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## A Portrait of State Preceptor Xibi Baoyuan: Case Study of Identification

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*Abstract:* This article is a case study of the engraving in the Tangut Buddhist text *Xibi State Preceptor's Compendium of Admonitions to the World* 訖龕隴訖訖龕龕 written by the Buddhist monk of high rank, State Preceptor Xibi Baoyuan. For a long period of time left and right parts of this illustration existed separately in two editions of this book. For this reason, this text's author in the illustration was identified incorrectly. The study of this engraving's fragments allowed to join two engraving parts in their original form and helped to identify the genuine portrait of Xibi.

*Key words:* Tangut Fund IOM RAS, Tangut state, engravings, Tangut Buddhism

The idea to write about the engraving which is the subject of this research belonged to the late Professor Evgeny Ivanovich Kychanov (1932–2013). I remember the day when working with the Tangut collection, he took this engraving, looked at it for a moment and said: “This picture deserves to be written about”. He was talking about an intro picture to the didactic text “A Compendium of Wisdom” by Xibi Baoyuan.<sup>1</sup> I was surprised by his words, but then forgot to ask his opinion, and now I think that he just liked it as a book illustration. Several years later, after E.I. Kychanov's passing, this engraving was in focus of my research again and I followed his advice.

This engraving (Pl. 1) is an introductory illustration in the didactic text *Xibi State Preceptor's Compendium of Admonitions to the World* 訖龕隴訖訖龕龕 (Tang 428).

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<sup>1</sup> In Tangut fund this text exists as two woodblock editions Tang 428, Tang 33, and as the manuscript Tang 34.

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Pl. 1. Intro engraving in the text Tang 428 after first restoration

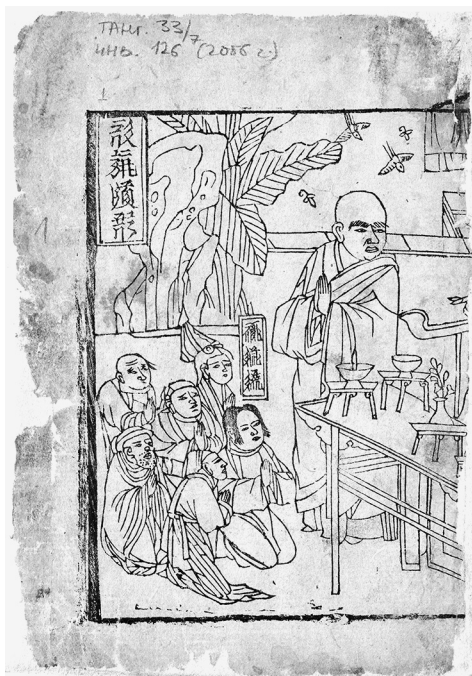
According to the colophon it is dated 1188–1189. This text is quite famous in the history of Tangut textological research. It was first mentioned and partly translated by N.A. Nevsky (1892–1937).<sup>2</sup> Many years later many researchers in the tangutology field referred to the *Compendium* in different contexts. The author of this book is Xibi Baoyuan, a Buddhist monk and a significant and famous person in the history of Tangut Buddhism primarily because of his numerous translations of canonical texts into the Tangut language. Ruth Dunnell describes him as a man with *ambitious erudition*.<sup>3</sup> He translated from Tibetan, Sanskrit and Chinese languages. In Kychanov's *Katalog tangutskikh buddiiskikh pamiatnikov* (*Catalogue of Tangut Buddhist books kept at the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS*) we find his name as an editor in colophons of some *Vajracchedikā-sūtra* editions.<sup>4</sup> Xibi Baoyuan occupied significant positions in the hierarchy of Tangut Buddhist Sangha:

<sup>2</sup> NEVSKY 1960: 83.

