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Astral Visuality in the Chinese and Inner Asian Cult of Tejaprabhā Buddha, ca. 900-1300 AD

by

Michelle Malina McCoy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Patricia A. Berger, Chair
Professor Whitney Davis
Professor Robert H. Sharf

Fall 2017
Abstract

Astral Visuality in the Chinese and Inner Asian Cult of Tejaprabhā Buddha, ca. 900-1300 AD

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The Song dynasty (960-1279) and its northern neighbors of the "conquest dynasties" witnessed the circulation of new knowledge and techniques in divination and the astral sciences and the widespread worship of astral deities. These elements cohered within the cult of the Tejaprabhā Buddha, controller of the visible heavens. This dissertation examines how this cult transformed Chinese and Inner Asian visual culture. The corpus of materials it addresses, in particular from the Inner Asian kingdom of the Tangut Xīxià (1038-1227), sheds new light on cultural development and interaction across Eurasia. In vivid detail, the paintings, sculptures, prints, and decorated grottoes reveal complex processes of reception, appropriation, translation, and world-making. They connect with a rich body of texts within the astral sciences, including Buddhist scriptures that are here studied closely. Examining not only the symbolic meaning of astral art but also its semiotic mechanisms, this dissertation demonstrates how the visible heavens as represented on earth came to constitute unique forms of visuality, and revisits foundational promises of art history as a modern discipline.
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194. “Five Calamities” in southwest corner, detail of fig. 188.

**Conclusion**

195. *Lady Wenji's Return to China: Parting from Nomad Husband and Children*, Southern Sòng dynasty, second quarter of the 12th century, album, ink, color, and gold on silk; 24.8 x 67.2 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

196. Five-color banners, detail of fig. 195.


199. Detail of fig. 198.
Writing from the new southern capital after the fall of the Northern Sung 宋 dynasty (960-1127) to the Jurchen Jīn 金, Mèng Yuánlǎo 孟元老 (fl. 1126-47) described, with utopian nostalgia, the sights and sounds of his former capital. Of Xiāngguó sì 相國寺, an imperially sponsored Buddhist temple, Mèng writes:

Five times a month Xiāngguó sì was thrown open to the public as a fairground. On (the platform of) the Great Triple Gate there were such things as flying birds and coursing hounds, with no lack of rare fowl and strange beasts. The second Triple Gate was wholly devoted to sundries for (everyday) use. Inside the courtyard multicolored colored canopies, outdoor shops, and vendor’s stalls were set up. Here were sold mats made of rush and bamboo, screen curtains, washing service, saddles and bridles, bows and swords, seasonal fruits, cured meats, and the like. Near the Buddha Hall, (one could find) Mèng-family Dào caps, Wáng Dàoren honey preserves, Zhào Wénxiù brushes, and Pān Gǔ inks. The two cloister corridors (sheltered) the temple nuns, selling embroideries, collars, flowers, ornamental earrings, pearl and jade head ornaments, fūtóu caps with lustrous gold-flecked flowers, bun combs, colorful ribbons and threads, and the like. Behind the hall and in front of the Zīshèng Gate it was all books, curios, and pictures, and also where various former officials had such things as regional specialties, incense, and medicines. The rear corridor was all fortunetellers, diviners, portrait artists, and the like.

Mèng Yuánlǎo leads us through this long-destroyed temple in his beloved fallen city with a demonstration of plenty, a list of consumer goods and services ranging from the sanitary and nutritional to the collectible and cosmetic. Last to appear, in a back alley, is a group of specialists

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who might seem to exceed this otherwise worldly realm—those who can, whether by calculation or representation, call upon the unseen. One such specialist is portrayed in the *Qīngmíng shànghé tú* 清明 上河園, another work featuring a similar combination of descriptive detail and idealizing rhetorical ambition. Midway through this encyclopedic portrayal of life in a Song city (fig. 1), we encounter a man in a black robe and cap seated at a table before a variety of implements (fig. 2). Three signs hanging from the thatched roof above specify his services as “Shénkè 神課, Kànmìng 看命, and Juéyí 決疑,” terms for different prognosticatory practices, thus identifying him as a diviner and the objects before him the tools of his trade. His client, a robed and capped man, is seated to his left; laborers gather behind to spectate. Located behind a restaurant and in front of what appears to be a government compound, the divination stall in the *Qīngmíng shànghé tú* is just a couple of doors down from a Buddhist temple but not within that compound (fig. 3), thus reflecting the diviner’s fluid position in mid-imperial Chinese society.

Within the Xiāngguó temple, there was a more permanent astrological presence in the form of wall paintings of Tejaprabhā (Chìshèngguāng 熾盛光), a buddha who had by then become Chinese and Inner Asian Buddhism’s preeminent controller of the visible heavens (fig. 4). According to Mèng Yuánlào, Tejaprabhā appeared on the left wall of the corridor in the main hall (dàdiàn 大殿) across from a complementary scene of the Buddha subjugating Hārītī 鬼子母, and was shown quelling the nine “guǐ 鬼” (spirits; demons). This is a reference to the nine “luminaries” (yào 曜), a term that encompasses the five planets visible to the naked eye (Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn), the Sun and Moon, and two invisible bodies originating in India. These are Rāhu, an eclipse-causing lunar node, and Ketu, which was understood variably...
as comet, second lunar node, and lunar apogee, or orbital point at which the moon is furthest from the earth. The number originates in the Sanskrit navagraha, or “nine seizers,” which control, influence, or portend the destiny of earthly affairs and beings. In Tejaprabhā assemblies they were joined by deified forms of the lodges (xiù 宿; nakṣatra), that is, twenty-eight divisions of the celestial sphere; the western zodiac, or twelve divisions of the solar ecliptic, and eventually two more invisible planets known as Yuèbèi 月孛 and Zǐqì 紫氣. Together they constitute a special class of Buddhist and Daoist deities, encoding rich cosmological and astral knowledge that moved with striking fluidity among traditions and cultures throughout the Eurasian landmass.

This dissertation addresses how visual culture transformed when divination, astrology, and astronomy—what I will refer to as the “astral sciences”—entered the Buddhist temple, so to speak, through the cult of Tejaprabhā. Between the fall of one great land-based empire, the Táng 唐 (618-907), and the rise of another, the Yuán 元 (1271-1368), this cult, which is not attested in South Asia, had spread to many areas and cultures in the territory of what is now China, from the kingdom of Dàlǐ 大理 in modern Yún-nán 雲南 to Liáo 遼 country in the northeast, and from the Uyghur kingdom of Qočo in the northwest to the region south of the Yangzi river delta. Patrons

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5 See discussion in chapter two.


7 Although the term xiù is frequently translated as “lunar lodge” or “lunar mansion,” Christopher Cullen has demonstrated that they were not linked in particular to the moon. Cullen, “Translating *sukh/xiu 舍 *lhah/she—‘Lunar Lodges’, or Just Plain ‘Lodges’?” East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine 33 (2011): pp. 76–88. Nonetheless, we shall see in chapter four that the lodges were linked with the moon in Buddhist visual culture.

8 The twelve “calendrical animals” symbolizing the earthly branches (dìzhī 地支) of the duodenary reckoning system are an important topic in the history of premodern Chinese art and astral visual culture. With the exception of one now-destroyed Tejaprabhā assembly wall painting from Turpan identified by Lilla Russell-Smith, they do not appear in materials of the Tejaprabhā cult and are therefore not examined in any depth in this dissertation. Their anthropomorphic forms seem to predate those of the planets and lodges. For studies, see Judy Chunghwa Ho, “Representing the Twelve Calendrical Animals as Beastly, Human, and Hybrid Beings in Medieval China,” in The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), pp. 95-136; Ho, “The Twelve Calendrical Animals in Tang Tombs,” in Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China, ed. George Kuwayama (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), pp. 60-83.

9 This term, which has become common in the history of East Asian science, generally refers here to technical knowledge. I use it with the intention of avoiding an anachronistic division between astrology and astronomy that invariably reflects modern values and interests rather than the manifold, even contradictory ways in which heaven was historically known and experienced. The term is also meant to accommodate a broader range of divinatory modalities than the term “astrology” normally does.
of the Tejaprabhā cult, which was primarily centered on an incantation (Skt. dhāraṇī; Ch. tuōluóní 陀羅尼), also spanned social sectors, from lay groups in Sòng-dynasty Dàzú 大足 to none other than Khubilai Khan. By far the highest concentration of material evidence for the cult survives in remains of the Inner Asian people who called themselves Mjɨnjia 氣懿 and founded the multiethnic “Great State of White and High” (Tang. Phiow bjjīlhjhīt ha 神祇鸞鶴).10 They were known in Tibetan as the Mi-nia and in Chinese as the Fān 番 people, founders of the Xīxià 西夏 state.11 Their most common designation in English, “Tangut,” derives from a Turkic word and has been used in western writings on them from at least the time of Marco Polo (ca. 1254-1324).12 The rich Tejaprabhā corpus from Tangut sites includes a variety of printed or handwritten scriptures in Chinese and Tangut and more than two dozen pictorial works in a range of styles, formats, and media.

In spite of the Tejaprabhā cult’s breadth of reach, its pictorial corpus in the vast territory of China and Inner Asia is rather small. It comprises for this period—its most active one—less than one hundred extant pictorial works. Certain visual elements, such as the iconography of the planets, are both highly distinctive and relatively consistent across sites, periods, and media. Joined with the unique degree and manner in which astral visual culture in general encodes numeric, cosmological, mythological, or empirical data, these factors make the Tejaprabhā cult a strong candidate for transregional and transcultural comparison. The results of this effort stand to recast paths of transmission and patterns of interaction, not just in the trans-Eurasian dimension but also among the various regional cultures that patronized the cult. Transregional comparison of astral visual culture allows us, for example, to think beyond the elliptical “between China and Tibet” paradigm that has long been invoked to characterize Tangut culture. Moreover, it reveals the limits of certain assumptions about Chinese culture. We shall readily see, for example, that representations of the five planets do not necessarily signal the presence of five-phases cosmological thought even when they are referenced by their five-phases names.

No previous book-length publication has addressed the visual culture of Tejaprabhā worship in China and Inner Asia. The first modern and still-authoritative study of the Tangut astral cult, written by Nikolai Nevsky (1892-1937) in 1931, identified the painted mandala at the center of chapter four, among many other contributions.13 In another early study, Matsumoto

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11 As Dunnell notes, Xīxià is an anachronistic term; “Xià” or “Great Xià” would be better. *Great State of White and High*, p. xiv. I have chosen to use Xīxià in this dissertation to the sake of consistency with contemporary convention.


Eiichi 松本栄一 addressed the iconography of the famous Dūnhuáng Tejaprabhā procession dated 897. A decade later S. M. Kochetova published a pioneering essay on the two dozen Tangut astral works in the Hermitage collection, many of which are Tejaprabhā assemblies. Kochetova characterized the astral gods as a “syncretic pantheon,” identifying iconographic links in Hellenistic, Iranian, and Indian cultures, as well as direct dialogue with Daoism.

Since the 1980s, a sizeable body of articles or book sections has been published on Tejaprabhā addressing issues of identification, patronage, ritual, composition, and iconography. Two China-based scholars have made particularly important contributions to the study of Tejaprabhā visual culture. In a series of articles published since the late 1990s, Mèng Sihuī 孟嗣徽 established three major types of Tejaprabhā composition (procession, frontal assembly, triadic frontal assembly), identified a number of deities, and analyzed the paintings’ relationship to astral texts. In addition to in-depth visual study, Liào Yáng’s 廖暘 many articles have

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examined the scriptural tradition, the later history of the cult, and its relationship to Tibetan Buddhist art.\textsuperscript{19} The Japan-trained scholar Sū Jiāyíng 蘇佳瑩 has made important distinctions in the cult’s development and visual culture across East Asia. In particular, Sū has critically addressed its transmission to Japan, an issue that has caused confusion in modern studies.\textsuperscript{20} The visual dimensions of the cult remain better examined than its scriptural tradition.\textsuperscript{21}

Tejaprabhā and Buddhist Astrology

The circulation of astral knowledge across premodern Eurasia is a complicated history of multidirectional circulation, accretion, correction, synthesis, and transformation. Research in this


field draws on linguistic training and knowledge in the history of astral sciences that are brought
together in few modern scholarly communities. Synthesizing and building on the pioneering
work of historians of astral science including Otto Neugebauer, David Pingree, Kiyosi Yabuuti
(薮内清), Yano Michio (矢野道雄), Niū Wèixīng 鈕衛星, and others, Bill M. Mak and Jeffrey
Kotyk have each recently presented updated overviews of the medieval circulation of astral
knowledge eastward across Eurasia. Several broad paths are followed, the first being Vedic
astral knowledge that appears in Chinese Buddhist texts beginning no later than the translation of
Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna attributed to Dharmaraka in the early fourth century. Another line begins
in the Hellenistic world, introducing Greco-Babylonian astral sciences to India. This
transforming knowledge travels in bits and pieces, generally through Central Asian
intermediaries, to East Asia. A third line constitutes a more direct transmission from Central Asia
with less evidence of Indian origin or mediation. Although elements of Greco-Babylonian
horoscopy and natal astrology (that is, genethliacal astrology based on ascendant) appear in
earlier texts, only around the eighth century does an East Asian version of this seem to develop
systematically. Mak and Kotyk are each careful to note that these processes of transmission are
not straightforward or absolute: multiple systems coexisted simultaneously, often within the
same text.

Though astral knowledge cut across religions in addition to cultures and states, the
majority of demonstrably foreign ideas and practices circulating in medieval China and Inner
Asia were associated with Buddhism. Texts that incorporate Central Asian knowledge, such as
the Ḍīvārañḍī jātaka, nonetheless prescribe characteristically Buddhist activities such as sutra
recitation. There are many unanswered questions surrounding this long-term phenomenon—
about the historical process, for example, by which texts and knowledge that may have been
transmitted by Central Asian Christians were absorbed into the Sinitic Buddhist tradition. It is
clear, in any case, that Buddhist astrology was by all appearances a widely accepted reality.

22 In addition to what are currently better represented primary-source languages, including Sanskrit,
Chinese, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Tibetan, other, less commonly studied languages including Tocharian,
Sogdian, Syriac, Middle Turkic, Tangut, and Mongolian are important for this field.

23 See Bill M. Mak, “Indian Jyotisa Literature through the Lens of Chinese Buddhist Canon,” Journal of
translation; Mak, “The Transmission of Buddhist Astral Science from India to East Asia: The Central
Christians in China during the late first millennium AD (Mediterranean Archaeology and

24 Shētōujiàn tàizǐ èrshíbāxiù jīng 舍頭諫太子二十八宿經, T 1301.


26 On such transmission, see Mak, “Astral Science of the East Syriac Christians in China.”

27 As scholars have noted, Buddhist opposition to astral sciences seems to have been mostly rhetorical,
beyond the injunction against earning money from such practices. In Chinese society in general, evidence
Jeffrey Kotyk argues that the need to perform esoteric rites at proper times was a key motivator for the Buddhist interest in astral sciences.28

Judged solely on the basis of texts, the cult of Tejaprabhā would seem to fall somewhat outside this history I have briefly sketched above. Beyond Rāhu and Ketu, the Taishō Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture contains little recognizably foreign astral knowledge at all. As discussed in chapter one, the two major approaches to fate that are engaged in some versions of the scripture (fēnyě 分野 and běnmìng 本命) were local concepts discussed in local terms. For this reason it should come as no surprise that we find in a Northern Song commentary on the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī rite a thorough doctrinal justification for the cult. In this sense the Tejaprabhā cult represents less a departure from more technical or foreign forms of astrology than an open embrace of them. Moreover, when we look beyond the Taishō to textual realia, the versions of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture present a more complex picture. Not all of these versions mention fēnyě or běnmìng. At least one Tangut print edition (see chapter one), moreover, contains a mantra for each planet sequenced according to its monthly date of descent, thus calibrating the Buddhist ritual calendar to an astrological one.

