

The Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur and Its Importance for the Study of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon: An Introduction

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In academic circles, the collection of Tibetan Buddhist canonical manuscripts made available through the research database of the Toyo Bunko library is referred to by three different labels. Both of the terms "Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur" or "Tokyo Manuscript Kanjur" denote the place of its current location, whereas the designation "Kawaguchi Kanjur" highlights the role of Kawaguchi Ekai (河口慧海, 1866–1945), a Japanese pioneer in Tibetan Studies, in bringing this important collection to Japan. It is considered as one of the major representatives of the *Them spangs ma* group of Tibetan Kanjurs.

As a Kanjur, this collection preserves core texts of the Tibetan canon, which is constituted by two distinct parts: the Kanjur (*bka' 'gyur*), that is, a collection of translated works that are, at least in a general and idealized sense, considered to be the word of the Buddha (Skt. *buddhavacana*, Tib. *bka'*), and the Tanjur (*bstan 'gyur*), that is, a collection of translated exegetical works (Skt. *śāstra*, Tib. *bstan bcos*) of Indian masters. The works contained in these two collections form the centrepiece of Buddhist literature as it was transmitted and adapted on the Tibetan plateau, and thus are crucial for indigenous Tibetan scholastics and modern academic scholars alike. Buddhist texts, in both manuscript and printed form, are also considered important symbolic and ritual objects. Most prestigious are Kanjurs, often produced in lavish deluxe editions,¹ as they are held to represent the Buddha in his aspect of speech. The physical presence of a Kanjur, therefore, is in some sense the physical presence of the Buddha. In this function, they are commonly placed at the front wall of Tibetan monasteries and temples. They also exhibit a range of functions in public rituals, for example, when they are paraded around a village, or when their contents are recited to ensure the well-being of the community.² This symbolic aspect also renders Kanjurs objects of diplomacy, and there are several accounts in historiographical literature in which these larger text

¹ On the production of such deluxe editions, see Wangchuk 2016.

² See, e.g., Childs 2005 for an example of the use of a Kanjur in public ritual.

collections were exchanged as presents among worldly and clerical dignitaries.³ A similar understanding might apply to the circumstances under which what is now called the Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur was acquired as a diplomatic gift from the thirteenth Dalai Lama by Ekai Kawaguchi (see below).

The transmission of the Tibetan canon

Tibetan canonical collections are the result of a long-term and at times highly regulated process of transmitting, translating, and ordering Buddhist scriptures and other works, mostly from India but also from China and Central Asia, a process that began in Tibet in the seventh century. These activities are reflected in the recording and classification of translated texts in the various text catalogues of the imperial period, that is, the *Lhan kar ma / Ldan dkar ma*, the *'Phangs thang ma*, and the lost or unavailable *Mchims phu ma*. These catalogues, however, did not endorse a strict division between the word of the Buddha (*bka'*) and exegetical treatises (*bstan bcos*). Instead, under the term *bka' bstan bcos* they record works that only later came to be differentiated into these two main classes.⁴ The term Kanjur also appears frequently in early historiographical sources. However, it seems to have been used in a rather loose sense to refer to larger collections of *buddhavacana* in translation. In the second half of the thirteenth century, efforts to gather and reproduce larger corpora of manuscripts increased under Mongol rule,⁵ and this led to the formation of the basic models of canonical collections as we know them today, that is, the conceptualization and independent transmission of Kanjurs and Tanjurs.

Both of these collections arrange Buddhist works according to three main categories, that is, Vinaya (*'dul ba*), Sūtra (*mdo*), and Tantra (*rgyud*). In Kanjurs, the larger division of Sūtra is usually constituted by several separate sections: Prajñāpāramitā (*sher phyin*) in six distinct sections, Avataṃsaka (*phal chen*), Ratnakūṭa (*dkon brtsegs*), and (miscellaneous) Sūtra (*mdo sde*). Occasionally other sub-divisions (*myang 'das*, *mdo che bzhi*) may be added. Some Kanjurs further

³ Two examples may be mentioned: Kaḥ thog Si tu reports the offering of a golden Kanjur (that is, one written in gold ink) to Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456) by a Mustang king (Almogi 2012, 511), and the Them spangs ma Kanjur of Ulaanbaatar is said to have been received as a gift from the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) to the first Rje btsun dam pa Khutuktu (1635–1723) ca. in 1671 (Bethlenvalvy 1982, 7). The first printed Kanjur, prepared under the Chinese Yongle emperor, was gifted to several Tibetan hierarchs for obviously political reasons (Silk 1996).