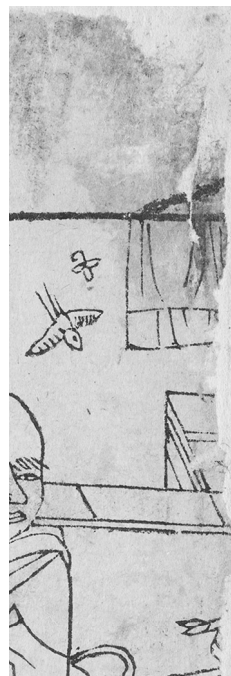
<sup>3</sup> DUNNELL 2009: 51.

<sup>4</sup> KYCHANOV 1999: 284, 286, 288.

Dharma Preceptor 法師 and later State Preceptor 國師.<sup>5</sup> According to the inscription in the cartouche, he is presented as State Preceptor at the right part of the engraving in the text Tang 428. But for a long period of time Xibi Baoyuan image was mistakenly identified with the person at the left part of the engraving in the Tang 33 edition (Pl. 2), because only this left part was known, and E.I. Kychanov examined only this part of the engraving.



Pl. 2. Left part of the engraving in the Tang 33 text as it was given in all reference literature



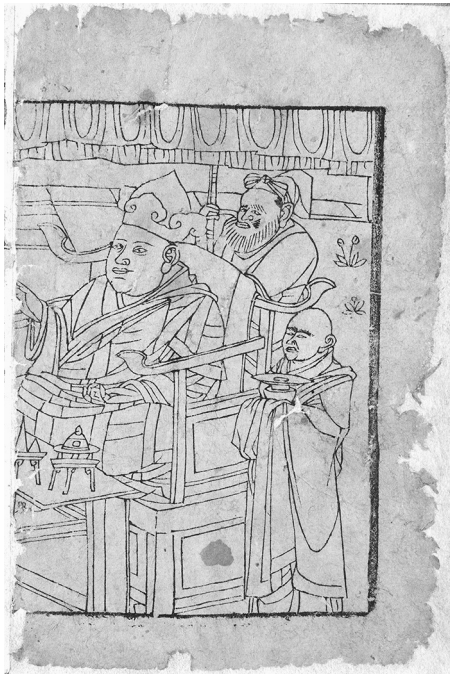
Pl. 3. A fragment of the left part close to the missing right part

We see a standing Buddhist monk with hands in the *mudra* gesture and a group of people kneeling before him. On top there is an inscription in the cartouche on the left: “State Preceptor Xibi”, and another inscription near the group of people: “Listening and accepting dharma”. As a rule, in Tangut book illustrations the name of a person was placed near that person’s image. According to this cartouche, Xibi Baoyuan was identified only with this standing monk since the inscription directly pointed at him. More importantly, in all earlier descriptions of this picture there were no indications that

<sup>5</sup> KYCHANOV 2008: 603–605.

this fragment is the left part of the engraving. However, indirectly, the poses of all the people, and directly, two fingers on the right clearly pointed to the engraving's lost right part (Pl. 3).

In Russian Tangutological literature this engraving was first mentioned and described by A.P. Terentiev-Katansky, who considered it to be the complete illustration.<sup>6</sup> He ignored the central standing figure of the monk and concentrated his attention on the group of people who “listen and accept dharma”, describing scrupulously their appearance. Recently, among unidentified fragments I have found — as I realized later — the right part of the engraving (Pl. 4). We see on it a high-ranking clergyman sitting on a throne of some kind, holding his right hand in a mudra gesture<sup>7</sup> and a figure of a servant standing behind the throne and holding the baldachin over this clergyman.



Pl. 4. Right part of the engraving that was found among unidentified texts.  
Now we can see the face of the second monk on the right side of the engraving.  
On the engraving in Tang 428 his image is damaged

<sup>6</sup> TERENTIEV-KATANSKY 1993: 49.

<sup>7</sup> I should remind that only this small part of this hand image (fingertips) is seen on the left fragment (Pl. 3) and that was the reason for the first restoration in process of which two parts of the engraving were joined as Tang 33 (Pl. 1), but not correctly, as we shall see later.