Unsurprisingly, visual and material culture presents a different image of the history of astral sciences in the mid-imperial period. The earliest clear evidence for demonstrably foreign astral knowledge in Sinitic visual culture does not emerge until roughly the fifth century, in the Buddhist grottoes at Dūnhuáng. Chronological discrepancies between texts and visual culture are clearly due at least in part to the different rates and conditions of survival. It is also likely that early pictorial representations of astral deities have not yet been identified because we lack sufficient iconographic knowledge. In any event, as Kochetova was perhaps the first to notice, depictions of Chinese and Tangut Buddhist planet gods demonstrate a connection not with a narrowly Buddhist or Indian visual culture but civilizations across Eurasia.29

Moreover, where visual culture frustrates the search for origins, it affirms the multidirectional, convoluted paths of circulation that belie linear accounts of eastward transmission (foundational though they nonetheless are). Take, for example, the East Asian dot-and-line asterism graph, an ancient and highly distinctive form of astral notation that is rarely discussed outside the East Asian context. After careful textual analysis, Brian Baumann has discerned that the Chinese xiù exerted some influence on the Indian nakṣatra.30 Multiple Buddhist grotto sites in the Tarim Basin preserved, until the twentieth century, depictions of the lunar lodges comprising Indic-looking gods accompanied by corresponding Chinese-style asterism graphs (fig. 5). In at least one case, they are paired with identifying inscriptions in Uyghur and Chinese, making the asterisms function almost like a third script. The presence here of Sinitic asterisms notation readily supports the idea of a westward transmission for the Sinitic


29 Kochetova, “Bozhestva Svetil.” This point has also been recently emphasized by Kotyk, for example in “Astrological Iconography.”

lodges. In a similar vein, Tejaprabhā visual culture embraces a great deal more astral knowledge than the Tejaprabhā scripture alone—not only in terms of how the deified planets look, but also, as we shall see in chapter two, scientific and perceptual elements as well.

**Astral Sciences in a Multi-Centered Age**

The Táng dynasty (618-906) is remembered as a golden age for both Buddhism and foreign astral sciences, during which astral specialist-monks such as Yīxíng 一行 (683–727) and Bùkōng 不空 (Amoghavajra; 705-774) gained prominence at the highest levels of society for their translations, inventions, or ritual expertise. The Táng heritage has exerted a powerful historiographic influence on understanding of the cult of Tejaprabhā—Yīxíng and Bùkōng, indeed, are each credited with translating a Chinese version of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture. Scholars have not always taken a critical view of these attributions despite the fact that reliable dates for Tejaprabhā realia do not emerge in China and Inner Asia until the early ninth century.31

Complicating the issue of Táng heritage, as well as the easily romanticized silk road image of fluid exchange between east and west, in the wake of that dynasty’s demise a series of powerful competing states, each with imperial ambitions, was founded by culturally distinct groups. They comprised the Khitan Liáo (907-1125), Hàn Sòng (960-1279), Tangut Xīxià (1038-1227), and Jurchen Jīn (1115-1234), the latter three of which were overturned in the early years of the Mongol conquest. We are dealing, therefore, less with “China” than a multistate, macroregional political and cultural order. Over roughly the past twenty-five years, scholars have let go of many formerly commonplace conclusions and attitudes about the Sòng dynasty and its northern “conquest dynasty” rivals. The image of the Sòng is no longer that of an introspective or closed-off age in which Buddhism lost its vitality.32 A similarly nuanced take can be said to characterize approaches to the Sòng’s neighbors, as sinology has come increasingly in dialogue with the field of Inner Asian studies. Previous sinological treatments tended to cast the Inner Asian states as unselfconsciously sinicized, misled by biased Chinese sources and the fact that each state modeled its administration to some extent on Chinese precedents and developed a script for their native languages that visually resembled Chinese. Scholars increasingly endeavor to regard them on their own political, social, and cultural terms.33 It is insufficient to speak of

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31 For a critique of astral scriptures’ attributions to Yīxíng, see Kotyk, “Buddhist Astrology and Astral Magic,” esp. chapter five.


33 For the pre-Mongol period, a selection of English-language monographs that represent this new perspective include Dunnell, The Great State of White and High; Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, Liao Architecture (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); Michal Biran, The Qara Khitai Empire in
Sòng history in isolation from its neighboring states. Similarly, relationships among the frontier states have received new scholarly attention, in addition to each individual state’s own relationship with the Sòng. Thus far North American academia has not been a major participant in Tangut studies. The field has developed a distinct set of topics and issues, an important one being Tangut-Tibetan interaction.

In the context of the astral sciences, there seems to have been in many cases an openness to learning from others. For example, the astronomical devices and star charts made by the polymathic Northern Song statesman Sū Sòng 蘇頌 (1020-1101), monuments of Chinese astronomy by any measure, may even be understood as a result of interstate interaction. In 1077, he was sent to congratulate the Liao emperor on his birthday, which fell on the winter solstice. Discovering that he had arrived a day before the actual calendrical event, Sū Sòng came to learn that the Liáo calendar was more accurate than his own state’s. This episode, according to one twelfth-century account, prompted court-sponsored astronomical reform.

Despite the increasingly nuanced discourse on this era, the depth and extent of transformations in the astral cult have been largely overlooked. By the tenth century, the

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35 On the international development and current state of Tangut studies, see Galambos, *Translating Chinese Tradition*, chapters one and two.


37 On this and another version of the story, see Needham et al, *Heavenly Clockwork*, pp. 7-8.

38 See, for example, such statements as “[The Indian nakṣatra] can be seen as having supplanted the traditional Chinese zodiac during the middle of the Tang, at least in the context of Zhenyan Buddhism as taught by the Three Ācāryas, Šubhākarasimha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, and their followers,” and, “In the post-Tang period, it appears that the use of the Western zodiac only took place in the limited context of Esoteric Buddhism, as evidenced in various representations of Tejaprabhā and his retinue of astral deities.” The first statement is oversimplified; the second is inaccurate. Henrik H. Sørensen, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Charles D. Orzech (general editor), Henrik H. Sørensen (associate editor), Richard K. Payne (associate editor), Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
number of planets had expanded from nine to eleven, embracing the two additional invisible planets of long-debated origins (see chapter two) in addition to the earlier two of undisputed Indian origin. These eleven planets became at least as important in Daoism as in Buddhism. Moreover, the western (solar) zodiac, in adapted but still highly recognizable forms, also began to appear in an increasingly broad range of contexts, including Daoist (fig. 6), non-astral Buddhist (figs. 7, 8), and funerary art (fig. 9).

Scholars have interpreted changes in the culture of divination in this period in terms of large-scale social transformation. As the hereditary aristocracy of the Táng was replaced with a scholarly elite, increased social mobility produced a new interest in predicting one’s fate, a phenomenon perhaps reflected in the divination scene in the Qīngmíng painting. The socially aspirational dimension of fortune telling is a useful perspective for understanding why the Tejaprabhā cult seems to have spread to so many different communities after the fall of the Táng, and moreover why inscriptions on some depictions of Tejaprabhā’s assembly take a celebratory (biǎoqìng 表慶) tone. In other cases, however, the cult served a purpose of state-protecting apotropaism, such as the Tejaprabhā assembly held (along with a Daoist propitiation rite at a different temple) at request of the Mongol court in response to an inauspicious lodging of Venus in 1262. Clearly the Tejaprabhā cult fulfilled a broad range of distinct social needs.

It is much more difficult to obtain a sense of the various social functions of the Tejaprabhā cult in the Inner Asian states than it is for the Sòng. This is due in large part to the


40 For example, the inscription on the earliest dated Tejaprabhā tableau, which may be read as, “Chíshèngguāng fó and the Five Planet Gods painted [on behalf of] disciple Zhāng Huáixìng, inscribed to express joy (biǎoqìng) on the eighth day of the first month of the fourth year of the Qiánmíng era (897)” 熾盛光佛并五星神, 乾寧四年正月八日, 弟子張淮興畫表慶訖. Dūnhuáng artisans are not known to have signed or dedicate their own work; Zhāng Huáixìng here is the patron. See Yáo Měiling 姚美玲, “Dūnhuáng juàn huà gòngyǎngrén tíjì géshì jiědú” 敦煌絹畫供養人題記格式解讀, Shìjì Hànzì xuéhuì 第四届年會“表意文字體系與漢字學科建設” (Conference paper, Kyungsung University, 2016). On the largely separate Dūnhuáng professions of scribe and artist, see Sarah E. Fraser, Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618-960 (Stanford University Press, 2004). The phrase biǎoqìng qì 表慶訖, meaning to memorialize in celebration, appears on the inscription accompanying another Tejaprabhā assembly, Niche 39, dated 966 AD, at the Běishān 北山 rock-cut grottoes in the Dàzú 大足 region. See Lóng Xiǎnzhāo 龍顯昭 Cái Dōngzhōu 蔡東洲, et al., eds., Bāshǔ fójiào bēiwén jíchéng 巴蜀佛教碑文集成 (Bāshǔ shǔshè, 2004) pp. 88-89.

41 A passage in the biography of Khubilai Khan in the dynastic history of the Yuán recounts that on December 15, 1262 中統三年十一月乙酉 after Venus threatened the star 鉤鈐 (ω1 Scorpii) a Tejaprabhā assembly 佛頂金輪會 was held at the Shèng’ān sì 聖安寺, as was a Daoist propitiation sacrifice at another temple. Běnjì dì wǔ, Shìzǔ èr 本紀第五，世祖二, in the Yuánshǐ 元史, compiled by Sòng Lián 宋濂 (1310-1381), at http://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=952758#p12.
asymmetrical nature of available textual sources. Information about astral deity worship in Song texts can be accessed in writings across any number of genres that represent a broad range of lettered social actors. By contrast, no native chronicle of Tangut history is known to survive, and the Tangut state was not given an official Chinese dynastic history unlike the Lião and Jìn. By the same token, the Tangut script has been deciphered and the Tangut language is better understood than either Khitan or Jurchen, making many of the thousands of excavated Tangut documents and fragments more or less accessible. Thus, on the one hand, Tangut historiography is less burdened by the prejudices of early Chinese sources, yet on the other, as a number of specialists have emphasized, many basic aspects of the Tangut state and culture—ideology, social hierarchies, discourse on the arts, and indeed the astral sciences—appear only in the glimpses afforded by such Tangut documents, the vast majority of which are Buddhist.42

Certain basic facts about the astral sciences in Tangut country are known. Tangut rulers received numerous Song calendars and maintained an astronomical bureau.43 A range of divination forms and techniques, moreover, are documented in Tangut sources (in both Chinese and Tangut language). Many involve astral terms and some do not seem to be attested elsewhere. Diviners were consulted for a variety of reasons, including horoscopy. Although a growing number of individual Tangut divination texts have been transcribed into Chinese and analyzed to some extent, a synthesizing history of Tangut astral sciences and divination is still a rather distant goal.44

The visual and material corpus is similarly fragmentary. Tangut pictorial art is even more Buddhist than Tangut texts and, unlike the latter, exceedingly few works of visual or material culture from Tangut sites bear dates. Moreover, the lack of precise documentation by Kharakhoto’s most consequential modern excavators, the team led by Russian explorer Pyotr Kozlov, considerably hampers dating on the basis of archaeological evidence. One cannot rule out the possibility that entire groups of objects from the site, previously identified as works of Tangut, date instead to the Yuán or possibly even later.45

In the face of these difficulties, astral materials offer unique solutions to the problem of dating. For example, according to Hermitage curator Kira Samosyuk, in the course of museum-sponsored restoration a date corresponding to 1206 was discovered on the backing paper of a small rectangular painting (fig. 10).46 It depicts an anthropomorphic goddess holding a pipa

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42 See, for example, Kirill Solonin, “Hongzhou Buddhism in Xixia and the Heritage of Zongmi (780-841): A Tangut Source,” Asia Major, Third Series 16/2 (2003), pp. 57-58.

43 For a brief discussion of Tangut astronomy and calendrics, see Shǐ Jīnbō 史金波, Xīxià wénhuà 西夏文化 (Jílín jiào yù chūbǎnshè, 1986), pp. 171-175.


flanked by two smaller men dressed as officials. Inscriptions identify the goddess as Venus (Tang. Kié gjii .getChildAt(209,215) and the officials (or at least one of them) as the lodge Tshji gjii (Ch. Māo; the Pleiades). A bull representing Taurus, a sign over which Venus rules in Greco-Babylonian horoscopy, is enclosed in a disk above. The horoscopic knowledge that the Venus-Taurus pairing represents (which is corroborated by at least two other works of the same size and format in the Hermitage collection) corresponds with a Tangut-language horoscope that is also dated to 1206. Such knowledge is not indicated in Tangut materials that are more directly related to the Tejaprabhā cult, despite the similar visual forms of both Venus and the bull. Given that the planet cult long predates the thirteenth century, this suggests that the iconography may have circulated among the Tanguts prior to the horoscopy.

Dating issues aside, there is reason to think that the Tejaprabhā cult was historically associated with the northern-northwestern frontier and may even have matured there first. Aside from the fact that the vast majority of excavated materials related to the cult have been found at Tangut sites, according to Liào Yáng the earliest known physical copy of a Tejaprabhā scripture, which is dated to the early ninth century on the basis of a date appearing elsewhere in the same document, was found in Gansu province. Moreover, one of the first historically plausible recorded painters of a Tejaprabhā assembly tableau, back at Xiāngguó temple in the Northern Song capital, is recorded as the celebrated Khitan painter Gāo Yì. Although very few depictions of Tejaprabhā have been identified in Khitan country, this painting was regarded highly enough as to reportedly generate a tradition of copying. As discussed in chapter four, by the end of the twelfth century the Tanguts seem to have only deepened their investment in Tejaprabhā. A number of objects indicate that they self-consciously merged the Sinitic dhāraṇī tradition with what seems to have been a nascent tantric mandala associated with the planet goddess Grahamātṛkā. This sheds light, therefore, on the position of the Tanguts at the interface of Sinitic and Himalayan astral cults during a particularly formative period in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

Astral Visuality

If astral knowledge cuts across any single political, religious, or ideological domain, in many respects astral subjects constitute a distinct form of visual culture. This is most obvious in the robust iconographic dialogue across cultures—at various points throughout medieval history, for example, Venus played local variations on a stringed instrument from one geographic extreme of Eurasia to the other (figs. 11-13). Foundational voices in the development of iconography as a systematic, self-conscious art historical discourse and method in late

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47 See also Liào, “Cóng Hēishuǐchéng xīngyào mǎntúluō kàn Hán Zàng Xià zhījiān de wénhuà gōulián” 從黑水城星曜曼荼羅看漢藏夏之間的文化勾連, Dūnhuáng yánjiū 敦煌研究 (forthcoming).


49 Liào, “Wèn běn.”

50 Soper, “Hsiang-Kuo-Ssū,” p. 34.
nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe recognized the revelatory potential in such an observation. Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and his followers saw that astrological symbolism, when systematically analyzed, represent nothing short of a window into a lost history of Europe’s dialogue with the non-west and with pagan antiquity. The window is hardly transparent, however, and the project of writing this history lost visibility. It became itself the subject of important critique, on the basis for example of a fixation on origins, hierarchy of cultures, and reification of the categories of science and superstition.

In hindsight, an important limiting factor to the Warburgian project of writing a transcultural history of astral visual culture was indeed simply one of data. From this perspective, some of the dismissal of or distaste for iconography as a method can be attributed to simply the often slow and incremental nature of its results. Owing to a number of recent developments, including the discourse of world art studies, institutional promotion of interdisciplinarity, and the emergence of digital tools, something along the lines of an art history without the geographic and temporal “border guards” that Warburg called for nearly a century ago is more realizable now than ever. This dissertation aims to make one contribution—and in many respects, it is just a beginning—to the history of premodern astral art in a Eurasia expanded fully eastward. By addressing how cultures that have sometimes been seen as too different to be fruitfully compared (as well as those that are not but perhaps should be) came to know and represent the singular visible sky, such a project stands at a minimum to greatly improve understanding of the historical character of trans-Eurasian cultural interaction. There is also a more fundamental promise in returning to the premodern astral sciences in art, in how the topic can elucidate the constitution of visual cultures as such.