⁴ See Skilling 1997 for this early phase of the development of Tibetan canonical collections.

⁵ On this episode, see Schaeffer and van der Kuijp 2009, 9ff.

list Dhāraṇī (*gzungs 'dus*, *gzungs 'bum*) and Old Tantra (*rnying rgyud*) as separate divisions. Tanjurs, in contrast, are not only organized according to literary genres, but further subdivided according to philosophical contents, like Prajñāpāramitā, Madhyamaka, Cittamātra (Yogācāra), or Pramāṇa. They also include sections on mundane sciences like language arts, medicine, or arts and crafts.

Given their symbolic significance, Kanjurs were produced in large numbers, varying in the individual texts included or excluded in a specific collection, the internal order of texts, or their precise wording. This diversity shows that Tibetan canonical collections constitute a principally open canon shaped according to specific historical circumstances.⁶ The affiliations between various Kanjurs have been subject to extensive research,⁷ with the result that nowadays it is common to distinguish between four or five different groups of Kanjurs.⁸

The two mainstream traditions to which most of the better-known Kanjurs belong are the Tshal pa and the Them spangs ma lineages. The former emerges from a manuscript Kanjur produced in Tshal Gung thang in Central Tibet in the middle of the fourteenth century, which also included material from an earlier manuscript collection, the so-called "Old Narthang Kanjur." The first printed Kanjur, produced under Chinese imperial order in 1410, during the Yongle period, as also its reprint produced during the Wanli era, belong to this tradition, and it is this line to which the later so-called Peking Kanjur is a revision. This later Peking version has had a large impact on modern studies since it was photomechanically reproduced in Japan in the 1950s, and widely distributed in academic libraries around the world. Likewise, the also widely used Derge Kanjur derives from this same lineage, and together with the Kanjurs of Lithang/'Jang sa tham, Cone, and Urga is part of a sub-branch of the Tshal pa group. (In fact, Derge is a sort of copy of the Lithang, and Cone in its turn a copy of Derge.)

While most of the Tshal pa Kanjurs (or at least those known now) appeared in woodblock print form, the Them spangs ma tradition is constituted entirely by Kanjurs in manuscript form. These too, like the Tshal pa, trace their origin to a Central Tibetan manuscript Kanjur, this one having been produced slightly later in Gyantse in the 1430s.

⁶ Cf. Skilling 1997, 100–101, and, for a broader discussion, Silk 2015.

⁷ See, in particular, Eimer 1992 and Harrison 1994.

⁸ See Tauscher 2015, 108–109, for an overview of these principle affiliations.

A third group of Kanjurs emerged as a conflation of these two mainstream traditions, including collections such as the Narthang Kanjur and the very recent Lhasa Kanjur, dating to only 1934. Other Kanjurs are not directly affiliated with the two main lines of transmission, and often had no or only limited influence on other collections (again, we must qualify this by saying, "as far as we currently know"). These are subsumed in a fourth group of "local" or "independent" Kanjurs, and include Kanjurs such as those called Phug brag, O rgyan gling, or 'Ba 'thang. Recently, however, researchers were able to show that some of these local Himalayan productions are indeed part of larger networks. Close connections became evident between the Early Mustang Kanjur, various Sūtra collections in Dolpo and Mustang, and the Kanjurs of Hemis and Basgo in Ladakh, for which the label of a distinct "Mustang group" has been suggested.⁹ Future research may be expected to sharpen our understanding of the history of the Kanjurs and their lineages.

The Them spangs ma group of Tibetan Kanjurs

In comparison to the Tshal pa tradition, the various Them spangs ma Kanjurs are less well known. Their first modern scholarly catalogues appeared relatively late, and more detailed comparative studies are still a *desideratum*. Their relative lack in fame is also indebted to their medium: printing technology fostered the influence of Tshal pa Kanjurs through their mass production and reproduction, while the manuscript form of the Them spangs ma Kanjurs confined them to single specimens.

In principle, all representatives of this group trace their origin to a common prototype, the early fifteenth century Them spangs ma Kanjur. At present, five manuscript Kanjurs are established as belonging to this group, varying in age as well as location of their production.

