabic toponym "Han state" is not widely attested in the Tangut sources. The Tanguts preferred to name their powerful neighbor as "Eastern Han" *wjĭ-zar* 鞏穰 or "Eastern State" *wjĭ-lhjij* 鞏穰.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> HAMILTON & NIU 1998: 128.

<sup>22</sup> HANSEN 2012: 238.

<sup>23</sup> BUDDHISTROAD TEAM 2018: 129–130.

<sup>24</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 269.

<sup>25</sup> SHI 2020: 436.

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One Chinese inscription on the wall of MG 444<sup>26</sup> states that the pilgrim has arrived from Great Qingliang Monastery (Chin. Da Qingliang si 大清涼寺) on Northern Mount Wutai, which was another name for Helan mountains 賀蘭山 near the Tangut capital. Although the inscription did not preserve the name of the protagonist, the monastery and its location are attested in the colophon of the Buddhist text *Mizhou yuanyin wangsheng ji* 密咒圓因往生集 included in the Taishō Tripitaka (T46 n. 1956).<sup>27</sup> In addition, Yang Fuxue 楊富學 suggested that Great Qingliang Monastery on Northern Mount Wutai is mentioned in the colophon to the Yuan dynasty Tibetan Buddhist composition *Dasheng yaodao miji* 大乘要道密集, which was partially written during the Tangut times. Several parts of this text, not including colophons, were also discovered by Pyotr Kozlov in Khara-Khoto (ТaнГ 251, ИHB. № 913, 914, 4528).<sup>28</sup>

Tangut and Chinese inscriptions preserved several occupations and ranks. The most prominent and informative inscriptions are located in YL 25. They mention a number of donors of the Zhao 趙 family that occupied several military posts in the Department of military inspection (Tang. 叢絲牝 *gyad zju rjar*, Chin. *jianjun si* 監軍司) in Guazhou and Suzhou.<sup>29</sup> Another interesting instance from Mogao Cave 65 is an official named Tow 頽 from the department (*gwon*) of tax collection 蓼蓼 *zjij 'iø* in Liangzhou.<sup>30</sup> Some inscriptions were made by Buddhist monks, who were either dwelling in the greater Dunhuang area or other regions.

Finally, the inscriptions contain more than a hundred personal and monastic names: Tangut, Kitan, and Chinese.<sup>31</sup> The most popular Tangut clan names that were used multiple times are Ma-dzon 黠龍 and Me-buq 緡穉. The latter surname is also widely seen in Tangut sources from the Kozlov collection and people bearing this surname constitute the significant majority of donors in Tangut sutra colophons.<sup>32</sup> Liang 梁 and Zhao 趙 are two Sinitic surnames that are attested both in the inscriptions and in sutra colophons.<sup>33</sup> Finally, one inscription (YL 12–13)<sup>34</sup> contains a Khitan name,

<sup>26</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 355; DHMGKGYRTJ: 168.

<sup>27</sup> SHI 1988: 118–119.

<sup>28</sup> YANG 2010: 15–16.

<sup>29</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 308.

<sup>30</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 253; ZGCXXWX, vol. 18: 211.

<sup>31</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 329–331.

<sup>32</sup> KYCHANOV 1999: 666.

<sup>33</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 330; KYCHANOV 1999: 664–665.

<sup>34</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 295.

transcribed as Yeli 野利 corresponding to the Khitan ruling clan Yarud/Yelü 耶律.<sup>35</sup> The Tangut inscriptions show that pilgrims rarely paid homage to the deity as individuals. Multiple inscriptions contain several names of pilgrims, who made offerings, burned incense, and prayed for prosperity and good fortune. These name lists indicate that some may have belonged to the same clan or occupied similar ranks.

The introduction is usually organically connected with the next part, which contains a supplication stating that the protagonist *physically arrived* at the place of pilgrimage. The inscriptions contain various expressions used to denominate these pilgrimage sites. Pilgrims usually revered them as “holy palaces” (Tang. *śjĭj mjĭ* 勿甌)<sup>36</sup> or “thousand temples” (*tū mjijr jĭj* 𐰇𐰏𐰍𐰏).<sup>37</sup> Another term, which is also attested in Uighur, Chinese, and Mongolian inscriptions, is “mountain temple” 𐰇𐰏𐰍𐰏 *śiã mjijr jĭj*. According to Arakawa’s estimations, this term is used twice in the corpus of Mogao and Yulin Tangut inscriptions.<sup>38</sup>

Variants of the corresponding Uighur term *tay vrixar / tay buqar / tay süm(ä)* “mountain temple” are widely used in Uighur inscriptions.<sup>39</sup> In all these three compounds, the first part *tay* is the Uighur term for mountain, and the second one is the Uighur adaptation of the Sanskrit term *vihāra* (Uig. *vrixar* and *buqar*)<sup>40</sup> and the Uighur word *sümä* means Buddhist temple, monastery.<sup>41</sup> Since the word *tay* [mountain] precedes the compound *buxar süm* [temple], Tibor Porció tends to interpret it as “temple or monastery (inside of) mountain”.<sup>42</sup>

This term is also attested in several Chinese inscriptions. One faded ink inscription on the eastern wall of the MG 61 states that on the 20th day of the fourth month of the fifth year of the Tianqing era (1198), a pilgrim came to the *mountain temple* (*shansi*) 山寺 to execute his pilgrimage.<sup>43</sup> Another Chinese inscription in MG 45 states that on the first day of the fourth month of the second year of Zhishun 至順 period (1331), a monk named Liu Zu 劉祖 came to the mountain temple to burn incense and pay homage.<sup>44</sup> Among

<sup>35</sup> RÓNA-TAS 2016: 121.

