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The Preface to the *Shiwang Jing*: An Early Legend of Revival*

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Abstract: The main text of the Tangut version of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* was based on the Tibetan version, but its preface, translated from Chinese, contains a folk legend about a child who returns alive from Hell after Yama admires his respect for deities and sages. A similar legend is recorded in Chinese Buddhist canon no earlier than the Ming Dynasty, therefore the Tangut preface proves to be the earliest sample of the same work. With the help of Chinese texts, it may be possible to decipher the Tangut version of the cursive handwritten preface in inv. № 819 kept at the IOM, RAS and the version in a xylograph that recently appeared on the Chinese relic market.

Key words: Tangut, Xixia, Buddhism, folklore, unorthodox scripture

1. Introduction

The *Shiwang Jing* 十王經 (*Scripture on the Ten Kings*) is an unorthodox Buddhist work that circulated widely in Northern China, especially in Dunhuang from the seventh to the tenth century.¹ It tells believers how to avoid afterlife pains in Hell by accumulating merits in advance. Its Chinese original was translated into Tibetan and then re-translated into Tangut with adaptation. There are two Tangut versions with different titles kept in the Khara-Khoto collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS that remain to be deciphered, especially a severely damaged preface in cursive handwriting. In the year 2021, a Tangut version of the scripture in question appeared on the market of Chinese relics, and we obtained a whole set of high-resolution pictures from the Taihe Jiacheng Auction Company.² This

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* The present paper was written under the guidance of Prof. Nie Hongyin and with the help of Prof. Sun Bojun and Sun Yingxin. Of course, I am personally responsible for any remaining errors.

¹ DU 1989; TEISER 1994.

² We would also like to thank Mr. Liu Yu, division manager of the company, for his permission to use these pictures. He told Prof. Nie that it was acquired by an anonymous collector, probably excavated first by some relic diggers from somewhere in the Edzina Delta, near Khara-Khoto.

proves to be the only xylograph of the *Shiwang Jing* we have at present. It preserves a comparatively complete preface, which will help us decipher the cursive hand preface of the same content kept at the IOM, and provides us an earlier sample of folk legends about returning from Hell.

2. Description and identification of the materials

There are two manuscripts of the *Shiwang Jing* kept at the IOM, RAS that are catalogued separately: inv. № 4976 as *Shiwang Jing* 十王經³ and inv. № 819 as *Yanmo Focheng Jishou Jing* 閻魔佛成記受經.⁴ Its full text survives in the latter manuscript, but the former lacks the initial part. In terms of content, both are identical to the *Shiwang Jing* that recently appeared on the market of cultural relics in China.

The xylograph on the market of cultural relics, with 41 folios of the initial part preserved, has accordion binding with the folio size 23.3×9.1 cm and the frame height is 15.8 cm, 6 lines with 15 characters per line. The end of the text is lost and the top of the book was damaged into debris. Before auction, it was mounted without guidance of specialists, so that some fragmented pieces were incorrectly pasted at the top of the folios and were hard to restore at the correct places.

On the front cover, the work is entitled *tha śjġ la yjwei lwər lhejr* 𑖦𑖩𑖪𑖫 𑖬𑖭𑖮 (Scripture on becoming Buddha and receiving prediction).⁵ Two other titles appear on the initial folio of the text (Pl. 1). The first line is the same title as on the front cover, the second to the fifth line is a very complicated title,⁶ approximately parallel to the Tibetan title *Bcom ldan 'das kyi (kyis) gshin rje la lung bstan pa dang/ 'khor rnam la bshos ston bdun tshigs bya ba dang/ sangs rgyas kyi zhing du skye ba dang/ lha 'i pho nya bstan pa zhes pa 'i mdo*:⁷