An important critique of the iconography of Erwin Panofsky is its “tone of certainty,” as Georges Didi-Hubermann has put it. “All it looks for in art are answers that are already given by its discursive problematic.” It is methodologically closed, fallaciously positivistic, “dispossessing its object” of “its own specific deployment or unfolding.” The trouble began, in other words, when art history tried to be too much like science. Take, for example, the concept of the attribute foundational to premodern Christian iconography. The attribute has long been invoked in Anglophone scholarship on Buddhist and Daoist art (including in this dissertation) (fig. 14), but, as far as I am aware, with little direct theoretical justification.


54 This is similar to the relatively unexamined transition in discourse on Buddhist art from the “idol” to “icon,” both fraught and value-laden terms. For a critique of approaches to the “Buddhist icon” primarily from the perspective of Japanese culture, see Bernard Faure, “The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze,” Critical Inquiry 24 (Spring 1998), 768-813.
in and across contexts and cultures where such a concept cannot be demonstrated.\footnote{For example, the monumental project led by Lokesh Chandra, \textit{Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography}, 15 vols. (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture: Aditya Prakashan, 1999-2005).} Establishing more-or-less coherent pictorial identities for deities of course enables all kinds of other critical research. But in the process of applying the attribute-based approach to Buddhist art, whether in earnest or not, we tend not to stop and ask what may have been missed. Surely there is a lot.

Trans-Eurasian study of astral visuality gives us an opportunity to reengage the iconographic method, to realize its fuller analytic and interpretive potential. This can be done, perhaps counterintuitively, by revisiting precisely that sticky issue of science, now in terms of its historical representation and constitution in visual form. Although not addressed in-depth in this dissertation, the western zodiac is an instructive case. At various times in the history of the zodiac in art, the decisive object of representation is the visible constellation itself, as famously illustrated in al-Sufi’s (903-986) \textit{Book of the Fixed Stars} (fig. 15). There we see that the scales of Libra are drawn around a more diagrammatic, dot-and-line depiction of the constellation itself. The stars act as the armature for the pictorial symbol, thus establishing a necessary causal relationship between the scales and the constellation as it is pictured in nature.\footnote{Gombrich identifies a similarly genitive role of the stars in his discussion of pictures as a form of psychological “projection.” The psychological basis of pictorial representation is not an issue addressed in this dissertation, nor am I concerned here with the origins of picture-making in general. As the comparison between the Sinitic asterism and the Hellenistic zodiac sign demonstrates, “projection,” in the sense of pictures being projected (to Gombrich, as a psychological process) into natural world phenomena, is just one aspect of a larger set of issues. E. H. Gombrich, \textit{Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation} (Princeton, 2000 [1961]), pp. 84-88.} This type of figuration is distinct from the scales understood to symbolize the equinox, and one no less important (regardless of which came first). This single, commonplace element of medieval visual culture is thus replete with potentially multiple forms of scientific knowledge. The observation in itself gives rise to a host of questions: is it possible to discern, for example, the effect of Libra’s stellar armature on how the sign was understood and changed historically? When represented as an “attribute” of an anthropomorphic god (figs. 16, 17), was it then the scale or the humanlike figure that constituted the locus of signification? Can we discern different semiotic processes for different zodiac signs that might nuance or reshape our understanding of the zodiac as a category of visual culture?

Such questions are only compounded when traveling eastward from the Abrahamic world. Although the East and Inner Asian zodiac were fundamentally consistent in iconographic terms with the signs of South, Central, and Western Eurasia, the representational object of the zodiac sign seems at no time to have been viewed as a symbolically mediated constellation in the manner discussed above. From the perspective of the history of the Sinitic astral sciences, such a phenomenon would seem extremely unlikely, as China had long known a completely different map of the stars and form of representing them (fig. 18). No later than the early medieval period this Sinitic asterism had gained widespread currency as an independent, notionally cartographic, dot-and-line form with symbolic and, it seems, rhetorical inflections that are understood today in only rudimentary terms. It retained a unique degree of primacy and autonomy, never becoming as the Greco-Babylonian zodiac did the armature for another symbolic object.
Thus there is such a thing as a Sino-Hellenistic zodiac tradition, defined by its formation in not a fundamentally distinct iconographic lexicon but a different set of subject-object relations altogether. This observation has important implications for the history of not only astral visual culture but, I think, visual culture more generally. Much more work needs to be done on these issues than can be accomplished in this dissertation. But for now, we can see our methodological charge as double: first, to assemble and analyze iconographic data as rigorously as possible while not forgetting that they are never simply passive documents of exchange (much less mythological degenerations of true science). We need also insist, just as rigorously, on the importance of failures, slippages, mistranslations, redundancies, and all the other untidy aspects of what we study. Allowing the material to rightfully trouble our own basic categories of inquiry is just how art history can demonstrate its usefulness to the history of science.

The basic difference I have outlined above—between the asterism as armature for another sign and as sign in itself—ultimately points to the problem of trying to distill iconography from more fundamental issues in visual semiosis. This, I think, is a more analytically productive starting point for the transcultural study of premodern art than the often truistic statements about perceived disposition or cultural preference in an era when we have few native accounts or even identifiable historical personages. This I hope to demonstrate in the opening to chapter two, in which I discuss the Northern Song Huīzōng emperor’s critique of the (ultimately Western Eurasian and probably also Indian) iconography of stellar gods. Huīzōng explicitly denounces their “disrespectful” physical appearances, some of which involved, for example, nudity. Regardless of how scandalous they may indeed have looked, I argue that this objection was as much about decorum as a symptom of their failure to signify.

This dissertation does not propose a general theory of the anthropomorphic deity or “icon” in Chinese or Inner Asian art, but it does seek to trouble the basic, sometimes hermetic categories by which they are understood. For now, we can tentatively identify one commonality among astral deities of the Western, Inner, and East Asian medieval worlds, namely a symbolic and/or semiotic distance from the local religious traditions in which they appear.

**Astral Culture and Spatial Schema**

So far I have traced what might be termed the negative aims of this dissertation. The positive one, for which I think astral visual culture is uniquely well suited, is to productively link a concept of transculturalism with that of intellectual synthesis.\(^{57}\) The cultures we will encounter in this dissertation were intimately familiar with the need to reconcile multiplicity. Premodern China, for example, maintained multiple uranographic traditions (or “schools”) simultaneously,\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) For a major study of the role of visual culture in a period for which transcultural synthesis was an issue at the very heart of empire-making, see Patricia Berger’s *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003).

\(^{58}\) They were distinguished in medieval documents, for example the famous Dūnhuáng star chart Or.8210/S.3326, though a system of color-coded asterisms. On the early schools, see Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, see *The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society*, Volume 38 of *Sinica Leidensia* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). See also Shī Yūnli 石云裏 on color coding in the mnemonic star poem *Bùtiān gē* 步天歌, unpublished presentation, Kyōto University, October 2017. On the Dūnhuáng Star Chart, See Jean-Marc Bonnet-Bidaud, François Praderie, and Susan Whitfield, “The Dūnhuáng
combining and even color coding them on the same document as though to register the fundamentally syncretistic nature of uranography. This type of “classical” synthesis and the types we will encounter in medieval astral texts (for example, the collation of multiple names for a planet deity) may well be analogous, for example in the degree of self-consciousness. The modern eye tends to see them differently, however, because the medieval case is freighted with the issue of cultural difference. Of course, this may have been an active issue for native actors—during the heyday of the Tejaprabhā cult there indeed was a fairly well-developed discourse of ethnic or cultural identity (distinct from the modern concept of race). That cultural difference was an issue is particularly clear in period discourse on the cultural identity of various artistic practices. Accordingly, style has become one of the primary rubrics by which historians of East and Inner Asian Buddhist art set out to analyze cultural difference, in particular how it informs the appearances of anthropomorphic deities in proportion, costume, and style. Tangut Buddhist art, which is seen as a kind of incubator for Sino-Tibetan art, is undoubtedly an advanced case of self-consciously transcultural stylistic synthesis. Iconography also becomes in some sense a

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Chinese Sky: A Comprehensive Study of the Oldest Known Star Atlas,” *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* vol. 4 (2009): pp. 39-59. Based on the text and the astronomical content, these scholars have dated the document to the Tang. A lingering issue is the visual evidence that indicates the document was produced with a stylus rather than a brush. This phenomenon is widely observed in Dunhuang documents although the practice is typically thought to begin (for obscure reasons) around the period of Tibetan rule (781-848).

59 The Tanguts, for example, referred to themselves in Chinese as “Fan 番” and the Song as “Han 漢.” Period commentators document associations between culture or region and medium (as well as proportion and physiognomy). For example, the historical-critical treatise *On Painting, Continued (Huaji 畫繼)* by the twelfth-century Song literatus Deng Chun 鄧椿 contrasts painting in China and South Asia on the basis of their material substrate, among other factors:

Monks at the Indian temple of Nalanda in Xiitian [lit. Western Heavens] frequently paint icons of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Lohans using Xiitian [i.e., Indian] cloth. The buddha’s appearance in these paintings is very different than that of Middle Kingdom [i.e., Chinese] men: his eyes are large, his mouth and ears eccentric. He sits or stands naked, merely a sash hanging from his right shoulder. First, the five viscera are rendered on the painting’s reverse. Then, the five colors are applied to the painting’s recto, using gold or vermillion for the ground. It is said that oxhide glue is upsetting, therefore they use peach glue mixed with liquid from the willow branch. Strongly binding, the Middle Kingdom knows not of its powers.

西天中印度那爛陀寺僧，多畫佛及菩薩、羅漢像，以西天布為之。其佛相好與中國人異，眼目稍大，口耳俱怪，以帶桂右肩，裸袒坐立而已。先施五藏於畫背，乃涂五彩於畫面，以金或朱紅作地，謂牛皮膠為触，故用桃膠，合柳枝水，甚堅漬，中國不得其訣也。


stylistic question, for example when deities are identified by culturally specific objects, such as when Mars or Saturn is shown carrying a Chinese-style talismanic seal. While I do not mean to discredit the interpretive utility of style, its attachment to human figuration—and the often-latent invocation of race or ethnicity—is one of the reasons that cultural difference is a limiting framework with which to approach astral visuality. We need to look for something more fundamental, and less blinkered by our own judgments of foreignness.

Composition and spatial configuration have not been important concerns in the discussion of transcultural synthesis in religious art, while they are primary issues in the formal analysis of cosmological systems and correlative thought. It is precisely these aspects of astral visual culture in China and Inner Asia that I argue are the most powerful loci of distinction, more so than iconography or style. The reason, put simply, is that because astral deities were freighted with an unusually precise type of cosmological or numeric significance, their spatial configuration often—but not always—constitutes an independent, less explicit but more fundamental object of depiction.

In this dissertation I call that object the pictorial “schema.” Here, schema is distinct from a more general concept of composition or pictorial program, primarily in that it transcends any single medium, format, or work of art. It is not a contingent representational strategy, in other words, but rather a set of independent, fixed, and spatially inflected relations. These relations resolve into a pattern or an aspect that, once seen, is difficult to un-see. Moreover, the schema is a relatively “notational” form of representation in the sense meant by Nelson Goodman, more akin to chart or diagram and not characterized by the “density” or “repleteness” of Goodmanian pictures. This allows the schema to be identified and described with an unusual degree of precision or one might say analytic “hardness.” In fact the schema as I define it is not always even visually present, for example when it is expressed through the sequencing of planets listed in a text. It recalls classic references for Chinese correlative cosmology, for example the five phases (五行 wǔxíng), yin-yang (陰陽), or the Yijing (易经) hexagrams. However, it is essential not to take these (or any others) for granted, but rather to start by addressing the picture first on its own terms. This is true whether in the Tangut context, where the use of translated five-phases names for the planets might suggest such an approach, or the Song, which unlike Tangut culture did take on the full weight of the ancient Chinese imperial tradition.

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62 By schema I mean something different than the sense used by Gombrich of a provisional representation that is “corrected” until a sufficiently refined or naturalistic version is attained. My usage is closer to James Elkins’s in The Domain of Images, in which the word “names a kind of image that is strongly notational but also infused with” many other forms such as “writing, pictures, framing elements, numbers, allographs, and so forth.” For Gombrich’s schema, see E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 60; for Elkins’s, and a more general discussion of uses of the term, see chapter thirteen, “Schemata,” in The Domain of Images (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

The dynamics between schema and what I term “figure,” or the symbolic objects that instantiate any given schema (here, most often anthropomorphic gods and zodiac emblems) are addressed most directly in chapters three and four. However, this basic bifurcation hums in the background of the rest of the dissertation. I do not claim that in all cases this was a natively operative mode, although it clearly was in at least some. However, it will perhaps help to recall that the type of figure-schema dynamic I am invoking, for example the four directional animals that appear in many Han tombs and mirrors, was operative in this part of the world well before Buddhist forms of depiction were introduced there.

By thematizing the schema it is precisely my aim to put contextually disjointed forms of more-or-less diagrammatic representation in dialogue. As a result, it will quickly become clear that there was no such thing as an orthodox order for the astral gods, even within the Han cultural domain. On the contrary, the dialectic relationship between figure and schema made astral visual culture a discursive, worldmaking agent in its own right, and these worlds may or may not have been described or named in texts. There seems, in fact, to have been a greater number of cosmologically inflected astral schemas, and by extension, astral visual cultures, than we currently have established names or historical explanations for. This is particularly true, as we shall see, for the Tanguts.

Chapter one of this dissertation focuses on scriptural traditions of the cult of Tejaprabhā and text-picture issues that present challenges to modern study. After an overview of known texts in Chinese and Tangut, I offer a translation of the most commonly cited version of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture. Turning to a commentary by the Tiāntái monk Zūnshi, I examine the astrological content in this scripture, in particular how it links two seemingly distinct approaches to fate, one primarily geographic, the other temporal, and a Daoist precedent for such a linking. I then address another version of the dhāraṇī scripture that treats astral calamity in markedly different terms, namely those of sorcery. Finally, I analyze several planetary talismans from Dūnhuáng as documents of historical performances of astral divination that involved pictures.

Chapter two turns to depictions of astral deities in human form, and the problem of this apparently novel form of representation whose earliest known examples are nonetheless iconographically mature. After discussing a case of occult symbolism and the problem of whether it was intelligible, I examine transformations in how each planet deity was perceived, written about, and depicted, from early representations of the Sun and Moon to the late-medieval rise of the tenth and eleventh pseudoplanets. I attempt to account for their changing appearances by joining issues of perception, myth, religion, and science, in addition to preexisting visual models. Finally, I discuss the development of what was by all appearances a new Tangut canon of planetary iconography.