There is also another monk figure on his left who holds a kind of ritual vessel. Interestingly, this engraving copy is well known too. We find it under the pressmark Tang 428 and it was also described in *Katalog* (Pl. 5).<sup>8</sup>



Pl. 5. Right part of the engraving in the text Tang 428 before restoration

This picture was also mentioned by A.P. Terentiev-Katansky,<sup>9</sup> and published twice by E.I. Kychanov: one time with the title “Eminent Lama with servants”,<sup>10</sup> and second time as “Noble Tangut with servants”.<sup>11</sup> Despite firm evidence of the authorship in Tang 428 text’s colophon, no researcher ever identified this man as Xibi Baoyuan. Ruth Dunnell describes both texts’ editions (Tang 428, Tang 33) and notes only that they contain a *Preface* and a portrait of preceptor Xibi.<sup>12</sup> But we should keep in mind that left and right

<sup>8</sup> KYCHANOV 1999: 615.

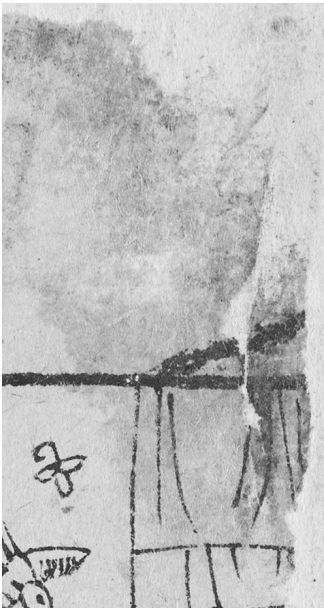
<sup>9</sup> TERENCEV-KATANSKY 1993: 66–67.

<sup>10</sup> KYCHANOV 1965: 113.

<sup>11</sup> KYCHANOV 2008: 595.

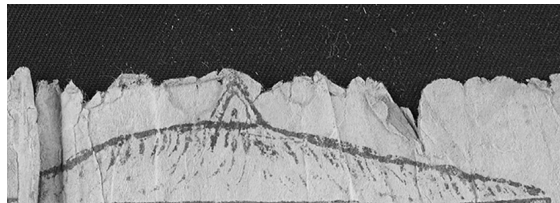
<sup>12</sup> DUNNELL 2009: 52.

parts of this engraving always existed separately in Tang 428 and Tang 33 editions. We find the *Preface* only in text Tang 33 with the left part of the engraving. As for the edition Tang 428, it has only two pages: first page is the right part of the engraving with the portrait “Noble Lama with servants” (according to *Katalog*<sup>13</sup>), and the second one is the last page of the text with only the title and the colophon (Pl. 5). I assume that Ruth Dunnell making reference to the portrait of Xibi Baoyuan could mean only the left part of the engraving in Tang 33, because only in this edition there is a cartouche with his name. Finally, only after an additional stage of restoration work all the pieces of the puzzle came together, the complete original engraving appeared and the portrait of State Preceptor Xibi Baoyuan was finally correctly identified: he is the “Noble Tangut” pictured on the right part. Restoration also brought to light another discrepancy lost from view before: on the left part of the engraving Tang 33 over the baldachin we see a short line drawn by hand that does not correspond to woodblock printing (Pl. 6), and if we look attentively at the engraving in Tang 428, we see that the whole upper part of the baldachin is drawn by hand too. It looks like “artistic” work of book owner who decided to draw the whole baldachin image (Pl. 7).