<sup>36</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 253.

<sup>37</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 310.

<sup>38</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 267.

<sup>39</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 19.

<sup>40</sup> WILKENS 2021: 846, 196.

<sup>41</sup> WILKENS 2021: 637.

<sup>42</sup> PORCIÓN 2014: 172.

<sup>43</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 347.

<sup>44</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 365; DHMGKGYRTJ: 16.



several other Chinese pilgrimage inscriptions, this term is used in several instances, most of which originate from the Yuan period.

Some pilgrims did not limit themselves to visiting only one location but travelled around the greater Dunhuang area and the western Gansu corridor. One Tangut inscription from MG 65 indicates that the pilgrim visited two “palaces of sand” (Tang. *mji be* 隴巖), which is an allusion to the two Buddhist complexes of Mogao and Yulin.<sup>45</sup> Another inscription from MG 196 introduces a pilgrim who visited the “two areas” (Tang. *njē iō* 孃 節), which is most likely also a reference to the two cave complexes.<sup>46</sup> Finally, an intriguing inscription from YL 12 tells us about a “professional” pilgrim, who is visiting “the holy palaces of the world” and in particular “holy palaces in Ganzhou”.<sup>47</sup> The inscription remains silent about his spiritual experience in Yulin. One inscription from YL 25 employed the term “bodhi-realm” (Tang. *po tjij rjijr* 繡教界), referring to the Buddhist caves at Yulin.<sup>48</sup> These examples illustrate that the pilgrims of Tangut, Uighur, and Chinese origins, who visited Dunhuang and Yulin in the 11th–14th cc., were using similar terms describing the destination point of their pilgrimage.

The statement that indicates the fact of arrival at a sacred place is usually followed by a manifestation of the good deeds that a pilgrim has performed. This may include burning incenses *śja njwī* 蕤纛, which is a calque from the Chinese *shaoxiang* 燒香.<sup>49</sup> Wealthy pilgrims may have sponsored the construction or restoration of a cave or a temple *tshə jji dzjwī dji* 龕窟禮慶(慶).<sup>50</sup>

The final part, supplication, is usually the longest and the most elaborate. Tangut devotees were praying for personal well-being as well as for the sake of all sentient beings. The inscriptions preserve various forms of such supplication. One variant is a wish that all beings may arrive at the Western Pure Land<sup>51</sup> (Skr. *sukhāvātī*, Chin. *xifang jingtu* 西方淨土) and pray for all generations to be able to behold the face of the Buddha, and that all the beings of the “lower *dharma*-realm would be liberated from the sins.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 253.

<sup>46</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 256.

<sup>47</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 293.

<sup>48</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 300.

<sup>49</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 267, 273, 301, 323.

<sup>50</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 271.

<sup>51</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 253.

<sup>52</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 267, 272.

The general pattern of the inscriptions is relatively unified and can be described by conventional structure. A completely preserved inscription usually started with an *introductory part*, which contained a date, expressed as a year either in the format of a reign period or a symbol of the zodiac cycle. It was followed by an introduction of the main devotee or a group of believers, who commissioned the inscription. Usually, this part mentions their origin and rank. A *statement part* declares that the devotee *has arrived* at the sacred location and conducted a series of actions, such as burning incenses and sponsoring the reconstruction of caves and temples. Finally, a *supplication part* contains prayers and wishes on the behalf of the pilgrim, other people, and even all sentient beings in general.

Another widespread kind of Tangut graffiti is donor inscriptions. MG 61 contains the majority of this kind of inscriptions, written near pictorial representations of donors and accompanied by their approximate Chinese equivalents. While a Tangut inscription reads as “the one, who raises a wish” (Tang. *tji šjwo mjijr* 輦禱疹)<sup>53</sup> followed by a personal name, its Chinese version indicates “a monk with conscious action” (Chin. *zhuyuan seng* 助緣僧).<sup>54</sup> The visual representation of the donors having shaved heads, wearing long monastic robes, and presenting various offerings in their hands suggests their ordained status. The inscriptions are located in rustic rectangular cartouches to the left of the figures.