Chapter three broadens the focus to examine overall Tejaprabhā assembly paintings. Here I address most directly the role of cosmologically inflected schemas as structuring devices in figurative art, and how this seems to have worked in Tejaprabhā tableaus. A distinctively Tangut approach to the planet gods emerges through this analysis. Applying this observation to the corridor of Cave 61 at Mogao, which was repainted during the period of Tangut rule, I propose a reconstruction of the overall pictorial program. I argue that, combined with what is known of the Tangut relationship to the cave’s main content and in light of subtle pictorial cues, the corridor paintings effectively depict Tejaprabhā and his retinue on pilgrimage, so to speak, to the sacred mountains of Wutai.
Chapter four addresses an experimental-seeming astral deity mandala from Kharakhoto that would seem to challenge the stereotype of the mandala as the ultimate schematizing device. I offer a step-by-step analysis of this significantly decayed painting based on in-person viewing and comparison with several related liturgical texts, noting important basic features of the painting that have not been previously observed. The painting demonstrates a Tangut linking of the astrally inflected cults the goddesses Mahāmāyūrī and Grahamāṭṛkā, and moreover important transformations in the Tangut Tejaprabhā cult. I argue that this likely documents an expansion or incorporation of the Sino-Tangut Tejaprabhā dhāranī cult into a trantric mandala.
Chapter One

The Cult of Tejaprabhā: Between Buddhism and Diffuse Occultism

Introduction: Names, Attributes, and Text-Image Identity Problems

Writing the history of the Buddhist astral deity known as Tejaprabhā is not a straightforward task. The dhāraṇī cult centered on him is not always easily recognized in texts, as it was historically described or identified by a number of semantically unrelated terms, including “auspicious(ness) 吉祥,” “great and mighty 大威德,” “calamity dispelling 消災,” “golden wheel 金輪,” and of course “effulgence 慈盛光,”64 of which Tejaprabhā is a Sanskrit reconstruction. “Calamity-dispelling” is a common short-form title for the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī (Xiāozāi jīng 消災經); however, at least one Daoist scripture also went by this same name.65 Moreover, the deity’s relationship to South Asian Buddhist traditions is not well understood, complicating the question of how to reconstruct his name. The term Tejaprabhā has been in use since at least the mid nineteenth century,66 but since then a number of other reconstructions have been used.67 At least one Anglophone scholar has simply used the English translation “Effulgent

64 “Chìshèng(guāng)” is an extremely common term in Chinese Buddhist texts, associated with meditative attainment and the radiance of the Buddha’s body. A narrower astral usage is attested early in the circulation of Indian astral knowledge in Chinese Buddhism, in the Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna translation attributed to the Indo-Iranian monk Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (ca. 233–310). In that text, Chìshèng 熾盛 is a semantic translation of Puṣya, the nakṣatra corresponding to the Chinese lodge Guǐ 鬼. On Chinese translations of nakṣatra names, see Niǔ Wèixīng, Xīwàng Fàntiān 西望梵天, Table 5.4.


66 The first usage of Tejaprabhā of which I am aware is Bunyiu Nanjio’s (南条文雄) 1868 catalogue under the entries for what are now known as T 963 and T 964. See A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka: The Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan, Compiled by Order of the Secretary of State for India (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1868), p. 222.

67 The multi-author volume Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia, Orzech et al, eds., for example, apparently refers to the deity at the center of the same scripture by two different names, Jvāloṣṇīṣa (p. 32) and Tejaprabhā (p. 240).
Finally, the complexity of the cult’s distinct formations across Sinophone cultures has only recently been given fuller attention. Given these issues, “Tejaprabhā” might begin to seem like a name without a referent.

At first blush, the same does not appear to be true of the visual tradition. This buddha is among the more readily identifiable deities in middle-period Chinese and Inner Asian Buddhist art. In paintings, prints, and sculptures from Jiangnan to Xinjiang, he takes the form of a seated tathāgata, typically holding a golden wheel and surrounded by a highly distinctive astral retinue. Pictorial art in some cases even resolves potential ambiguity about the relationship between this buddha and scripture. For example, in a roughly fifteenth-century wall painting from the Front Hall of the Guǎngshèng 廣勝 Lower Monastery, Shānxī 山西, now in the collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Art and Archaeology (fig. 19), a bodhisattva seated to the right of the wheel-turning tathāgata and his planetary retinue, raises an apparently butterfly-bound copy of a scripture whose faint but still-legible title reads Xiāozāi jīng 消災經 (fig. 21).

Such clarity of text-picture relations, however, was far from the rule, particularly in the earlier period with which this dissertation is concerned. Two roughly contemporaneous representations of the seated tathāgata holding a wheel from far-flung corners of the Sòng empire exemplify some of the issues in uniting a textually identified cult with pictorial materials. These materials demonstrate how on the one hand, a coherent visual tradition can coalesce around a seemingly disparate set of names, yet on the other, a relatively stable iconography can misleadingly suggest continuities from site to site.

**Personified Incantation? Dàwēidé Mingwáng at Dàzú**

Modern scholars have characterized Tejaprabhā Buddha as a deified incantation. This concept is useful for establishing a distinct identity for the cult and moreover emphasizes its origins in a ritual technique. However, it is not clear that all appearances of the wheel-carrying buddha denote the same astral incantatory tradition or, for that matter, that the figure of the buddha now called Tejaprabhā represents the actual personification. Deified spells in Chinese Buddhist art typically take the form not of tathāgatas but bodhisattvas or goddesses, as in the well-known cases of Mahāpratisarā and Uṣṇīṣavijaya, or wrathful wisdom kings (mingwáng 明王; vidyārāja).

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68 Eugene Wang, “Ritual Practice Without a Practitioner? Early Eleventh Century Dhāraṇī Prints in the Ruiguangsi Pagoda,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011): 127-160. This may well be a better solution to the problem of linguistic bias than using a thus-far unattested Sanskrit reconstruction.

69 See, for example, Sū Jiāyíng, “Nihon ni okeru shijōkō Futsu zuzu no kōsatsu”; Chén Mínghuá 陳明華, “Cóng Cháoxiǎn qízi xíngtài shilún Chishèngguāng fó yǔ Báiyī Guānyīn de jiāohuì” 從朝鮮祈子形態試論熾盛光佛與白衣觀音的交會, *Xuánzàng Fóxué yánjiū* 玄奘佛學研究 22 (2014/9).

One type of deity associated with the Tejaprabhā cult is in fact the wisdom king. This association was made explicit in a sculpted tableau in the southwest grotto region of Dàzú 大足, though according to a logic that is not entirely clear. At the horseshoe-shaped cliff-side site of Bǎodǐngshān 宝顶山, which was produced between 1177 and 1249 under the direction of the monk Zhào Zhìfèng 赵智凤 (1159-1249), a figure conforming to the standard Tejaprabhā iconography appears in a colossal tableau dedicated to Liǔ Běnzūn 柳本尊, a local lay master of the late Táng period (fig. 21). Instead of assuming his regular position at the center of an astral assembly, however, this wheel-holding tathāgata rises on a cloud raft from the forehead of a larger, multiarmed and multi-faced figure who emerges, waist-up and in high relief, to the viewer’s immediate left (fig. 22). This wrathful figure’s upper arms display a large square seal and, like the buddha, a spiked wheel. Behind his frontal face manifest, somewhat uncannily, two smaller, lateral ones.

These two figures, the wrathful seal-bearer and the cloud-borne tathāgata, comprise one of ten pairs of vidyārājas and buddhas or bodhisattvas that are arranged in a horizontal register beneath Liǔ Běnzūn’s ten acts of self-mortification (literally, “smeltings”; “Liǔ Běnzūn shilian 柳本尊十炼”). Like a number of the other sculpted pairs appearing in this register, the one in question preserves an inscription that records not just the deities’ names but also conveys something about their relationship. Carved into the section of smoothed cliff face directly above the vidyārāja, we read, “The Great and Mighty Wisdom King (Dàwēidé Míngwáng); Golden Wheel Effulgent Buddha Tathāgata (Chìshèngguāngfó rúlái) manifested [大]威德明王，金轮炽盛光佛如來化.”

It might seem self-evident that it is the wrathful figure and not the Tejaprabhā Buddha who represents the incantation itself. However, the syntactical relationship between the inscription and the sculpture is somewhat ambiguous. Does the buddha huà 化 (transform; manifest) the vidyārāja? Or does their relationship flow the other way around, following the direction of emanation represented in the sculpture? Applying a standard hierarchical logic, the answer should be the former. From the perspective of ritual efficacy, however, their relationship could be understood inversely: the vidyārāja summons the buddha into view by the power and authority of the spell he embodies.

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72 For discussion of this case, see Liáo, “Zàikǎo,” pp. 333-336.

Stepping back from the question of what particular causal relationship is meant to be expressed in the sculpted tableau, it is worth noting that the association between a wrathful *vidyārāja* and the golden-wheel buddha resonates with a little-discussed element in a number of Tejaprabhā texts. In the three Taishō versions of the *dhāraṇī* scripture that are examined below, a wrathful deity icon (忿怒像) is to be installed in the center of the ritual precinct. Does this Bǎodǐngshān tableau therefore reflect more about historical practices of Tejaprabhā ritual than the highly composed and more populated assembly and procession scenes that never feature wisdom kings? It is difficult to say, because the Dàzú tableau ultimately connects with few other pictorial materials of the Tejaprabhā cult. Moreover, this “Great and Mighty Wisdom King” is clearly a nonstandard interpretation with respect to other Sinitic regions, where this name often refers to Yamāntaka, an iconographically unrelated deity prevalent in Himalayan Buddhist traditions.74

The Dàzú pair might then seem to be simply a regional phenomenon. However, it is completely distinct from even other local depictions of Tejaprabhā. The five other rock-cut depictions of Tejaprabhā known in the Dàzú area all assemble the deified planets around the central buddha (figs. 24, 25). By contrast, in the Bǎodǐngshān cliffside tableau there is no pictorial indication of a connection to the astral cult. Following Angela Howard’s suggestion, the pairing may well be explained by an even more local cause, namely the schematic constraints of the overall tableau.75 Fully ten pairs of *vidyārājas* with bodhisattvas or buddhas were needed to match Liu Běnzūn’s ten acts of selfless self-harm and the five *jina* buddhas in the register above them. Ten being a somewhat odd number for East Asian *vidyārājas*, this Dàwēidé-Chìshèngguāng pairing were perhaps brought in to fill a gap, a linguistic felicity given that both terms appear in the title of the *dhāraṇī* scripture.

*Name or Trait? Mahāpratisarā as Tejaprabhā Frame*

Marking what may be the extreme end of verbal-pictorial slippage in the cult of Tejaprabhā, in early eleventh-century Sūzhōu the deity seems to have bled into an entirely different *dhāraṇī* tradition altogether, that of Mahāpratisarā (Great Wish Fulfillment; Dàsuíqiú 大隨求). In a print dated to 1005 discovered within a reliquary beneath the third floor of the pagoda at Ruiguāng temple 瑞光寺塔, Suzhou, Tejaprabhā’s assembly is set in the center of the Great Wish Fulfillment *dhāraṇī* written in Siddhaṃ, a variety of Brāhmī script used frequently in East Asian incantatory traditions (fig. 25). Tejaprabhā is not elsewhere associated with Mahāpratisarā, and the reason he should appear in this amulet, and in no less than its most privileged position, has been subject to significant speculation and debate. Explanations include accident or iconographic confusion or adaptation to local beliefs.


A simpler and to my mind more satisfying explanation rests on the version of the Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī in use. According to Chén Míng-huá, this particular print reproduces an excerpt of the version in the Taishō whose attributed translator is Bùkōng 不空 (Amoghavajra; 705-774), the powerful Indo-Central Asian monk and celebrated astral specialist (who is also identified as translator of one of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scriptures discussed below). Bùkōng’s version contains a versified passage on eliminating astral-induced misfortune, specifically infertility. It names the navagraha and the twenty-eight xiù, both of which groups appear in Tejaprabhā’s printed assembly. Though suggestive, this brief passage is just one small part of the overall scripture—why draw out the astral connection? Though it would be impossible to prove definitively, perhaps one reason is that the word “effulgent 熾盛” appears multiple times throughout this sutra, including the title itself as printed on the dhāraṇī sheet. This, it seems, is not so unlike the linguistically felicitous Dàwēidé-Chishèngguāng pairing we saw at Dàzú.


T 1153, Pǔbiàn guāngmíng qīngjìng chìshèng rúyìbāo yǐnxīn wúnéng shēng dà míngwáng dàsuíqiú tuóluóní jīng. However, the title of the Bùkōng-attributed version in the Taishō differs slightly from the title appearing in the Chinese-language colophon at the bottom of the print. In the print, it appears as The Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Great Wisdom King Wish-Fulfilling Dharani Scripture of the Universally Radiant, Pure, and Effulgent Wish-fulfilling gem, the Sealed Essence of the Invincible Incantation (Fóshuō pǔbiàn guāngmíng yànmán qīngjìng chìshèng sīwèi rúyì bāoyīn xīn wúnéngshēng zòngchí dàmíngwáng dàsuíqiú tuóluóní 佛說普遍光明焰鬘清淨熾盛思惟如意寶印心無能勝總持大明王大隨求陀羅尼). See Chén, “Chishèngguāng fǒ yǔ Báiyī Guānyīn,” pp. 114-116.

“Among the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, and Jupiter, Venus and Saturn, the Comet, and Rāhu: if any of these navagraha invade one’s original destiny lodge, the calamities thereby caused can be stripped away completely. If a woman or man with congenital infertility (lit. imperforate hymen 石女 and intersex, that is, ʂa˛n̄dha pandaka 扇姹半姹迦). Due to wearing the Mahāpratisarā [amulet], this type of person will lose her or his infertility. For any such wearer, one should paint the navagraha and the twenty-eight lodges with that person depicted inside. He or she will obtain all that is sought.”

As noted in Liào, “Zàikǎo,” 333.
In the end, a notion that Tejaprabhā appears inside the Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī simply as the result of confusion or arbitrary decision making is unwarranted. A more dynamic, semi-verbal process was likely at work, one in which a specific component of the sutra was singled out and amplified. Tejaprabhā was by then understood as a major specialist in such types of calamity, not just compatible with the Mahāpratisarā cult but also implied by the very title of the scripture. Such a relay between name, attribute, and icon would hardly be unique within Chinese Buddhist art. It seems simply unusually transparent here, because depictions of Tejaprabhā ’s assembly at this time were still somewhat rare and distinctive as ever iconographically. Whatever it may ultimately have meant to place Tejaprabhā at the center of a Mahāpratisarā amulet sheet, what brought about such a pairing seems to have been precisely the slippage between name and trait, proper noun and adjective, which might be generally said to characterize the Táng-Sòng Tejaprabhā cult as a whole. The Dàzú and Ruìguāng cases together demonstrate how, as far as Tejaprabhā goes, iconographic traits alone cannot serve as reliable evidence for the stability of any given cult.

Textual Tradition

Taishō scriptures: “Bûkōng” and “Unknown Táng Translator” Versions (T 963 and T 964)

The standard modern references for the cult of Tejaprabhā are two standalone dhāraṇī scriptures found back-to-back in the edition of the Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, the modern Sinitic Buddhist canon compiled in Japan. They are T 963, the Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Effulgent, Mighty. Calamity-Dissolving Auspiciousness Dharani (Fóshuō Chìshèngguāng dàwēidé xiāozāi jíxiáng tuóluóní jīng 佛說熾盛光大威德消災吉祥陀羅尼經), and T 964, the Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Calamity-Dispelling Dharani of the Great and Mighty Golden-Wheel Buddhosnisa Effulgent Tathāgata (Fóshuō dàwēidé jīnlún fódǐng Chìshèngguāng rúlái xiāochú yīqiè zāinàn tuóluóní jīng 佛說大威德金輪佛頂熾盛光如來消除一切災難陀羅尼經). Bûkōng 不空 is identified as the translator of T 963; T 964 only notes an unknown Táng translator. (I hereafter refer to T 963 as the “Bûkōng version” and T

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80 This reading of the Tejaprabhā print in some ways supports Eugene Wang’s proposal about the relationship between this amulet and the other Mahāpratisarā print found in the Ruìguāng pagoda, which is written in Chinese around a seated bodhisattva-like figure understood to represent Mahāpratisarā herself. It is important to note that the version of the scripture used on this second print is different than the one cited in the print on which Tejaprabhā appears. Wang’s analysis pertains to how the two prints might be seen to express a unified cosmological program. He concludes that the Tejaprabhā print represents a “higher altitude,” and the one featuring Mahāpratisarā, because it is written in Chinese instead of Siddham yet references the transcendent lunar disk “implies and embodies the devotee’s earthbound, albeit transcendent, point of view.” (pp. 152-153). One additional point of tension in this reading that Wang does not mention is the possible cosmological relationship between the two prints’ compositional format. Here, the prints are put into a dynamic symmetry by inverting expectations—the circular format is used not for heaven but the print he posits as representing Earth, making the square then be the image of heaven. See Wang, “Ritual Practice Without a Practitioner?”
964 as the “unknown-translator version” for the sake of convenience and not as a sign of accepting the questionable attribution to Bùkōng.) Another feature signals the period association between Tejaprabhā and Bùkōng, namely that the buddha’s main interlocutor is the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the patron of astrology and an important focus of Bùkōng’s activity at the Táng court (see chapter three).81

Despite the prestige of the Bùkōng version, which is affirmed by its Yuán-dynasty preface, the two texts have much in common. As a rule, modern scholars have treated them as essentially interchangeable, while giving some priority to the Bùkōng version. The two texts in fact do contain fairly significant differences that have gone generally unnoted. In particular, the unknown-translator version features additional planetary mantras that speak to the origins of the dhāraṇī in the textured fabric of medieval Chinese ritual culture, in which mantras, mudras, and other technical modules were combined in a highly fluid manner.