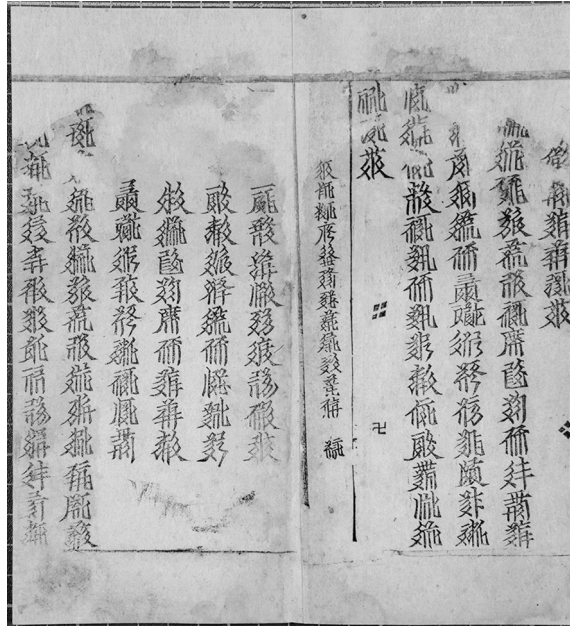
³ NISHIDA 1977: 31; KYCHANOV 1999: 472–473.

⁴ NISHIDA 1977: 59; KYCHANOV 1999: 473–474.

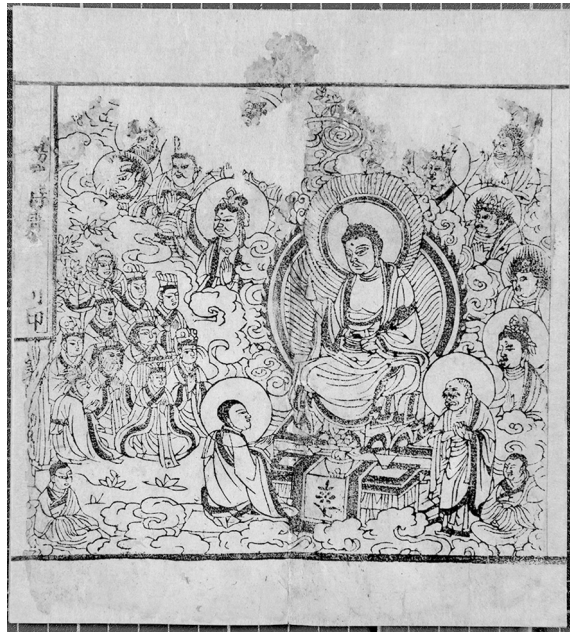
⁵ Chin. *Chengfo shouji qijing* 成佛受記契經. *Shouji* = Skr. *vyākaraṇa*.

⁶ Since the titles are slightly fragmentary, the following transcription is collated with inv. № 819 and 4976.

⁷ Besides, according to BEROUNSKY 2012: 148, there is another title for the same scripture: *Gshin rje sangs rgyas su lung bstan pa dang/ 'khor rnam bzhi la bshos ston bcol ba dang/ sangs rgyes kyi zhing du skye ba dang/ lha 'i pho nya lnga bstan pa zhes bya ba 'i mdo* (Chin. 閻羅成佛受記四眾修齋往生佛土示教五天使契經).



Pl. 1. The beginning of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*



Pl. 2. Frontispiece of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*

[𪛗𪛘𪛙]𪛚𪛛𪛜𪛝𪛞
 [𪛟𪛠𪛡]𪛢𪛣𪛤𪛥𪛦𪛧𪛨𪛩𪛪𪛫𪛬𪛭𪛮𪛯𪛰𪛱𪛲𪛳𪛴𪛵𪛶𪛷𪛸𪛹𪛺𪛻𪛼𪛽𪛾𪛿⁸

Scripture on Yama becoming Buddha and receiving prediction

The Buddha,⁹ World-honored,¹⁰ Dharma-king,¹¹ Yama¹² becoming Buddha and receiving prediction, each of the fourfold assembly¹³ practicing the ten days of fasting,¹⁴ being reborn to the Buddha's land and increasing the practices of the Five Dharmas¹⁵ in advance, enlightening the Five Heaven Envoys,¹⁶ preached by the Buddha

On the border joining the first and second paper sheets, the name of the translator is recorded in the following colophon:

𪛗𪛘𪛙𪛚𪛛𪛜𪛝𪛞𪛟𪛠𪛡𪛢𪛣𪛤𪛥𪛦𪛧𪛨𪛩𪛪𪛫𪛬𪛭𪛮𪛯𪛰𪛱𪛲𪛳𪛴𪛵𪛶𪛷𪛸𪛹𪛺𪛻𪛼𪛽𪛾𪛿

Created by Tangut texts translator,¹⁷ abbot in red,¹⁸ Mjī-njij Źjīr-njow

A similar colophon may be found in inv. № 819,¹⁹ showing slight differences: the religious name of the translator, Źjīr-njow 𪛗𪛘 (Tib. *Shes-rab rgya-mtsho*, Chin. *Huihai* 慧海) is substituted by Tsjīr-njow 𪛟𪛠 (Tib. *Chos-kyi rgya-mtsho*, Chin. *Fahai* 法海), and the description of his working manner *γjīr* 𪛗 (to create) is substituted by *lhe dej* 𪛚𪛛 (to translate and