### Challenges of studying inscriptions

Votive wall inscriptions are a visible and accessible source of information about the Tangut social and religious history. In contrast to many Buddhist texts that were translated from Chinese or Tibetan, the wall inscriptions are the original textual product of the Tanguts. Based on the Chinese and Uighur models, the Tangut inscriptions provide us with a glimpse of their lives, beliefs, and religious practices. They record several dozens of people’s personal names and *dharma titles*, native places, and official positions. Supplication parts unveil their religious and spiritual endeavors. Although wall inscriptions are a source of valuable information, their study is a challenging task for a student of Tangut studies for the following reasons.

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<sup>53</sup> MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017: 249–252.

<sup>54</sup> According to (HIRAKAWA 1997: 202) the term *zhuyuan* 助緣 is a translation of the Sanskrit term *saha-kāri-pratyaya*, which means “with conscious action” (MONIER-WILLIAMS 1899: 274; 1194; 673). The Tangut term is not a simple lexical calque from Chinese, but an elaboration of the Sanskrit original term.

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First, very few inscriptions are preserved in intact form. If the inscription was written with ink, its pigments may have been destroyed by the environment and the ink may be faded, making the inscription hardly visible. If the inscription was scratched with a sharp stylus and its stucco layer was later disturbed and fell off, its identification and deciphering become quite challenging. Second, the calligraphic font, cursive or semi-cursive script, may also become an issue for a scholar. Although the inscriptions have been thoroughly studied by Shi and Arakawa, there are still many graphs that cannot be clearly identified. Moreover, even if the Tangutgraph is identified, its usage and grammatical role may remain obscure and create a problem for an adequate translation. Third, due to the fragmentary and scattered nature of these inscriptions, their decent interpretation may be a challenging issue.

### ***Inscriptional Discourse of Mogao Caves***

Tangut pilgrims did not exist in a religious and cultural vacuum, therefore emic research on votive inscriptions is unable to provide us with the comprehensive landscape of pilgrimage in the greater Dunhuang area. Comparative analysis of multilingual pilgrimage inscriptions from various epochs demonstrates a certain level of conformity in the applied patterns and vocabulary, which suggests the existence of a unified *inscriptional discourse* that existed in the area for at least sixteen hundred years. In other words, the pilgrims upon arrival to the sacred location were able to browse through the existing multilingual inscriptions and get themselves acquainted with the forms and styles of the local inscriptions. Some pilgrims also translated inscriptions of their predecessors, as we see in YL 25, which contains inscriptions in Tibetan and Uighur. According to Porció's research, two Tibetan inscriptions "are simply the translations, respectively, of the Uygur inscription next to them, or the other way around".<sup>55</sup>

We cannot deny the possibility of the existence of local monastic scribes, who were able to make a manuscript copy of a sūtra to be offered by a donor as an expression of religious piety and as a means to accumulate merit. Most likely, these scribes were also able to provide scribal services to make wall inscriptions.

The majority of the complete pilgrimage inscriptions in Chinese, Tangut, and Uighur contain information about the time when the inscription was

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<sup>55</sup> PORCIÓ 2014: 162.

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written or the pilgrimage was conducted. Many Chinese language pilgrimage inscriptions created between the 10th and 15th cc. originated from the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) with a significant portion from the *zhishun* 至順 (1330–1333) and *zhizheng* 至正 (1341–1370) reign periods. Uighur inscriptions studied by Hamilton, Niu, and Matsui were written in the 13th–16th cc.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, Uighur and Tangut inscriptions always start with the indication of time, while the Chinese ones often locate the date either after the name of the donor or even at the very end.

Since creating an inscription is an act of commemoration, a personal name is a common element in all inscriptional traditions. In many cases, it was located after the date and was also connected with the place of origin. Matsui suggests a similar inscriptional pattern, resembling the one described above for the Tangut inscriptions, that includes a date, name, place of origin, activity at the site of pilgrimage, and supplication.<sup>57</sup> Chinese inscriptions from the Tangut period are preserved in quite a poor condition that hinders finding a working pattern for the inscriptions. Nevertheless, Chinese inscriptions from the Mongol period are relatively consistent and often display a pattern comprised of a place, name, date, and description of activities performed at the pilgrimage site. Most of the Chinese inscriptions do not contain any supplications, wishes, and vows that are widely represented in Tangut and Uighur ones.

### Abbreviations

DHMGKGYRTJ — *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供养人题记. See: DUNHUANG YANJIUYUAN 1986.

MG — Mogao Caves 莫高窟. For the cited inscriptions (MG + cave number) see: MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017.

SS — *Songshi* 宋史. See: TUO TUO 1980.

Tang. — Tangut

XZZTJCB — *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編. See: LI 1985.

YL — Yulin Caves 榆林窟. For the cited inscriptions (YL + cave number) see: MATSUI & ARAKAWA 2017.

ZGCXXWX — *Zhongguo cang Xixia wenxian* 中國藏西夏文獻. See: NINGXIA DAXUE XIXIA YANJIU ZHONGXIN, GUOJIA TUSHUGUAN, GANSUSHENG GUJI WENXIAN ZHENGLI BIANYI ZHONGXIN 2005.

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<sup>56</sup> HAMILTON & NIU 1998: 127–210.

<sup>57</sup> MATSUI 2018: 38.

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