To my knowledge, the earliest dated copy of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī that names Bùkōng is from 972, the fifth year of the Kāibǎo reign of the Northern Sòng dynasty 大宋開寶五年.82 Based on lexical similarities with the commentary by the prominent Tiāntái monk Zūnshì 遵式 (964–1032), discussed below, a version similar to this one seems to have been used in Northern Sòng Tiāntái.

“Yīxíng” Version (T 1310)

A third important Taishō version of the Tejaprabhā incantation sutra, entitled Essentials of the Effulgent Method (Chìshèngguāng yàofǎ 熾盛光要法), appears at the end of a ritual text centered on the “Northern Dipper” Běidǒu 北斗. This text is attributed, also questionably, to Yīxíng 一行 (683–727), another eminent monk and astral specialist of the Táng.83 For the same reasons detailed above, I will refer to this text hereafter as the “Yīxíng version.”

If the unknown-translator version indicates some of the modular fluidity that characterized techniques of Chinese Buddhist astral worship, this scripture demonstrates much more clearly this fluidity in action. This is indicated, first of all, by the fact that it appears in a Běidōu scripture, a cult with strong Daoist associations. Although the Yīxíng version overlaps significantly with the Bùkōng and unknown-translator versions in terms of wording, framing, and astral content, it involves a significantly divergent set of ritual techniques, including exorcistic violence and apotropaic picture-making.

Effulgent Buddhoṣṇīṣa Mandala (T 966)


82 The full date on this document, which is held in Nara, Japan, reads 大宋開寶五年年歲次壬申四月八日. See Wéi Bīng, “Riběn xīn fāxiàn,” pp. 214-221.

83 Běidōu qīxīng hùmó fǎ 北斗七星護摩法, T 1310
The Taishō contains another ritual text known by the shortened end-title *Effulgent Buddhoṣṇīṣa Ritual Protocol* (Chīshèngguāng fǒding yīguǐ熾盛光佛頂儀軌). It professes to have emerged from a little-known text called the “Calamity-Ending, Difficulty-Eliminating Chapter of the Mañjuśrī Great Assembly Sutra, also known as the Effulgent Buddhoṣṇīṣa 出文殊大集經息災除難品亦云熾盛光佛頂.” This text offers step-by-step instructions for producing and worshipping a calamity averting mandala centered on Tejaprabhā, either in powdered pigment or the more permanent but portable format of paint on silk. It features dozens of deities, including, in the cardinal positions of the inner precinct, Tejaprabhā Buddhoṣṇīṣa熾盛光佛頂 and three major bodhisattvas: Mother of the Buddha-Eye Department佛眼部母菩薩, Mañjuśrī文殊師利, and Vajrapāṇi金剛手. Outwardly radiating precincts contain Śakra, Mahēśvara, and other major Indic deities, the twelve zodiac signs, and various protector deities. Formatted as a spoked golden wheel, the mandala telescopically contains and comprises the main attribute of the primary buddha himself.

Despite its considerable interest and the frequency with which it is cited by modern scholars of the Tejaprabhā cult, I have not found significant evidence that this mandala was produced in China or Inner Asia. The frontispiece to the 972 Sòng print edition now held in Nara is the closest in terms of content and layout, but this is an exceptional case, and moreover it is missing the directional orientation and all of the supporting Buddhist deities. The Tangut mandala examined in chapter four is the only known physical example that is comparable in terms of scope, but its structure, format, and constituents are all completely different. The iconographic descriptions in T 966 diverges in significant ways from known Chinese and Inner Asian examples iconographically. For example, the deity corresponding with Tejaprabhā is described as wearing a five-buddha crown首冠五佛相, which is seen in no Chinese or Inner Asian example known to me, but is quite common to Japan. It may be that this mandala had more of a presence there. This would not be surprising given that a highly distinct independent pictorial tradition also matured there.

**Hexi Version**

Of the more than ten pre-Ming copies of the Tejaprabhā *dhāraṇī* scripture that have been excavated or preserved in what is now China, the majority have emerged at sites along or just north of the Hexi Corridor. As Liào Yáng has shown, they represent a relatively stable version

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84 The full title is *Dàshèng miào jíxiáng púsà chúzāi jiàolìng fǎlún* 大聖妙吉祥菩薩說除災教令法輪, T 966.


86 T 966, 19:0343a260-343b05.

87 See Sū Jiāyíng, “Ribén shìshēngguāng fó tǔxiáng zuòpǐn chūtàn.”

mantras recall the mantras in the Taishō unknown-translator version, indicating that they may not have been arbitrary or significantly later appendages. Many of the printed Hexi version copies also contain pictures, in the form of either frontispieces or individual deity inventories. A Tangut-language print copy with the shelf mark Inv. 951 (hereafter IOM 951) combines each of the nine illustrated planet deities with a mantra (fig.), sequenced according to its “monthly day of descent 鬥…” 鬥 鬥.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planet</th>
<th>Tangut Name</th>
<th>Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rāhu</td>
<td>Lo xew 鬥 鬥</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venus</td>
<td>Kiŋ giŋ 鬥 鬥 (lit. Metal Star)</td>
<td>15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketu</td>
<td>Kji tu 鬥 鬥</td>
<td>18th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn</td>
<td>Tser giŋ 鬥 鬥 (lit. Earth Star)</td>
<td>19th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Zjiŋ giŋ 鬥 鬥 (lit. Water Star)</td>
<td>21st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Sji giŋ 鬥 鬥 (lit. Wood Star)</td>
<td>25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>Tha dę 鬥 鬥 (lit. Great Yin)</td>
<td>26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Tha so 鬥 鬥 (lit. Great Yang)</td>
<td>27th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>Mę giŋ 鬥 鬥 (lit. Fire Star)</td>
<td>29th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table. 1.1 Sequence of Planets in IOM 951

**Tangut Version**

Finally, what we may call a uniquely Tangut version of the dhāraṇī sutra appears to have been produced during the major sutra revision and mass printing movements sponsored by the long-ruling emperor Xià Rénzōng 夏仁宗 (r. 1139-1193). This is indicated by a colophon on a  

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92 General consensus holds that an initial body of scriptures was translated into Tangut during the eleventh century. Translations were revised and new texts were produced during the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century, approaching the demise of the Tangut state, Tangut Buddhist literature was increasingly influenced by tantric and “state-protecting” scriptures. Tangut Buddhist textual production long outlasted the Tangut state itself. For a detailed overview, see Kirill Solonin, “Tangut Buddhist Literature,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 1 Jonathan A. Silk, et al, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2015) pp. 844-859.

fragmentary copy now held in St. Petersburg whose illustrations are crucial for understanding the
Tangut transformation of the Tejaprabhā cult.\textsuperscript{93} Although the printed copy of this version that I
have been able to examine preserves only a few lines of text, its pictorial content demonstrates a
considerable expansion of the cult in scope and character. It is the only Tejaprabhā scripture
known to me that represents the full roster of eleven planets (sun, moon, the five naked-eye
planets, and fully four invisible planets) and in a new iconography that is discussed in chapter
two. Moreover, the deities gathered around Tejaprabhā in the frontispiece are the very same
figures who appear in the inner and outer gates of the Tangut astral mandala examined in-depth
in chapter four. For now, this scripture thus documents an apparently concerted effort to integrate
two other astrally inflected cults prominent in Tangut Buddhism, those of Mahāmāyūrī and
Grahamāṭkā, into the Tejaprabhā frame, and moreover to integrate a tantric mandala with a
Sinitic dhāraṇī.

\section*{Taishō Sutra Content}

The Yīxing, Būkōng, and unattributed-translator versions, along with the Zūnshi
commentary, form the central objects of inquiry in this section. Unlike such Taishō texts as the
“Secrets of Seven-Planet Apotropaism” (Qīyào rǎngzāi jué 七曜攘災訣, T 1308) and the
“Scripture on the Lodges and Luminaries” (Xiùyào jīng 宿曜經 [T 1299]), which are core
sources for the medieval history of the astral sciences in East Asia,\textsuperscript{94} the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī is
not a technical document on astrology. Its references to celestial events and astral knowledge
have thus been overlooked. As we shall see, the astral knowledge in the scripture, though brief, is
indeed meaningful.

\section*{Būkōng and Unknown-Translator Versions}

Because of its brevity and the frequency with which it is cited in modern sources, I
translate the “Būkōng” version here.

At that time, Śākyamuni was in the Heaven of Pure Abode (Śuddhāvāsa). He said
to all the xiù and yào space-wandering devas, the nine-seizer (nahagrahā)

\textsuperscript{93} IOM Inv. 7038. The colophon reads: 觀世音観、觀世音觀、觀世音觀、觀世音觀、觀世音観、觀世音観、觀
世音観、觀世音観; Chinese translation: 奉天顯道、耀武宣文、神謀睿智、制義去邪、惇睦懿恭、皇帝御校, which is understood to refer to the Rénzhōng period. See Shi, Xīxià Fǎjiào, pp. 79-80.

\textsuperscript{94} On the dating, authorship, and content of the Qīyào rǎngzāi jué, see Kotyk, “Iranian Elements”; For a major study of the Xiùyào jīng, the full title of which is Wēnshū shīlǐ pǔsà jí zhǔxiān suǒshū jīxiōng shì
rì shān’è xiùyào jīng 文殊師利菩薩及諸仙所說吉凶時吉善悪宿曜經, see Yano Michio 矢野道雄,
Mikkyō senseijutsu: Sukuyōdo to Indo senseijutsu: meicho fukkan 密教占星術: 宿曜道とインド占星術:
名著再刊 (Tōkyō: Tōyōshoin 2013 [1986]). Translated title of T 1308 follows Kotyk, ibid.
mahādevas, as well as the twenty-eight lodges (naksatras/xiù), the twelve palaces (gōng), and the entire sagely assembly:

爾時釋迦牟尼佛在淨居天宮，告諸宿曜、遊空天眾、九執大天及二十八宿、
十二宮神一切聖眾：

‘I now preach that which was taught by the Sāla-rāja Tathāgata of the past, the Calamity-Dispelling Method of the Effulgent, Great and Mighty Dhāraṇī. Any kings or great ministers whose dwelling-places and states are harassed by the five planets; or if Rāhu and Huibèi96 and [other] weird stars illuminate their natal palace or lodge (běnmìng gōngxiù) and various stellar positions; or if [these planets and stars] illuminate the Imperial Seat (Dìzuò97) and the corresponding state or household field-allocation places (fēnyě chù), at the time of such harassment, when their advancing or retreating causes hindrances, simply erect a ritual precinct in a purified space. Recite this dhāraṇī 108 or 1,000 times, for a day, two days, three days, or up to seven days. Adorn the ritual precinct in accordance with the proper method. Receive and uphold the recitation with the utmost mind (zhìxīn). All calamities will be completely extinguished and able to do no harm.

‘If Great White (Venus) and/or the Fire Star (Mars) enter [the lodge] Nándōu (φ Sagittari) [or] the corresponding state or household field-allocation places, creating hindrances, one should depict the oppressor (śatru)99 before an icon of a

95 T 963, 19:337c14-337c16.

96 The term “Huibèi,” which references a comet- or meteor-like phenomenon is sometimes understood as a translation for Ketu. Further on in this same text, however, the standard transliteration for Ketu, “Jidu 計都,” is used. This suggests that the two terms may reference separate entities in this scripture. This will become significant in the discussion of Ketu and the possible tenth invisible planet in chapter two.

97 Dìzuò 帝座, “emperor’s seat,” may refer to the asterism (α Hercules) by the same name within the enclosure known as the Heavenly Market (Tiānshì yuán 天市垣). It also refers to the corresponding terrestrial location.

98 T 963, 19:337c16-337c24.

99 It is somewhat unclear to whom this refers, but, as discussed below, it may signal this rite’s origins in anti-sorcery. In this section, we seem to be dealing with two separate representations, one of a wrathful Buddhist deity, another possibly of the harmful planet. See the discussion of the Yīxing version below.
wrathful deity, and in an earnest voice recite this dhāraṇī of empowerment. The calamity will be immediately eliminated and transferred onto the traitor who refuses the ruler’s order.\(^{100}\)

若太白、火星入於南斗, 於國於家及分野處作諸障難者。於一忿怒像前, 畫彼設都嚕形，厲聲念此陀羅尼加持。其災即除，移於不順王命悖逆人身上。

\(^{101}\)

After preaching the incantation, the Buddha continues:

‘This dhāraṇī is promulgated by all the tathāgatas together. Any bhikṣu or bhikṣunī, clansman or clanswoman who receives and upholds the recitation of this dhāraṇī can attain 80,000 types of auspicious things and extinguish 80,000 inauspicious ones. [To] any kings, great ministers, their family members, and commoners alike whose imperial seat is harassed by the five planets, Rāhu, Ketu, Huibèi or [other] weird and demonic stars, such that in their country or household and [their corresponding] fēnyě positions various calamities arise; if Zhènxīng (Saturn) harasses, by advancing or retreating; or whose past-life enemies wish harm upon them, such that disasters befall in the form of various evils and sudden misfortune, slander, spells, and curses:\(^{102}\) May all living beings who accept and uphold [this dhāraṇī] in accord with the method be relieved of all such calamities and may none be able to bring them trouble. [May the calamities] be converted to good fortune and may all attain auspiciousness. This dhāraṇī I preach is of unimaginable, incomparable merit. Uphold it in secret, and do not wantonly disseminate it.’

此陀羅尼一切如來同共宣說。若有苾芻、苾芻尼、族姓男、族姓女。受持讀誦此陀羅尼者，能成就八萬種吉祥事。能除滅八萬種不吉祥事。若有國王、大臣及諸眷屬一切庶民或被五星、羅睺、計都、彗孛妖怪惡星陵逼帝座，於國於家及分野所屬宮宿，災難競起。或鎮星陵逼，或進或退，及宿世冤家欲相謀害。諸惡橫事、口舌厭禱、呪詛以為災難者，令諸眾生依法受持一切災難悉皆消滅不能為害。變災為福皆得吉祥。我今說此陀羅尼不可思議，功德無比。秘密受持，勿妄宣傳。\(^{103}\)

\(^{100}\) The specific reference here is again somewhat unclear to me but may pertain to the rite’s origins in anti-sorcery.

\(^{101}\) T 963, 19:337c24-337c28.

\(^{102}\) The unknown translator version (T 964) also mentions misfortune brought on by talismans 符書.

\(^{103}\) T 963, 19:338a07-338a17.
At that time, the *tathāgata* told the four assemblies: ‘If unrest arises in any given state, invite a pure assembly to establish a ritual precinct in accordance with the proper method. Install a Buddha icon and bind its borders in order to protect the recitation. Distribute offerings of incense, flowers, and lamps, in order that all sentient beings may obtain limitless blessings and all of their calamities are dispelled.’ Then, the preaching of the *dhāraṇī* was complete. Mañjuśrī *bodhisattva-mahāsattva* and all the voice-hearers (*shēngwén*), the four assemblies, and the great space-wandering gods, as well as the stars and asterisms, and all the assembled sages, together assented to the buddha's command, prostrated before him, and bore his teaching in mind as they each returned to their original palaces [in the sky], along with the celestials and snake spirits and the eight classes of beings. All the sentient beings and all who had heard the Buddha's preaching received it with joy and practiced with devotion.

The Bûkōng text simply ends here, while the unknown-translator version concludes with the nine appended planetary mantras.