- The Kanjur of **Ulaanbaatar** was received in Mongolia around 1671, and is considered a primary copy of the Central Tibetan model. Its contents were first described by Bethlenvalvy (1982). His hand-list, however, was drawn from a secondary source, the *Thob yig* of Jaya Paṇḍita, and only more recently a more detailed catalogue based on the actual manuscripts was added by Samten *et*

⁹ The hypothesis of a "Mustang group" of Kanjurs is introduced in Tauscher and Lainé 2015 and further discussed in Viehbeck 2020.

al. (2012). In 2010, a very high quality digital scan of the original manuscripts was published by the Digital Preservation Society, Tokyo.¹⁰

- The **London Kanjur**, a copy of a Kanjur from Shel dkar, Southern Tibet, was brought to England with the Younghusband Mission and is now preserved in the British Museum, where it was also microfilmed. The original copy was produced at the beginning of the eighteenth century (c. 1712). While it is closely related to the Them spangs ma group, it shows also an influence of Western Tibetan Kanjur traditions. The contents of the London Kanjur were recorded by Pagel and Gaffney (1996). It is mostly complete.

- The manuscripts of the **Stog Palace Kanjur** were reprinted in Delhi in 1975–1980. A detailed analytical catalogue of the collection was published shortly afterwards by Skorupski (1985). The original manuscripts are preserved by the royal family of Ladakh, and are commonly believed to be produced in the context of the funeral ceremonies of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal (d. 1738), based on a copy of a Kanjur from Bhutan.

- The Kanjur manuscripts kept in the palace of Shey are roughly contemporary, being produced towards the end of Nyi ma rnam rgyal's reign. They are closely related to the Stog Kanjur, but some parts appear to be incorporated from a specific Western Tibetan tradition. Scans of this **Shey Kanjur** were made available by the Tibetan Manuscript Project Vienna;¹¹ its contents and relations to other Kanjurs are discussed in a forthcoming publication by Lainé and Viehbeck.

- Given its estimated time of production (1858–1878), the **Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur** is a relatively late representative of the Them spangs ma tradition. However, as it was produced from the same place as the original Them spangs ma Kanjur and its contents are closely related to the contents found in the Ulaanbaatar manuscript, it can be assumed that it reflects this tradition in a rather close manner. Its contents were analysed by Kōjun Saitō (1977), who was the first to produce a detailed study of any Them spangs ma Kanjur.

Recently, a number of manuscript Kanjurs from Bhutan were digitised by Karma Phuntsho under the auspices of the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), based in the British Library. At least some of these Kanjurs, which are yet to receive careful study, also clearly belong to the Them spangs ma group.¹²

¹⁰ Cf. http://www.tibet-dps.org/tempangma_kangyur.htm; accessed February 10, 2021.

¹¹ Cf. <https://www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/sub/archives.php>; accessed February 10, 2021.

¹² Cf. https://eap.bl.uk/search/site?f%5B0%5D=ss_country%3ABhutan; accessed February 10, 2021.

While the relationships between these individual Kanjurs still need to be determined in detail, this shows that the influence of these manuscript Kanjurs was not confined to a single region. Emerging from Gyantse in Central Tibet, the Them spangs ma tradition took hold also in other locations and was transmitted not only within Tibet, but also brought to Mongolia, Bhutan, and Ladakh.

All of the Kanjurs of the Them spangs ma group are largely similar in content as well as structure. In principle, they contain the same sections, with minor variations in size or in overall order. While the textual sequence within individual sections is significant, the overall arrangement of the sections is somewhat arbitrary, and differs according to available content lists (*dkar chag*) or the principles applied by the individual cataloguers.

For the Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur, the sequence and size of sections is as follows:¹³

- 1) Vinaya (*'dul ba*, 16 vols.)
- 2) Prajñāpāramitā (*sher phyin*, 28 vols.), comprising six subsections:
 - Śatasāhasrikā* (*'bum*, 18 vols.)
 - Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* (*nyi khri*, 4 vols.)
 - Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* (*khri brgyad*, 3 vols.)
 - "miscellaneous (Prajñāpāramitā) works" (*khri sna tshogs*, 1 vol.)
 - Daśasāhasrikā* (*shes khri*, 1 vol.)
 - Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (*brgyad stong*, 1 vol.)
- 3) Avataṃsaka (*phal chen*, 6 vols.)
- 4) Ratnakūṭa (*dkon brtsegs*, 6 vols.)
- 5) (miscellaneous) Sūtra (*mdo sde*, 37 vols.)
- 6) Parinirvāṇa (*myang 'das*, 3 vols.)
- 7) Tantra (*rgyud*, 18 vols.)