⁸ Chinese deciphering: 佛说佛世尊閻羅法王成佛受記四眾修十齋生佛土及預增五法行示教五天使契經。

⁹ Buddha (*swew sa* 𪛗𪛘) < Tib. *sangs rgyas* = Chin. *mingman* 明滿。

¹⁰ World-honored (*tšjī dju dzjij* 𪛟𪛠𪛡) < Tib. *bcom ldan 'das* = Skr. *Bhagavān* = Chin. *chuyouhuai* 出有壞 (*shizun* 世尊)。

¹¹ Dharma-king (*tsjīr njij* 𪛟𪛠) < Tib. *chos rgyal* = Chin. *fawang* 法王。

¹² Yama (*dji dzjwī* 𪛟𪛠) < Tib. *gshin rje* = Chin. *yuzhu* 獄主 (*yanluo* 閻羅)。

¹³ Fourfold assembly (*ljīr-ji* 𪛟𪛠), generic terms for Buddhists: *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇi*, *upāsaka* and *upāsikā*。

¹⁴ Ten days of fasting (*śja tsew* 𪛟𪛠) = Chin. *shizhai* 十齋, indicates the observation of Buddhist precepts during ten days every month practiced by lay people。

¹⁵ Five Dharmas (*ṅwə mə tsjīr* 𪛟𪛠), also named *wuyun* 五蘊 (Five Skandhas): form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*samjñā*), impulse (*samskāra*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*)。

¹⁶ Five Heaven Envoys (*ṅwə me phjī* 𪛟𪛠), envoys of Yama, in charge of birth, senescence, illness, death and legal prison。

¹⁷ Texts translator = Tib. *Lo-tsa-ba*。

¹⁸ Wearing a red cassock is the distinguishing mark of eminent monks。

¹⁹ KYCHANOV 1999: 474。

transmit). We believe that both names refer to one and the same person with the Tangut surname Mjī-njij who translated the Tibetan original into Tangut and transmitted it to the masses.

In the two folios preceding the text, there is a frontispiece showing Śākyamuni preaching to the masses (Pl. 2) and at the top left corner there is a severely fragmentary colophon with few Chinese characters remaining, indicating that it was produced by a certain printing workshop. Besides, Chinese characters also appear for numbering the woodblocks, such as *sibai ershiqi* 四百二十七 (four hundred and twenty-seven), *sibai ershiba* 四百二十八 (four hundred and twenty-eight) etc., suggesting that these blocks might have come from a huge Buddhist collection. What is more, on the 29th folio there is inserted a Chinese character Li 李, evidently the surname of the woodblock carver. In Tangut scriptures, it is a typical feature of *Hexi Zang* 河西藏 (Tangut *Tripitaka*) of the Yuan era that carvers recorded woodblock sequence and their own names in Chinese. Thus, we may conclude with certainty that this xylograph is a part of the Yuan edition of the *Tripitaka* compiled at the end of the 13th c.²⁰

3. Deciphering and annotating the preface

There is no doubt that the main text of *Shiwang Jing* was translated from Tibetan, but its preface was translated from Chinese.²¹ The Chinese original has not been found in text materials before the Xixia era. There are only two later editions of *Shiwang Jing* that we can see in the National Library of China. One is a Ming dynasty xylograph collected by Rong Geng and Zheng Zhenduo (№ 16022), the other is a donated printing by Liu Zan in Chongqing City in 1819.²² Both editions begin with a preface similar to those in Tangut versions. With the help of the Chinese texts, the Tangut preface can be deciphered satisfactorily, but needless to say, the word “decipher” does not mean “to restore” the Chinese original, because it is impossible to do so only by means of collating a translation with two later different editions.

²⁰ Besides, in a certain private collection in China, there are other fragmentary printings of *Shiwang Jing* similar to this xylograph (ZHANG Jiuling 2019). For the history of compiling the *Tangut Tripitaka*. See SUN 2011.