### Astral Modalities: Fēnyě and Běnming

The Tejaprabhā *dhāraṇī* is short on exposition or demonstration of the principals and techniques underlying the form of astral propitiation it promotes. The astral content in this scripture might seem to the modern reader to be generic, unsystematic, or even incoherent, moving abruptly between overlapping units and names—between, for example, the *navagraha* and the five planets, five-phases planet names (“Great White” for Venus) and archaic ones (“Fire Star” for Mars). Also striking is the apparently rapid alternation between the scope of concerns, between, for example, the governmental (“if unrest arises…”) and the individual (“slander, slander, slander…”). Adapted from *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* Robert E. Buswell Jr., Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton, 2013), p. 279

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104 That is, direct disciples.

105 That is, eight classes of beings, commonly comprising divinities (Skt. deva; Ch. 天), serpents (nāga; 龍), demons (yakṣa; 夜叉), demigods (asura; 阿修羅), divine musicians (gandharva; 乾闥婆), mythical birds (garuḍa; 鳥), human-animal hybrids (kinnara; 乾闥婆), great snakes (mahaśīra; 摩睺羅迦). Adapted from The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism Robert E. Buswell Jr., Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton, 2013), p. 279

spells, and curses”). Who is the target of this scripture? Kings and ministers? Clerics and lay devotees? Are we talking, in other words, about the fate of the state or the individual? The scripture coheres better when we consider the ideas then circulating about heaven’s influence on mankind and the heterogeneity of techniques for controlling it: rather than serving as a manual for specific forms of divination-based or occult ritual, the Tejaprabhā scripture instead aimed to offer a single, ritually streamlined, indisputably Buddhist method to contain or supplant them. This becomes clearer after briefly examining the two astrological modalities invoked in the scripture, fēnyě and běnmìng, and how the sutra might be understood to engage these concepts.

Fēnyě (“field division” or “field allocation”) is a branch of astral science developed in early China that Shigeru Nakayama characterized as “portent astrology,” that is, “the accumulation of portents in the form of celestial, meteorological, and seismological phenomena—supernovae, planetary conjunctions, comets, hailstorms, earthquakes—and their empirical correlation with events in human society [that] are relevant to the success of the Imperial rule.” 107 Fēnyě in particular refers to the system of topographic mirroring of heaven and earth in which events in the sky signaled fortune or calamity in the corresponding territory below. It is attested long before Buddhism was introduced to China in the early centuries AD, and was a constitutive element in early statecraft.108 Běnmìng, typically translated as “original” or “fundamental” destiny, is a term with broad, diffuse application, which is perhaps one reason it is not, to my knowledge, a well-established theme in modern scholarship on the astral sciences.109 It pertains to a person’s “potentialities and talents, inclinations and tastes, qualities and faults that predetermine a specific developmental pattern” as determined by time of birth.110 As Nakayama writes, the “mìng” 命 (destiny; mandate) in běnmìng relates to a notion of

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individual fate and also appears in early Chinese writing.\footnote{111} The discourse of běnmìng, however, seems to be much more recent.\footnote{112} Although it is based on nativity, běnmìng is often characterized as chronomancy rather than horoscopy, in other words related more closely to the calendar than actual celestial motions.\footnote{113} This would be particularly true before the mid-imperial period, when western genethliacal astrology was systematically introduced.

Thus the scope and concerns of the two astral modalities repeatedly invoked in the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture, fēnyě and běnmìng, would seem to be fundamentally distinct. Fēnyě is elite and official, addressing general matters such as seasons, military affairs, natural disasters, and above all the ruler, his household, and top officials, whose territories and abodes were mirrored in various sectors of the sky. Běnmìng by contrast is personal and individual. Mid-imperial texts and material culture indeed demonstrate that the concept was engaged in many social sectors, from people documented only divinatory materials found in the Library Cave at Dūnhuàng to emperors who created their own personal běnmìng altars (dàochǎng 道場).\footnote{114}

Whereas běnmìng was centered on the individual, fēnyě fixed not only geography but also political boundaries. When universal empire was instituted, not only did heaven and earth symmetrically center on the imperial court, “the person of the Emperor, the Son of Heaven” (tianzi 天子) became identified with that universal pivot, the pole star.\footnote{115}

What were the means, then, by which an ancient, elite form of portent astrology became so unproblematically integrated with a newer, personalized approach to fate in the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scriptures? Here, Chinese Buddhism seems to have played an important role, namely in the doctrine of dependent origination. This made time of birth a moral question, determined by accumulated past-life actions. The commentary on the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī altar rite by the prominent Tiāntái 天台 monk Zūnshì 遵式 (964-1032) gets at some of these issues.\footnote{116}

\footnote{111} Nakayama, “Characteristics of Chinese Astrology,” p. 448.

\footnote{112} Although attested in earlier periods, according to Liú Chǎngdōng the first systematic, clearly astral use of the term does not appear until the Suí 隋 dynasty (581–618 AD), in the compilation Wuxing dayi 五行大義. Liú, “Běnmìng xinyinăng kǎo,”

\footnote{113} Nakayama, “Characteristics of Chinese Astrology,” p. 449.

\footnote{114} They appear in both Buddhist and Daoist contexts. On the Northern Song Emperor Huīzōng’s běnmìng altar, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Emperor Huizong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 135.


\footnote{116} Chìshèngguāng dàochǎng niànsòng yì 炎盛光道場念誦儀, T 1951, 46. For an overview of Zūnshì’s life and career, see Stevenson, “Protocols of Power”; see also Daniel Aaron Getz, Jr., “Sìmíng Zhīlì and Tiāntái Pure Land in the Song Dynasty,” PhD dissertation, pp. 295-331.
The scripture says, ‘All calamities will be completely extinguished.’ The term ‘all’ encompasses the three hindrances (sānzhàng). And though the scripture clearly distinguishes karmic hindrance (yèzhàng), the existence of karma follows from mental afflictions (fānnǎo). Karma necessarily incurs retribution. Furthermore, the external retribution of that which is internal in calamities and the like is the retributive hindrance (bàozhàng). That which is focused on illumination of the inner mind constitutes the afflictive hindrance (fānnǎo zhàng). Any arising, deciding, or fixing of the mind, or movement of the body and issuing forth of speech, necessarily brings about recompense. This is karmic hindrance. If aberrations of evil and calamitous stars alike do not concern the mind, then one may ask, why are they [known as] karmic hindrance? The answer: they arise as the external marks of expressive karma; they are the marks of karmic punishment. Karmic hindrances stimulate (gǎn) recompense. Therefore, their marks manifest before [one’s eyes]. Karmic hindrances make themselves known as retribution not long after.

Zūnshì situates astral calamities within a causal taxonomy of “three hindrances,” which encompasses 1) mental afflictions, including greed, desire, ignorance, and so on (fānnǎo zhàng); 2) obstructions caused by activity (karma) of the body, speech, and mind (yèzhàng); and 3) outwardly manifested retribution (bàozhàng). Zūnshì generally associates astral calamities with the third class, bàozhàng, to the extent that they are the outward marks of karmic activity, the origin of which, in turn, is mental affliction.

The key feature of this passage for our purposes is not the taxonomy itself, but rather Zūnshì’s linking of astral calamity with the concept of gǎn (“stimulus”; short for gǎnyìng). As Robert Sharf has argued, medieval Chinese Buddhists interpreted Indian Buddhist concepts of causation in terms of this native theory of gǎnyìng. By the Han, fēnyě was an official expression of gǎnyìng (感應; “sympathetic resonance,” or “stimulus-response”), a theory that takes the cosmos as an integrated whole in which, as John Henderson has put it, “things of the same category but in different cosmic realms were supposed to affect one another by virtue of a

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117 T 1951, 46:979a10-979a17.

mutual sympathy, to resonate like properly attuned pitchpipes.” The process of gānyīng, like the cosmos within which it operated, was a moral one—virtuous rule would stimulate auspicious responses and unvirtuous rule their reverse. Natural phenomena were the direct signs of heaven’s judgment on human affairs; fēnyě was one framework through which those judgments were understood. For our purposes, then, there need have been no fundamental conceptual distinction between personal and general, folk and elite astrology, that is, fēnyě and bènmìng, in medieval Chinese Buddhism. Zūnshì’s commentary indicates as much, casting both as expressions of the same basic causal process of mutual resonance and thereby making clear that historically there was no trouble linking the two modalities.

Zūnshì emphasizes the continuity in the Buddhist and ancient Sinitic approaches to fate and the stars near the end of the commentary, in a passage linking the “Rú-school 儒宗” concept of heaven-endowed fate with Buddhist karma: “[The doctrine of] karmic recompense (bàoyìng 報應) was preached in Buddhist scriptures,” Zūnshì writes, “while the Ru school bestowed that of heaven’s mandate (tiānmìng 天命).” Zūnshì cites various Ru-school approaches to calamity relief: the “Metal-Bound Coffer” (Jīnténg 金騰) episode in the Shàngshū 尚書 shows how the method (fǎ 法) for doing so was obtained. The insight that virtuous and unvirtuous actions incur like responses even “a thousand li away 千里之外,” likewise, is found in the Zhōuyì 周易. To exemplify this point, Zūnshì returns to the subject of the visible heavens, briefly alluding to the case of Duke Jing of Sòng 宋景公, who in 480 BC was met with an appearance of Mars in Xin 心 (Antares; α Scorpii), a lodge correlated in the fēnyě system with the ancient Sòng state. His court astronomer-astrologer offered three remedies, all of which would have brought harm on ministers or the general populace. Because Duke Jing declined them all, heaven’s favor

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120 On uses of gānyīng as a check on the emperor’s behavior and therefore power, see Henderson Development and Decline, 24.


manifested in the form of Mars shifting three du 度.\footnote{The Shiji records, “In the thirty-seventh year (480 BC), King Hui of Chù snuffed out the state of Chén. Yinghuò (Mars) hovered in [the lodge] Xin, which was field-apportioned to Song. Duke Jing fretted over it. The Sixing (Minister of Stars) Zi Wéi advised, “[The calamity] could be shifted to the prime minister.” Duke Jing said, “The prime minister is close to me as my limbs.” Zi Wéi offered, “It could be shifted to the people.” Duke Jing replied, “The people are in the Lord’s charge.” Zi Wéi said, “It could be shifted to the annual (suì) [harvest],” to which Duke Jing replied, “A sui famine would harm the people! Whose Lord would that then make me?” Zi Wéi then replied, “Heaven, on high, hears even the lowly [i.e., Duke Jing’s sagely insight allows him to know the plight of commoners]. The Lord has made three noble utterances; it is proper for Yinghuò to move.” Then, observing Mars, indeed it had moved three degrees. \textit{Shiji}, 54 “Sòng wēizi shijiā 宋微子世家” http://ctext.org/shiji/song-wei-zi-shi-jia, accessed Nov. 5, 2017. Translation based on Niehauzer, \textit{The Grand Scribe’s Records, vol. 1} (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2006), pp. 288-289.}

Zūnshì concludes that to uphold the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī rite is to carry forth the wisdom in these ancient texts, which, indulging in a moment of astral poetics, he likens to the brightness of the sun (\textit{ming rú rìxīng} 明如日星).\footnote{T 1951, 46: 982a17}

Overall, Zūnshì’s commentary constitutes an implicit defense of astral divination as a legitimate Buddhist pursuit. Backed up by classic “Ru-school” texts, and undoubtedly appealing to an educated, elite readership, he uses the decidedly local terms of sympathetic resonance, in which fate was bidirectional and no fundamental difference existed between geographic fēnyě and temporal běnmìng.

\textit{Daoist Fēnyĕ-Běnmìng Precedents}

Centuries before Buddhist texts began to systematically integrate Hellenistic and Sinitic forms of astrology, the Celestial Master 天師道 Daoists had developed a system of cosmic order based on correlations between earthly territories, ecclesia, seasons, individuals, and, eventually, asterisms. Spread throughout the Sichuan basin and the Chengdu plain, these Twenty-Four Parishes 二十四治 were, according to a third-century text, “established to distribute the primal, original, and inaugural pneumas, and administer the people 立二十四治分佈玄元始氣治民.”\footnote{Zhèngyī fǎwén tiānshī jiào jiè kē jīng 正一法文天師教戒科經 DZ 789, 14b. Translation after Gil Raz; see Raz, “Daoist Sacred Geography,” in \textit{Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220-589 AD)} vol. 1, John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, eds., Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 1424. See also Franciscus Verellen, “The Twenty-Four Dioceses and Zhang Daoling: The Spatio-Liturgical Organization of Early Heavenly Master Taoism,” in \textit{Pilgrims, Patrons, and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions} (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), pp. 15-67.}
Initially, the specific astro-calendrical correlate was the jiéqì 節氣, “nodal pneuma,” or twenty-four terms that divide the solar year. In time, four auxiliary parishes were added and the correlative schema embraced the twenty-eight lodges. Each parish became the seat of a natal-deity god (bènmìng yuánshén 本命元神) who guarded the fate of individuals born under that sign, thereby linking each congregant to a spiritually potent place and its corresponding asterism. Thus, fēnyě and bènmìng had already been seamlessly integrated by the early medieval period.

Daoist approaches to personal fate are closely connected with notions of conception and embryonic gestation. A classic reference on Daoist fate is the Six Dynasties text Master Who Embraces Simplicity: Inner Chapters (Bàopǔzǐ: nèipiān 抱樸子：内篇), which quotes the weft text Scripture of the Great Seal (Yùqián jīng 玉鈐經):

“A person’s good or bad fortune is determined by the day on which the fetus is knotted together and its pneumas received, for in each case the fetus obtains from on high the essences of the arrayed lodgings. If it meets with the sagehood lodging, [the person] will become a sage; if with the worthy lodging, a worthy [and so on…]” Thus it runs; I cannot record all of the passage here, but its essentials are as indicated. It adds up to the fact that people’s lives have fixed ming.

人之吉凶, 制在結胎受氣之日, 皆上得列宿之精。其值聖宿則聖, 值賢宿則賢, […] 如此不可具載, 其較略如此, 為人生本有定命。128

Here, fate is determined by the moment of conception. Although it could be modified or potentially escaped, according to this understanding, fate (ming) was essentially fixed. Daoist conceptions of personal fate, however, were hardly static or uniform. By the mid-imperial

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127 Verellen writes that “[t]he relationship between the clergy and the diocesan congregations was circumscribed by the belief that the Twenty-Four Dioceses [i.e., Parishes] were the seats of destiny gods. The theological rationale of the system of household registration was that the registries were communicated to the destiny gods responsible for the family members concerned, thereby ensuring their protection. By correlating the cyclical characters for an individual’s birth year with those associated with the spatial disposition of the Twenty-Four Dioceses, the personal destiny (bènmìng) of each member of the community was tied to a particular holy site and corresponding constellation.” “The Twenty-Four Dioceses,” p. 42.


period, Daoist fate had come to be seen, Stephen Bokenkamp notes, as “implanted in one’s former lives” rather than “by one’s ancestors,” in clear response to the Chinese Buddhist understanding of rebirth.\(^{130}\) A robust set of techniques was developed to prolong one’s life, increase wealth, and so on, including exorcism, the use of substitute bodies, cultivational visualizations, ritual choreography, and talisman practice.

One of Buddhism’s clearest debts to Daoist astral worship is most obvious in the cult of Běidǒu. Natives were assigned to one of Běidǒu’s seven major stars, which were regarded as “producers of life,” in whose charge he or she would remain thereafter.\(^{131}\) As a number of scholars have shown, the Běidǒu cult preserves some of the richest evidence for medieval Buddhist-Daoist interaction.\(^{132}\) The Yīxing-attributed version of the Tejaprabhā *dhāraṇī*, which is embedded in a “Běidǒu homa,” is a clear example of how difficult it can be to distinguish between Buddhist at Daoist approaches to fate. The specific techniques advocated by this scripture for doing so are, however, highly distinct from the two standalone *dhāraṇī* scriptures we have examined thus far.