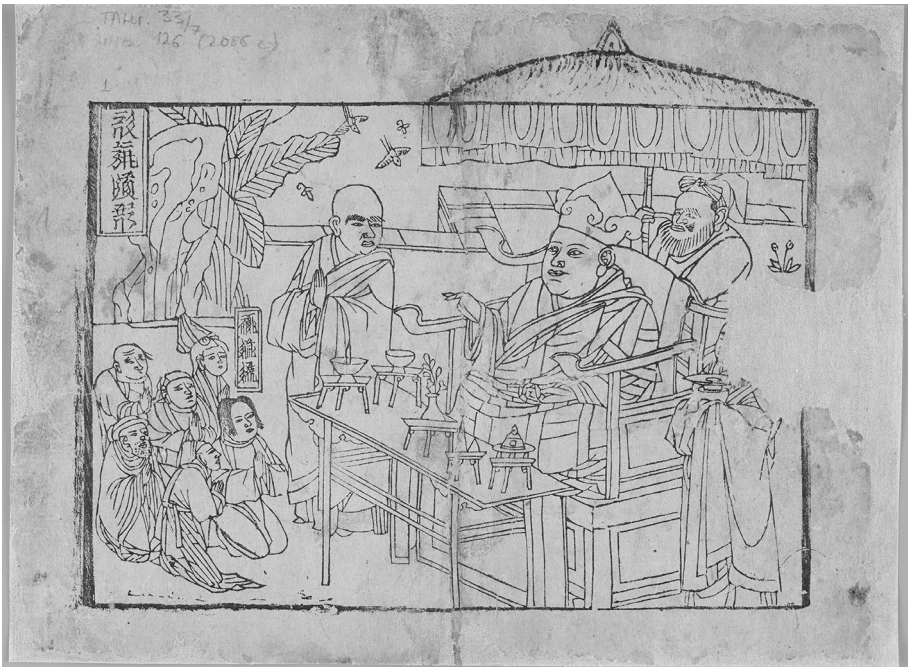
Pl. 6. Line drawn by hand at the upper left part of Tang 33

Pl. 7. Upper part of the baldachin drawn by hand on the right part of the engraving in the text Tang 428



<sup>13</sup> KYCHANOV 1999: 615.

Thus, it is quite obvious that the left part of Tang 33 engraving is, in fact, the left part of the Tang 428 engraving. In this case the engraving recently found among unidentified fragments should be the right part of the Tang 33 edition. But probably this is not true, because of different sizes of printed frames, and because we cannot be sure that *A Compendium of Wisdom* 效彰訓 of Tang 33 was published originally with the intro engraving. In any case, now we can be sure that the text *Xibi State Preceptor's Compendium of Admonitions to the World* 設雍隲彰訓歲壽 of Tang 428 was published with his genuine portrait (Pl. 8). Also, the appearance of listeners accepting dharma in this engraving deserves special attention: their clothes are very similar and suggest that they are adepts of some religious cult. Hypothetically, they may be Nestorians who began their missionary activity during the Tang dynasty in China, and, as Kychanov noted, documents testifying to the activity of Nestorian Christians in Xi Xia were found in Khara-Khoto.<sup>14</sup> Especially interesting is the man on the left side in the second row — his set of face features, shape of beard, clothes, and especially his headdress look unusual for a Tangut, a Chinese or a Tibetan, and I propose that he could be a native from the so-called West Land.



Pl. 8. Intro engraving of Tang 428 after final restoration

<sup>14</sup> KYCHANOV 1965: 257.

Some notes in conclusion: Tangut art as the original tradition arose as a mixture of art styles of neighbouring ethnicities. Therefore, I think, in order to trace its original style, we should try to explore each piece of art from the viewpoint of individual masterpiece style, rather than try to give general abstract characteristics. Not being a specialist in the field of art studies, I want to give my opinion about several features of this illustration that attract my attention. Art style shows itself better in small details: here, different expressions of people's faces and their poses create a specific atmosphere of the whole scene. When we look at the monk figure standing on the left and his facial expression, it seems that he contemptuously turned away from the group of people to whom dharma is preached and listens only to words of Preceptor Xibi. From the standpoint of European artistic tradition, all figures are completely static, they are fixed in the disproportional landscape and the group of people to whom Dharma is preached looks smaller than the group of preachers. However, there is a concealed dynamic in all these static figures that reveals itself in their body language, and each person's facial expression is unique. There is also one distinctive feature that makes this engraving special: it depicts an episode of historical reality with real people of this epoch, a rare example of realistic art in Tangut book illustration.

### Abbreviations

KATALOG — *Katalog tangutskikh buddiiskikh pamiatnikov Instituta vostokovedeniya Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk* [Catalogue of Tangut Buddhist books kept at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences]. See: KYCHANOV 1999.

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