²¹ NISHIDA 1977: 31, 59 and KYCHANOV 1999: 472–474 assumed the scripture to be a translation from Chinese. Maybe they only referred to the preface, and not to its main text.

²² ZHANG Zong 2013.

The following transcription of the preface is based on the xylograph auctioned in China (Pl. 3) and collated with the manuscript inv. № 819 in the IOM (Pl. 4). Missing and vague words in the original, tentatively restored based on the texts of Chinese editions, are placed in square brackets.

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 [𤝵]𤝵[𤝵]𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵
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 𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵
 𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵𤝵

The Preface to the *Scripture on King Yama Practicing Shiwang Jing in Advance, Preached by Buddha*

In the Aniding Block²³ of the Western Capital²⁴, the Great Tang dynasty, deity Ma Xing²⁵ had only²⁶ one son named Hongjing.²⁷ When he was able to differentiate east from west roughly, he revered the Three Treasures.²⁸ He used to call and invite the sages and deities of the earth²⁹ before dining. It was only after doing this that he started to eat and drink. On the first day, the fifth month, the second year of Jinglong,³⁰ he suddenly died without cause. His chest remained slightly warm for three days, so the family members dared not to incinerate him.³¹

²³ Aniding Block (*yā-thjjixjow* 藤有𤝵) = Chin. *Aniding Fang* 安定坊, located to the west of the capital. Song Minqiu's *Chang'an Zhi* 長安志, juan 10: *Zhuque jie xi zhi disi jie, ji huangcheng xi zhi diyi jie, jie xi cong bei diyi Aniding Fang* 朱雀街西之第四街, 即皇城西之第一街, 街西從北第一安定坊 (The fourth street to the west of Zhuque Street, also the first street to the west of the Imperial Capital, the Aniding Fang is located in the first block from the north to the west of the street).

²⁴ “Western Capital” refers to Chang’an (now Xi’an city), as opposed to the “Eastern Capital” Luoyang.

²⁵ The name Ma Xingxian 馬行仙 in Chinese original is misunderstood by Tangut translator as a *xianren* 仙人 (deity) named Ma Xing, so he transcribed *ma xing* phonetically as *bia xiaj* 𤝵𤝵, but translated *xian* semantically as *sjj dzjwo* 𤝵𤝵 (deity).

²⁶ Here the Tangut word *twu* 𤝵 (straight) is used to express the meaning “only”. This is caused by Chinese phonetic borrowing, because Chinese words *zhi* 直 (straight) and *zhi* 祇 (only) are homophones in the Northwest dialect at that time.

²⁷ Chin. *hongjing* 弘敬.

²⁸ “Three Treasures” refers to Buddha, dharma and saṃgha = Chin. *fofaseng* 佛法僧.

²⁹ Deities of the earth (*ljj sji* 𤝵𤝵) = Chin. *diqu* 地祇 or *tudi* 土地.

³⁰ Jinglong 景龍 is the reign period of Tang Emperor Zhongzong (707–710). The date mentioned here is May 24, 708 AD.

³¹ Here the Chinese *binmai* 殯埋 (burial) was substituted with *pju tshj* 𤝵𤝵 (burn, incinerate) in order to accord with the Tangut custom of cremation.



Pl. 3. The preface of the xylograph *Scripture on the Ten Kings*

𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑 [𦉑] 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑: “𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 [𦉑𦉑𦉑]?” 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 “𦉑”. “𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 [𦉑𦉑?” 𦉑] 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑: “𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑𦉑𦉑. [𦉑] 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 [𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑] 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑.” 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑. 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑: “𦉑𦉑 《𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑》 𦉑 [𦉑] 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑?” 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑: “𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 [𦉑] 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑.” 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 [𦉑] 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, [𦉑] 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑.

The dispatched messenger³² led him to the related department. The governor of the department questioned: “Aren’t you Ma Hongjing from the An ding Block of the Western Capital?” Hongjing gave him an affirmative answer. “What merits did you make before?” The governors of the department said to each other secretly: “Despite being an ignorant child, he is always glad to make goodness in his mind.³³ Every time before daybreak,³⁴ he chants the appellation of Deliverance Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara a hundred times.” The governors of the departments said that his soul might be released. The King asked again: “Will you be glad or not to transcribe a book of *Scripture on Yama King*?” Hongjing replied on his knees: “If you let me be released, I shall transcribe one thousand books.” The King ordered to change his name into “Longevity”³⁵ and let him live till ninety years of age, and then called the dispatched messenger so that he would not get lost.

𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑 [𦉑 𦉑 𦉑] 𦉑𦉑. 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑. 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 [𦉑 𦉑] 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑. 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑. 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑. 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑, 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑.

After the soul came back, it made the whole family full of happiness and the whole area full of compliments. Reports were gathered in detail and transmitted from the country to the capital. One thousand books were transcribed, and everybody worshipped them with respect. Patients were recovered, dying people were revived, lawsuits were prevented, and blind people regained sight. The record is engraved on the stone and taken for transmission.

³² Dispatched messenger (*bju mjiŋr phjĭ dzjwo* 𦉑𦉑 𦉑𦉑) = Chin. *zhuling shiren* 追領使人, refers to the soul guide in Hell.

³³ The Tangut translation parallel to *chang le shan* 常樂善 is dropped.

³⁴ The Tangut translator employed the word *le dzjĭj* 𦉑𦉑 < Chin. *yinshi* 寅时, indicating 3–5 o’clock.

³⁵ Longevity < Chin. *yanshou* 延壽.

- [6] ……席筵窺髣櫛髣蘆席……舜翊緘救髣髴翊翊救
 [7] ……緘窺髣髴……髣緘祀□□蕪敬循髣髴髣髴蕪蕪
 [8] ……髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴
 髣髴髣髴髣髴
 [9] ……髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴髣髴

Evidently, the extant preface in inv. № 819 is identical to that in the xylograph that appeared on the Chinese market. This fact confirms that the xylograph of the Yuan era is a reprinted edition based on the version in Xixia.

4. Restoring the Chinese original

Based on the Tangut translation, the Chinese reconstruction of the preface is collated with the Ming and Qing editions in order to point out some errors in the original, although there are also mistakes in the order of sentences in the two later editions caused by irregular circulation during hundreds of years.

佛說閻羅王預修十王經序

大唐西京安定坊馬行仙祇生一男，名弘敬。粗辨東西³⁶，惟崇三寶。每日吃食之時，先呼賢聖土地，然後方食。景龍二年五月一日午時³⁷忽爾暴亡。三日之間，心上微暖，家人未敢殯埋。追領使人引見所司，司主謂曰：“汝非西京安定坊馬弘敬否？”弘敬言是。³⁸“汝曾作何功德？”³⁹司主陰相謂曰：⁴⁰“然雖愚幼，心常樂善。每遇寅朝，念救苦觀世音菩薩一百

³⁶ Before *cubian dongxi* 粗辨東西 (to differentiate east from west roughly), the age of the son was probably omitted. Perhaps *nian fang jiusui* 年方九歲 (only nine years old) should be added according to the Qing edition.

³⁷ The Chinese word *wushi* 午時 (11–13 o'clock, noon) omitted in the Tangut version is added according to the Ming and Qing editions.

³⁸ A longer statement is omitted here. In the Ming edition: *Zhusi yin xiangwei yue: Ran ciren sui nianyou, you qinxian musheng zhi nian. Zhiyu yinshi zhi shi, jie meng huzhao. Zhuwang youjian, kefang huanhun* 主司陰相謂曰：然此人雖年幼，有欽賢慕聖之念。至於飲食之時，皆蒙呼召。諸王幽鑿，可放還魂 (The governors of the department secretly said to each other: Although he is a child, this person admires sages in his mind. Whenever he is going to eat and drink, they are called and invited by him. The Kings considered this deeply and (said that) his soul should be released).

³⁹ This sentence was asked by the King in the Ming edition, but by the officials in the Qing edition.

⁴⁰ According to the Chinese original, it was Hongjing who answered this question, not the governors of the department.

遍。”諸王曰：“可放還魂。”⁴¹王復問曰：“汝願書寫《閻羅王經》一卷否？”宏敬跪而答曰：“倘若放回，千卷可寫。”改名延壽，可至九十，處分追領使人，勿令迷路。魂魄既還，一家喜慶，闔境稱揚，具錄奏聞，遍傳京國。依經本抄寫千卷，無不敬崇。病者得愈，死者再甦，冤訟得免，盲者得明。刊石為記，流布□□。

As for the content and writing style of a traditional preface or postscript to the *sūtras*, it was indispensable for authors to eulogize Buddha and dharma, to praise the key thoughts of a *sūtra*, and to narrate its form or translation process.⁴² Accordingly, it might be presumed that the above text was simply a folk tale transplanted to the beginning of the *Shiwang Jing* with a new title, and not an authentic preface attached to the scripture.