### Astrology and Sorcery in the Hexi and Yīxing Versions

Beyond the learned discourse in Zūnshì’s commentary, connections were also made between Tejaprabhā and gǎnyìng in quasi-historical records of ritual performance. The *Sòng-Dynasty Traditions of Eminent Monks* 宋高僧傳 records a figure known as Wújī 無迹 (d. 925) who received training in the Tejaprabhā altar rite. A military official in Wújī’s hometown of Língzhōu 靈州 learned of the rite’s ability to dispel fēnyě calamities and erected a ritual precinct, which “was greatly resonant 多感應.”\(^{133}\) This early record of a military official sponsoring the rite indicates the persistent link between the Tejaprabhā cult and the state’s welfare.

However, as far as I have been able to determine, many copies of the Tejaprabhā *dhāraṇī* scripture that circulated in the Hexi corridor present a different concept of astrology than what I have outlined in the sections above. Neither the 1184 xylograph of what I am calling the “Hexi version” from Kharakhoto nor its close relative in the two manuscript copies from Dūnhuáng’s Library Cave reference either fēnyě or běnmìng, despite sharing the Taishō versions’ Sāla-rāja frame story and a significant number of identical phrases. Instead, they focus more on sorcery,
which the Taishō versions only obliquely reference. This suggests that in the Hexi versions such was conceived as the primary cause of astral misfortune.

The dhāraṇī, we read in one of the Library Cave manuscripts, offers relief for those who not only “encounter calamities [caused by] Saturn, Mars, and [other] evil stars 逢年災月厄，土、火惡星” but also “monsters and evil people 妖怪、惡人.” Similarly, if one “concertedly upholds the recitation of the spell 之心誦持此咒” when they “threaten your body 臨逼於身,”

…all calamities shall spontaneously dissolve and no enemy’s poison shall be able to harm you. The tragedy will be reversed and visited upon those with evil intentions.

一切災障自然消散，所有冤家毒藥不能為害。起惡心者反受其殃。134

This is a blunt acknowledgement of the perceived danger of sorcery. Unlike the Būkōng version in the Taishō, the enemy here is not described in karmic, past-life terms. The manner of defense is also more immediate: the effect of the spell is not to shift (yí 移) the inauspicious planetary lodging, but a full-on tragedy (yāng 殃) that is returned directly to its would-be sender. This passage is thus in line with what Christine Mollier has written of the Buddhist and Daoist response to this poorly understood but pervasive threat to medieval society, namely that the best “antidote to sorcery” was a “ritual counterattack.”135

Much is yet to be learned about the connection between sorcery and astrology in the age of Chinese horoscopy. For now, we can connect the Hexi versions of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī with the ritual procedure described in the Yīxing-attributed version. Both are much more the stuff of Buddho-Daoist exorcism than the community-building, ethically unproblematic ritual evidently envisioned by Zūnshì.

Along with its barebones Sala-raja frame story, the astral content in the Yīxing-attributed text is quite similar to that in the Būkōng version translated above—it also combines fēnyě and bēnmìng astrological modalities and mentions the inauspicious conjunction of Mars and Nándōu. The Yīxing version, however, involves a much more eclectic and better articulated set of ritual techniques. Along with additional mantras and their corresponding mudras, it also prescribes exorcistic subjugations that use pictorial and written representations of offending planets:

If the Fire Star (Mars) seeks to enter Nándōu, dot the form of the Nándōu [asterism] and that of the Fire Star in front of and beneath the wrathful deity icon. Within this, paint the form of the śatru (enemy) and write out [its] name. Bind the mudra and seal it over your heart, and over the body of the wrathful deity icon recite the mantra seven times. Before the word “svāhā,” add the śatru’s name, reciting in a fiercely assertive tone. All calamities will disappear.

134 Fōshuō dàwēidé chishēngguāng rùlái jixiáng tuōluóní jīng 佛說大威德熾盛光如來吉祥陁羅尼經, P 2382. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b83012670.r=pelliot%20chinois%20202382?rk=21459;2

135 Mollier, Buddhism and Taoism, p. 56.
As with its discussion of fēnyè, here the Yīxíng text seems to clarify the Bùkōng and unknown-translator versions: the rite is indeed to involve two different pictures—the wrathful Buddhist icon 忿怒尊像, and, beneath it, a two-dimensional depiction of the entity bringing one harm. Such a setup is affirmed by the Zūnshì commentary (though that rite features with a larger, directionally oriented assembly of major Buddhist deities).¹³⁷

In addition to multiple formats, multiple forms of notation are involved in the Yīxíng rite: the written name of the planet; the “dotted” (diǎn 點) asterism, a reference to the Chinese asterism graph; and, finally, the anthropomorph. This latter form seems to have been used for both the salvific Buddhist deity and the celestial offender, a notion made explicit in a subsequent passage:

If Yínghuò (Mars) and/or Tàibái (Venus) arrive in a lodge (xiù) that corresponds in field allocation with the imperial seat, in that corresponding lodge paint, as before, the evil figure beneath the icon and then beat it. This will make it unable to give rise to evil intentions.

熒惑太白等所到諸宿分野及帝座，於分野宿中如前於像下畫彼惡人形亦損彼人，令不起惡意。¹³⁸

Again, who represents the “evil figure” in this passage is somewhat unclear—is it the evil planetary body? The past-life enemy mentioned in the Bùkōng-attributed text translated above, or the sorcerer of the Hexi version? In any event, the difference between the two figurative depictions seems relatively clear: the bringer of astral harm is to take the form of a two-dimensional effigy that is then violently exorcised as though a demon. The presence of the Buddhist icon within the purified enclosure is what enables this effigy-based exorcism, in addition to the spell and a variety of mudras (the latter of which do not appear in the Bùkōng and unattributed-translator versions).¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Běidǒu qīxīng hùmó fǎ, fù Chìshèngguāng fǎ 北斗七星護摩法，複熾盛光法 T 1310, 21:0458c10-458c14.

¹³⁷ In addition to these two figures, the ritual is also to feature icons of Śākyamuni 釋迦像, Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and Guanyin 曼殊、普賢、觀音等像, as well as guardian kings of the four directions 護世四天王. T 1951, 46:978c10-978c12.

¹³⁸ T 1310, 21:458c28-459a01.

¹³⁹ The therapeutic use (and abuse) of an effigy, particularly to treat demon possession, is well attested in medieval Chinese sources. Edward Davis summarizes a “Noose Dhāraṇī” rite in which an effigy is made
Some of these elements appear in a rare depiction from the Library Cave of a Buddhist medical exorcism. In it, a monk is seated on a mat near a man, likely the patient, who lies supine, apparently clutching his abdomen (fig. 28). Ritual implements (vajra, bell, incense brazier, and offering trays) are arrayed between the monk and a three-dimensional doll-like figure pierced at five points (elbows, knees, and midsection) by it seems stakes or blades. Next to this scene of active ritual performance is a mandala depicted in overhead view and populated with Buddhist deities. On the each spoke of the four-blade central precinct appear the five buddha families represented by symbolic objects. Between them appear the four guardian kings in anthropomorphic form; wildly coruscating protector gods are stationed at each of four gates. To be sure, the Đūnhuâng medical drawing is probably not reliable evidence for the ritual precinct in the Tejaprabhâ dhâraṇî texts, but it does provide a sense of the monk’s position squarely between deity and demon, empowered by one to manipulate the other.

Subsequently the Yi sxing text prescribes another image-based subjugation to be performed in the face of comets and aquatic disasters:

If, occluded by Râhu, the sun and moon eclipse each other, if Huixîng [“broom star,” i.e., comet or asteroid] appears, or if there is a drought or flood, in a ritual precinct set up in a secret location, dressed in black garments of an official and seated facing south, use ashes to draw a triangular arena and the forms of Râhu and Huixîng inside. In times of flood or drought, draw the form of a dragon. On the [malevolent] figure’s heart, write his or her name. Burn benzoin incense at midnight and midday. Recite the mantra, adding this name, and strike the figure with a pomegranate branch. Recite it twenty-one times, striking the figure once per recitation, and the calamity will be dispelled.

或被羅睺掩弊日月薄蝕或彗星現或旱或澇。則當於道場中隱密處身著皂衣面向南坐。以燒死灰絵三角壇中書彼羅睺彗星等形。旱澇時畫龍形。於彼人心上書彼人名。於中夜及午時燒安悉香。念誦於真言。句中加彼名。以石榴枝鞭其彼形。誦真言二十一遍每一遍一鞭即除。141

from rice flour and cut to pieces while the patient’s name is called out, and a fictionalized Daoist version of a similar rite in which the patient is cured of possession by a fox. Davis, Society and the Supernatural, 253-254n59. See also Mollier, Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face, 84-89. Such rites often involve making an effigy of the patient herself rather than the offending astral body-qua-demon, as the Yi sxing text seems to instruct.

140 Based on their weapons and the symbols appearing in the central zone of the mandala (wheel, vajra, viśvavajra, lotus(?), and, in the center, jeweled bottle), Christian Luczanits has identified this as a mandala of the five jina buddhas likely centered on Ratnasambhava. Luczanits, “Ritual, Instruction, and Experiment: Esoteric Drawings from Đūnhuâng,” in Anupa Pande and Mandira Sharma eds., The Art of Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent in Cross Culture Perspective (New Delhi: National Museum Institute-Aryan Books International, 2009), p. 141.

141 T1310, 21:459a01- 459a07.
As before, the technique involves making and then damaging an effigy of the harmful heavenly body. Yet salient differences emerge in the details: the officiant here wears not a monk’s robe but a garment linked to the imperial Chinese bureaucracy. The triangular enclosure he or she produces for the subjugation, moreover, bears no clear relationship to the wrathful icon installed earlier.

Where it departs from the apparently more narrowly icon-based incantation of the Būkōng and unknown-translator versions, the Yīxíng version connects to a motley range of other sources. The triangular altar in India was a conventional shape for demon-subjugating (abhiṣiṣṭa) fire sacrifices (homa).142 Pomegranate-branch beatings were prescribed for subduing enemies in general.143 Invoking, through writing or recitation, the name of a demon is among the more widespread apotropaic techniques found in Buddhist and Daoist texts. The use of ash is also common in Buddhist and Daoist incantatory culture, though typically the ash was produced by burning a talisman or amulet and then administered through, for example, sprinkling or ingesting rather than being used to represent a demon.144 In sum, much more than the Būkōng and unknown-translator versions, the Yīxíng rite shares the miscellaneous, non-exclusive character that Michel Strickmann and Edward Davis, among others, have described for a broad swath of premodern Chinese religious activity, whether Buddhist, Daoist, or grouped under the diffuse category of fāngshù 方術.145

**Astral Ritual Realia: Planetary Talismans**

Given that the depictions prescribed in the Yīxíng rite are executed with ephemeral materials and then intentionally damaged or destroyed during the course of the ritual, one dares not hope for surviving physical traces. A variety of items from the Library Cave at Dūnhuáng, while they do not conform to the specifications in any Tejaprabhā rite, were produced for

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143 For the ritual use of pomegranate branches, see Michel Strickmann: “But for demonic bewitchments in general, the prescription consists of reciting Vaiśravaṇa’s spell 108 times over a pomegranate branch with which you then beat the victim soundly.” *Chinese Magical Medicine*, p. 257. In distinction from the Tejaprabhā rite it is the patient here who is beaten.


145 See, e.g., Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, pp. 191-192; and Edward Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*. Determining whether specific ritual techniques ultimately originate in a Buddhist, Daoist, or “diffuse occult” practice or idea can be difficult and unsatisfying as an end in itself.
astrological purposes and thus make for productive comparison. As we shall see, they deviate significantly from standard expectations of the Chinese Buddhist or Daoist talisman.

All three of the surviving planetary talismans from the Library Cave were painted or sketched on a paper of a coarseness that suggests local Dùnhuáng production. The three also share a common format: two stacked rectangular fields outlined in red and black, the upper of which depicts the planet, the lower, a talisman and/or textual petition. The largest, by far highest quality, and best studied of the three is dedicated to the gods Mercury and Ketu (fig. 29). A self-identified “dhāraṇī talisman 陀羅尼符,” its Buddho-Daoist orientation, red-ink magic formula, and colophon indicating that it was meant to be worn (dài 帶) have generated considerable interest among scholars of Chinese religion.146 The two lesser known examples, both dedicated to the eclipse demon Rāhu, were produced with much humbler technique and materials and feature no such talismanic writing (fig. 30).147 In terms of the history of divination, the Rāhu talismans are highly significant, as their inscriptions pinpoint a specific astrological method and furnish details (though limited) about the people they were meant to protect.

Only one of the Rāhu talismans, known by the British Library shelf number S.5666, is preserved intact (S.4279 is missing most of its upper, pictorial half).148 Unlike the full-body figures in the Mercury-Ketu talisman or the disembodied head in other, roughly contemporaneous materials, Rāhu is depicted from the chest up—a transitional format particular to ninth- and tenth-century Dùnhuáng (see chapter two). Snub-nosed and grimacing, Rāhu’s hair and headdress fly wildly as though a viper frozen mid-strike.

According to the inscription, the document is meant to secure health, prosperity, and happiness for an elderly woman. Her age, sixty-four, is key to identifying the form of divination at work here. In the divination method known as Jiǔyào xíngnián fǎ 九曜行年法, in which a person’s fate is influenced each year by one of the navagraha, Rāhu is the one who controls this very year.149 Several Dùnhuáng documents relate to this Nine Luminaries practice, and the frequently cited Taishō scripture Fàntiān huǒluó jiǔyào 梵天火羅九曜 provides a relatively precise overview. On Rāhu, we read:

Make offerings to Rāhu with [spirit] money. By tradition, face the chouyin direction to make offerings. [The years of] 1, 10, 19, 28, 37, 46, 55, 64, 73, 82,

146 For partial analysis of the talismanic writing, see Yu Xin, “Personal Fate and the Planets,” p. 179.


148 Like many other ephemeral and/or textual materials from the Library Cave produced after the Tibetan (Tǔbō) takeover, this work was evidently written with a stylus rather than a brush.

and 91 are all greatly ominous. Years arriving at this xiù [i.e., Rāhu] are misfortunate. This stellar body is hidden and does not appear. It is called Rāhu, Luoshi, Yellow Banner, and Fire Yang. If Rāhu illuminates your natal [palace], you will worry about loss of official standing and be fettered by serious illness. You will experience financial ruin, don the mourning garments, and be troubled by disputes. The ruler does not sacrifice to this god.

Rāhu comes first in the nine-planet cycle, which begins at one sui 岁. As this passage from the Fǎntiān huǒluó jiǔyào affirms, the woman who sponsored the talisman is in her eighth cumulative year under Rāhu’s influence. The other Rāhu talisman known from Dūnhuáng was written by (or on behalf of) a thirty-seven-year-old man born in wèi 未, hence in his fifth year under the pseudoplanet’s influence.

Why should the only two known pictorial talismans unambiguously produced as a result of the Nine Luminaries divination technique be dedicated to the same planet? This may well relate to Rāhu’s universally baleful nature as described in ritual texts. Buddhist astral scriptures such as the Fǎntiān huǒluó jiǔyào seem to agree that depicting harmful planets was an integral part of appeasing them. Although this text describes each planet’s anthropomorphic appearance, it directly instructs the devotee directly to depict only the three most ominous planets: Rāhu, his fellow pseudoplanet Ketu, and Saturn, the “most ominous of them all” (qí xiù zuìxiōng 其宿最凶). As the section on the sacrifices to Rāhu quoted above continues:

If arriving in this xiù, in order to cultivate merit and pacify it, [donate] primordial-spirit money and depict the form of the transgressing god. It is said [that one should] make offerings [in this way] to generate great luck.

It is certainly possible that not all planets are to be depicted is simply the result of textual corruption. However, another influential scripture mentioned above, the Qīyào rǎngzāijué 七曜
Qīyào rǎngzāijué 七曜禳災決, T 1308, 21:426c10.

