

Reading A Dhāraṇī – Problems Concerning the Indian Sitātapatrā in the Light of Amoghavajra's Transcription and the Tibetan Translations from Dunhuang

Max Deeg, Cardiff University (UK)

Tibor Porció, University of Szeged (Hungary)

This paper will introduce a comparative study of one of the most popular dhāraṇī texts, the Tathāgatoṣṇīṣasitātapatrā. Most of the translations of this text into Tibetan, Chinese, Uigur and Mongolian are relatively late, and the Sanskrit version from Nepal belong to this same group. The oldest form in which this text preserved is the transcription in Chinese characters by the famous Tantric master Amoghavajra of the Tang period (T.944A), one of the few extensive Tantric texts of the Tang period rendered phonetically into Chinese and thus reflecting in a more direct way on the underlying Indic original. The paper will focus on this transcriptional text and will try to clear some historical issues of its transmission from the underlying Indic original. It will be shown that, by a critical evaluation of the different version, Amoghavajra's transliteration is systematic and therefore valuable to investigate text-historical issues. It can help to get a picture of the form and size of the 8th century Sitātapatrā and to understand and correct some problematic passages in the other versions, especially in the Nepalese Sanskrit version. Furthermore, by studying the transcribed text in the light of the early middle-Chinese reconstructed phonetic form some conclusions can be reached about the underlying language of Amoghavajra's original or, this being another possibility of explaining some peculiarities of the Chinese transcriptional body, Amoghavajra's way to pronounce or to recite the text.

As another textual strand, among the Tibetan Dunhuang collections more than fifty copies –complete as well as fragmentary– of this text can be found. In view of their contents, structure and phraseology three basic groups of variants may be distinguished. Taking them into a comparison with Amoghavajra's text, in the second part of our paper, we intend to present the possible relationship of these various early versions and the position of Amoghavajra's text among them. This would also enable us to establish a relative chronology of the versions represented in the Dunhuang collections.