5. Summary

Folk legends about revival from Hell originated in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589 AD) under the influence of Indian Buddhism. Their general theme was that one's afterlife depends on how many merits and virtues one has accumulated in life. Most of these legends in collections, such as *Mingxiang Ji* 冥祥記 and *Youming Lu* 幽冥錄, were regarded as grotesque tales and ignored by orthodox intellectuals.

The tale about Ma Hongjing does not belong to the earliest works in Chinese Buddhism. The *Shiwang Jing* without preface was formed during the era of the Five Dynasties or the beginning of the Song dynasty,⁴³ and it was translated into Tibetan soon after. Both the Tibetan and Chinese versions spread along the Silk Road simultaneously. It may be assumed that the Tangut translator read its versions in both languages, and created a Tangut version based on the Tibetan text, but utilized the title in Chinese and attached a preface of unknown origin in front of the text.

The preface had not been adopted into orthodox Buddhist Canons for years, its many varieties circulated through oral or written diffusion among Chinese people, and were even accepted by Tanguts who did not have any concepts of Hell in their cultural tradition.

⁴¹ In the Ming edition: *Zhuwang tanyue: Ruci daonian, ningbu fanghui* 諸王歎曰：如此道念，寧不放回 (The Kings said with admiration: Why do we not release him back for such a moral thought)?

⁴² NIE 2016: 13.

⁴³ DU 1989: 146.

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Appendix

The Ming edition:

《佛說閻羅王經》並序

大唐西京馬行仙祇生一男，立名弘敬。年至十九，粗辨東西，惟崇三寶。每日吃食之時，先呼賢聖土地，然始可食。景隆二年五月一日午時忽爾暴亡。三日之間，心上微暖，家人未敢殯理。追領使人引見所司，主司謂曰：“汝非西京安定坊馬弘敬否？”遂言是答。主司陰相謂曰：“然此人雖年幼，有欽賢慕聖之念，至於飲食之時，皆蒙呼召。諸王幽鑿，可放還魂。”王復問曰：“不審此人作何功德？”弘敬對曰：“然雖愚幼，心常樂善。每遇寅朝，念救苦觀世音菩薩一百遍。”諸王歎曰：“如此道念，寧不放回？能與我等書寫流傳《閻羅王經》一卷否？”弘敬拜而答曰：“儻得放回，千卷可矣。”諸王處分追領使人引還魂，冥冥之間勿令迷路。改名延壽，可至九十。魂魄既還，欵然警覺，一家喜慶，闔境稱揚。具錄奏聞，遍傳京國，依經本抄寫印造千卷，普勸受持。

The Qing Edition:

《閻王經》序

蓋聞：昔日大唐西京安定坊，景龍二年五月一日，馬行仙祇生一男，年方九歲，取名弘敬，初辨東西。每日吃食之時，先呼土地，然後方食。其日午時忽爾卒亡。三日三夜，冥冥之中，不知身主，身中尚暖，家中未敢殯埋。追領使人令敬過召身司，司主問曰：“汝莫是西京安定坊馬弘敬否？”敬言是。司主謂諸司官曰：“此人雖則年幼，極乃有心。吃食之時，[先蒙]呼召。請眾官能[放卻回否]？”[眾官問曰：“汝]曾作何功德？”弘敬云：“心最樂善，每日[念]救苦觀音菩薩一百遍。”眾官曰：“如此善心，豈不放回？汝能與我寫《閻羅王經》一卷否？”弘敬跪而答曰：“儻若放回，千卷可寫。”冥官處分領使人便引回家，勿令迷路。改名延壽，壽終九十。警覺還家，至誠虔敬。具錄聞奏，於是便傳京國，無不敬崇。病者得愈，死者再甦，冤訟得免，聾者[能]聽，啞者能言，刊[石為記，勿]瓚吉]。

理民弟子劉瓚同緣胡氏男鴻書、奇，謝氏、吳氏[捐資]敬刊《閻王經》一部，永垂不朽，冥陽俱利，存歿均沾。

龍飛嘉慶二十四年中秋月清溪四之堂余子南沐手敬書