¹³ Cf. Saitō 1977, 399.

In general, in evaluating affiliations, among the various sections the content and sequence of the works of the Sūtra section appears as the most obvious marker for determining affiliation with the Them spangs ma or Tshal pa group. In each tradition, the respective order of the works in this section is largely similar, but differs significantly from the sequence found in the other tradition.¹⁴ A major difference in content between the two main traditions is that the Kanjurs of the Them spangs ma group include several works from narrative genres commonly ascribed to human authors or compilers, and which hence were placed in Tanjurs rather than Kanjurs in the Tshal pa tradition.¹⁵ The key importance here is that Tshal pa editions, such as Peking and Derge, have Tanjurs into which such works could be placed, while Them spangs ma traditions lack Tanjurs. The overall divide between Them spangs ma and Tshal pa is also reflected in the precise wording of individual texts, as numerous philological studies have confirmed.

Within the Them spangs ma group, minor differences are found in individual sections, and these may indeed shed some light on the internal relationships between the different representatives. A comparison of such variations suggests that the Ladakhi Kanjurs of Shey and Stog are closely related to the Bhutanese tradition and, as a group, differ slightly from the other Them spangs ma Kanjurs. Further, both the London/Shel dkar Kanjur and the Kanjur of Shey show some influences of a particular Western Tibetan tradition in organising the Ratnakūṭa section.¹⁶

The Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur

In principle, research on the Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur is still largely limited to the pioneering work by Kōjun Saitō (1977). As laid out in his study, this Kanjur was received as a diplomatic gift. Ekai Kawaguchi, who is famed for his four journeys to Nepal and two to Tibet, had requested a version of the Tibetan canon during an audience with the thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876–1933) in Lhasa in 1913. The Tibetan leader acceded to this wish and granted him a Kanjur of 111 volumes from Dpal 'khor chos sde Monastery in Gyantse, that is, the very same place where the original Them spangs ma Kanjur was produced. Kawaguchi received the manuscripts in 1915 and brought them to Japan via India in the same year. In 1941, these volumes along with numerous other Tibetan

¹⁴ See Laine 2009, 13–15 for overview charts comparing the textual sequence of Tshal pa and Them spangs ma.

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of this aspect, see Harrison 1994, 299–301.

¹⁶ See Lainé and Viehbeck (forthcoming), Introduction.

manuscripts were donated to the Toyo Bunko research library, where they have been preserved ever since, forming an important part of the "Kawaguchi Ekai Collection."

Using information gained from short poetic texts that introduce some of the volumes, Saitō was able to retrieve some of the details of the manufacture of the manuscripts, which he placed in the period between 1858 to 1878. The main part of his study is a meticulous record and analysis of the contents of this collection. This includes a detailed description of important features of the manuscripts themselves, and, more importantly, a precise hand-list of all of the works included in the collection, which he identified in comparison with the Kanjurs of Narthang, Peking, and Derge. This comparison also allowed him to point to some characteristic features of the Them spangs ma group, such as texts that are unique to this tradition or others that are placed in Tanjurs and not in Kanjurs in the Tshal pa lineage, but also more fine-grained differences in the title or content of individual works.

Subsequent researchers on Them spangs ma and other Kanjurs made heavy use of this study, but given that it was written in Japanese, its influence remained limited. In correspondence with Kōjun Saitō, Jonathan Silk produced an English translation of the study from 1985 to 1987,¹⁷ which he further enlarged significantly according to the research in Kanjur Studies that had become available in the meantime. Unfortunately, however, this improved English version circulated among some scholars but it never appeared in print. A revised and updated version of this catalogue is published among the materials of the current database and will facilitate use of this valuable resource.

In practical terms, research on the Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur was hindered by the limited access to the original manuscripts. It is therefore hoped and expected that the establishment of the current research database that aims to successively include images of the entire Toyo Bunko Manuscript Kanjur will foster new research opportunities. This will also allow scholars to evaluate earlier findings by Saitō and to compare them with the information found in other Kanjurs, which are becoming more easily available through various digitisation enterprises. In this way, this database should foster not only research with regard to this important manuscript collection in particular, but also with regard to Kanjur Studies as a general field of enquiry.

¹⁷ Cf. Saitō and Silk (unpublished).

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