Translation modified from Yu Xin, “Personal Fate and the Planets,” p. 167.
sophisticated—note the reserve painting that indicates folds in Mercury’s dark gray robe, or the coordinated sweep of Ketu’s scarf and hair up and away from the direction of his cloud raft to suggest airborne descent. By contrast, the adjacent inscriptions far exceed their rectangular cartouches. As Yu Xin has written, the cartouches were likely intended to hold not much more than the deities’ names. This reinforces the notion that painter and ritualist-scribe were largely separate occupations at Dūnhuáng during this time, and moreover indicates that the painting was made first. In the Rāhu talisman, such a division of labor is less apparent. Although this Rāhu was certainly not painted by an untrained artist, it is not evident that the scribe had specialist training in apotropaic ritual techniques such as the talismanic writing on the Mercury-Ketu example. Despite sharing a format and generally apotropaic goal, the Rāhu talisman therefore may result from a comparatively informal social and ritual scenario.

Less information comes forth from these objects about the setting in which they may have been viewed and/or stored. Given their personalized nature, it seems more likely that they would have been kept privately than put on display. As with many ritual sources (including the Qīyào ràngzāi jué) the Mercury-Ketu colophon advocates that the talisman be worn on the body of the petitioner. None of the three Dūnhuánɡ examples, however, bear clear physical traces of such use. The Mercury-Ketu talisman is creased at midpoint horizontally, indicating that it may have been stored folded in half lengthwise. Yet even when folded this way, the document would still measure roughly eight by eleven inches—too large, it seems, to be carried on one’s person inconspicuously and certainly to fit into the armband amulet carriers known from other sites. The question remains of how the Dūnhuánɡ talismans relate to the Tejaprabhā cult, beyond their shared iconography. The Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī has a much more generic relationship to divination than these do—though the Taishō texts invoke fēnyě and běnmìng, unlike many other occult astral texts, they are hardly technical presentations or guides of specific astral techniques. Rather than signaling disinterest or ignorance, it seems the dhāraṇī instead sought to supersede them all. A similar contrast can be drawn out in the planetary talismans with Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī sheets found at Dūnhuáng and in the southwestern kingdom of Dàlǐ 大理 (fig. 31): whereas the planetary talismans addresses one specific type of misfortune, the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī sheets serves as a kind of general insurance policy, covering all potential misfortune. The nexus of efficacy in the two types of talismans shifts accordingly: whereas the Rāhu talismans’ potency is concentrated in the demon’s grimacing face, which follows a logic of aversion, the dhāraṇī prints’ transformative power concretes in both the picture of the benevolent Tejaprabhā and the spell itself. The two are mutually reinforcing, functioning like a portable dàochǎng to encapsulate the entire Buddhist liturgy on a single sheet of paper.

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158 Yu Xin, “Personal Fate and the Planets,” p. 167.

159 See Fraser, Performing the Visual.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered the Tejaprabhā cult from a primarily scriptural and ritual perspective. Two cases laid out some of the challenges to historical understanding that originate in the phenomenon of a deity who went by a number of different names, had an evidently flexible devotional role, and yet maintained a stable visual identity. Turning to some of the core texts of the tradition, we examined how this short dhāraṇī scripture went on to lead a number of different lives. On the one hand, it became a specialized apotropaic technique that emerged from a diffuse ritual substrate aimed at combatting a variety of evils, including sorcery. On the other, it was promoted by an elite Tiāntái monk on the basis of an amplified classical pedigree.

We considered, moreover, the intellectual basis for how some versions of the dhāraṇī integrated approaches to fate that are often kept separate in modern accounts—the individual and the general, or the personal and the political—and a Daoist precedent for such an integration. Finally, we examined realia used in astral divination and propitiation rites that are broadly grouped under the category of “talismans.” Produced in accord with a popular planetary divination method, these talismans drew to some extent on Indian and Central Asian concepts and yet, unlike the astral sutras, were not necessarily packaged as Buddhist. I have argued that this is one example of a practice that the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī sought if not to supplant then at least to accommodate or contain.

Many of the questions taken up in this chapter can be viewed as internal to the tradition and its historical practitioners. In the next chapter we will begin to examine more external sources, a necessary step for understanding the visual culture of the Tejaprabhā cult and its rich, often arcane, iconographic heritage. Our starting point will be the question of how the sun, the moon, and the planets—entities that had not been systematically ascribed fixed identities as deities in ancient Chinese culture—came to take on human form and even humanlike characters, and how these planets were, in turn, appropriated and transformed by the Tanguts.
Chapter Two
Fixing Identities, Shifting Signs: Chinese and Tangut Planet Gods

Introduction: The Problem of Intelligibility

In 1119, at a high point in his efforts to reform the country’s religious institutions, the Northern Sòng Emperor Huīzōng (1082-1135) issued an edict on how the planet gods were to be depicted. He registered no small displeasure at what he had seen:

Recently, inspecting temples and shrines, we have seen, among the true-form (zhēnxíng) [depictions] of the Nine Planets and Twenty-Eight Lodges, those handling or riding beasts of burden and grasping dagger-axes; those seated upright in military garments, stamping their feet with exposed crowns. Some were exposing their bodies or situated within an earthenware pot. Their myriad aspects were absurd and freakish, disrespectful and capricious. If one desired the descent of these Upper Realized [beings] in order to receive their blessings, this surely would not suffice.

Continuing, Huīzōng prescribes a corrective:

We take it that the lofty celestial bodies and arrayed luminaries, in their formal audience with the Jade Emperor as assistants to the Primordial Transformation, are without exception to be solemn and upright in cap and gown, and to have


162 These terms normally refer to Daoist structures and institutions. In this period, however, Huīzōng had mandated that Buddhist monastic institutions be “rebranded” using Daoist terms. See Ebrey, Emperor Huizong, p. 365.

dignified appearances. Although each is unique in its respective hidden or manifest [nature], the celestial and the human realms are not disparate. This is just the same, in a worldly sense, of how the principle of the relationship between the sovereign and the minister once was.

朕以為高辰列曜。參拱玉帝。以輔元化。非非冠服端肅。儼然之相。隱顯雖然殊。天人不遠。正如世諦君臣之理。曾何若是。164

The planets and lodges, we read, should be turned out for nothing less than a formal audience with a primordial emperor himself. Such a bureaucratic analogy comes as no surprise for the Song period in general,165 nor for Huizong’s targeted campaign to expand Daoist institutional power. But its manifestation here is worth investigating further. What made Huizong so invested in the planets’ specific appearances and demeanor?166 And what, precisely, was so disturbing about the icons he had seen? The answer is not as straightforward as may seem. Huizong’s objections seem to have laid not in any superficial or simple notion of decorum. More likely at issue was control over the governing semiotic system of religious visual culture itself, in which the bureaucratic analogy was far superior to a shockingly disordered array of potentially unintelligible symbols.

Fortunately, examples of the offending iconography have survived in several different works, including a handscroll known to have been in Huizong’s own imperial collection entitled the True Forms of the Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lodges 五星二十八宿真形圖.167 Now held in the Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts, Japan, many of the painting’s surviving figures

164 “Universal Imperial Decree.”


166 Traditional historiography treated Huizong’s intense commitment to the aesthetic as precipitating the fall of the Northern Song. This approach has been revised at length by Ebrey in, for example, Emperor Huizong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) and Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

167 The painting features two of Huizong’s seals. Moreover, a painting with a similar title, Icons of the Five Planets and the Twenty-Eight Lodges 五星二十八宿像, is recorded in Huizong’s painting catalogue known as the Xuānhé huàpǔ 宣和畫譜 compiled in 1120. The catalogue features many other astrally themed paintings. A focused study of this painting is Mèng Sìhuī 孟嗣徽, “‘Wǔxīng jí niàn bā xiù shènhxīng tú’ tǔ xiàng kǎo biàn 五星及廿八宿神形圖 圖像考辨, Yìshùshǐ yánjiū 藝術史研究 2000.2: 517–56. See Stephen Little and Shawn Eichmann, eds., Taoism and the Arts of China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 132-137. Two other early versions are held by the Palace Museum, Beijing. A later copy by the sixteenth-century professional painter Qū Ying 仇英 (c. 1495-1552), now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, preserves a complete set of the star gods, though certain aspects of the iconography are dulled in this later reception. Yet another version was produced collaboratively by court painter Dīng Guānpéng 丁觀鵬 and the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor in 1744, which is now in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. On this see Berger, Empire of Emptiness, pp. 76-77.
correspond to Huīzōng’s description with striking precision (fig. 32). The first four figures, who represent Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, and Venus, ride domesticated animals (though Venus’s fowl conveyance has become more of a phoenix). Some four figures behind the planets, the lodge Dī (α Librae) is shown seated and in full military gear except for his uncovered head. Clinching the connection is the lodge Xū (β Aquarii), who takes the form of a man jutting out, unclothed, from the wide mouth of a large, earth-colored pot.

The painting can be characterized as a figural inventory, a classic Chinese handscroll subgenre in which a range of taxonomically linked figures are depicted in small groups or one by one, often punctuated by inscriptions. This tradition includes such canonical works as the *Emperors Scroll* 帝王圖卷 attributed to the Táng court painter Yán Libēn 閻立本 (ca. 600-673) (fig 33.). Unlike the *Emperors Scroll*, however, the *True Forms of the Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lodges* is not any kind of quasi-historical record, but in fact a sophisticated work of transcultural astrological correspondence. The main action happens after the planets in the section depicting the lodges. These lodge deities, identified by their Chinese names, are linked with the signs of the Hellenistic zodiac. For example, the second lodge in the Osaka handscroll, Kàng 亢 (κ Virginis) here corresponds with the sign of Libra, known as “Scale 秤” in Chinese (fig. 34). This explains the scale he carries, which, like his clothing, is depicted in Chinese form.

Thus, while its format is distinctly East Asian the painting belongs to a symbolic tradition known in many parts of medieval Eurasia, from India to the Latin west, in which deities representing one class of astral entity are linked with another through symbolic attributes like tools and animals. This is akin to the tradition Aby Warburg famously identified for decan-planet-zodiac correspondences in his study of the fifteenth-century allegorical frescoes at the Palazzo Schifanoia (fig. 35). In the Osaka painting, the Sinitic lodges become something akin

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168 The Osaka painting was traditionally attributed to the late-fourth/fifth-century painter Zhāng Sēngyóu 张僧繇, though the attribution is long discredited among modern scholars. It has been more plausibly associated with Liáng Lingzān 梁令瓚, a Tang astral specialist and inventor who collaborated with Yīxíng in the 720s on the development of astronomical instruments. However, the first half of the eighth century would still be far the earliest known systematic visual presentation of the western zodiac in central China. Kotyk points out that this is also rather early for the iconography in terms of available textual sources (“Astrological Iconography,” pp. 67-68). It is worth noting that the inscriptions, which describe the astral gods and instruct on sacrifices to him or her, may well have circulated independently of the pictures.


170 This observation has been made in a number of studies, including; Meng, “Wūxíng jì niàn bā xiù,” pp. 548-549; and Little and Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, 132-137; and Takeda Kazuaki, *Hoshi mandara no kenkyū 星曼荼羅の研究* (Kyōto-shi: Hōzōkan, 1995). See also Michelle McCoy, “The Western Zodiac in Chinese and Inner Asian Visual Culture, 10th to 13th Centuries,” poster delivered at *East-West Encounter in the Science of Heaven and Earth*, Kyōto University, October 27, 2017.

to the decans or the horâs, two traditions for subdividing the zodiac or ecliptic. The thirty-six decans originated in ancient Egypt and were mapped onto the zodiac in the Hellenistic period, three decans per sign.\textsuperscript{172} Prevalent in India, a horâ could represent, as Yano Michio writes, “a spatial unit of half a zodiacal sign,” or “a temporal unit of [one] twenty-fourth part of a day.”\textsuperscript{173} In the Ōsaka scroll, each zodiac sign is similarly linked with either two or three lodges. The sequence begins with Jiǎo 角 (α Virginis), reflecting the starting point of the Sinitic lodges since the Western Han (206 BC-9 AD).\textsuperscript{174}

There is much to learn about the Ōsaka handscroll. For now, I note its striking commonalities with a similarly enigmatic work that twentieth-century German expeditioners uncovered in the Tarim Basin (now the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region), likely in the Turfan region (fig. 36).\textsuperscript{175} From what remains of the scroll’s ink and lightly colored line drawings, Frantz Grenet and Georges-Jean Pinault have argued in a long article that it represents the decans with zodiac correspondences. They date it to roughly the eighth or ninth century on the basis of its Tocharian inscriptions.\textsuperscript{176} Here, only some deities are depicted singly, whereas others are grouped into enigmatic narrative vignettes. As we shall see later in this chapter, the Ōsaka and Berlin paintings overlap not only in terms of content and their approach to astral correspondence, but also in style and form.


\textsuperscript{175} I thank Kira Samosyuk for introducing me to this work and Lilla Russell-Smith for allowing me to study it in person.

The *Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lodges* is not the only extant picture to correlate the Sinitic lodges with the Hellenistic zodiac, but it is the only example I know of that does so without any kind of overtly diagrammatic component such as concentricity. Compare, for example, the Japanese *Hora chart* dated to 1166 and purportedly based on a Táng original (fig. 37). It separates the lodges and zodiac signs into their own registers about which each deity and zodiac sign is distributed concentrically (fig. 38). Each lodge deity, moreover, is accompanied by both its asterism graph and written name. Buttressed by three notational systems working in concert (asterism graph, written name, and concentric diagram), the lodges could afford to be depicted as iconographically uniform gods without any confusion about their individual identities or relational positions.

The Ōsaka handsroll benefits from none of this notational clarity. Taking the form of animals, implements, and postures, the zodiac signs become hidden actors— occult in a symbolic sense—referred at best obliquely by their inscriptions. Knowledge of the Hellenistic zodiac, at least by name, was relatively widespread among Sòng elites. By then, however, the signs had attained a different pictorial format, the symbolic emblem enclosed in a roundel or disk (see figs. 6-10). This, unlike the zodiac attributes of the *Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lodges*, made them an independent semiotic class. It is thus highly plausible that many Sòng beholders would not have been able to decode the trans-Eurasian occult symbolism in the attributes and implements of the handsroll deities, whether the man in the pot we now recognize to symbolize Aquarius or the horseman standing in a bath of flames whose significance, as far as I am aware, escapes modern understanding. Period viewers did, in fact, express confusion about astral iconography. The eleventh-century connoisseur Dong You, for example, wrote of a painting in the imperial collection known by the similar title *True Forms of the Twenty-Eight Lodges* and attributed to Yan Liben himself:

In the picture of the Five Luminaries transmitted in the Daoist canon, Venus takes the form of a girl, Mars a child, Jupiter an emperor, and Saturn an old man. But in this painting, Venus is a beauty with hair sprouting from her temples like wings and riding a soaring phoenix, and Saturn is a holy man. I do not know the basis for this [change].

Uncertainty such as this would surely have displeased Huizong, who was notoriously invested in projects of aesthetic standardization that affected many aspects of society, including religion and

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177 For a detailed analysis, see Takeda, *Hoshi mandara*, pp. 127-152.


art.\textsuperscript{180} Scholars have indeed shown that an important motivation for these projects was hermeneutic clarity, for example in the veritable cult of “auspicious responses (\textit{ruìyìng 瑞應}),” or natural-world signs of heaven’s favor. These were systematically interpreted and sent to court artists for pictorial documentation.\textsuperscript{181} Thus we comprehend that a planet god’s physical appearance needed to be not simply decorous but comprehensible within an available symbolic rubric. Unlike the overwhelmingly diverse collection of foreign and/or occult symbols in the \textit{Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lodges}, officials in an audience with the celestial emperor maintained their own built-in symbolic logic, transparent to anyone even minimally familiar with the imperial bureaucracy. Huīzōng’s edict thus represents a strikingly different type of solution to the symbolic repleteness and diversity of astral visual culture than Warburg’s at the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara. There, strange-looking or seemingly unexplained symbols are not eliminated but rather amplified, with the continuous landscape settings helping to naturalize them.\textsuperscript{182}

As far as the lodges go, Huīzōng largely got his wish, as their bureaucratized forms became the norm throughout not just Sòng, but also Xīxià and Liáo territory (fig. 39). However, this process is already documented in materials that predate the 1119 edict. Compare, for example, the frontispiece to the 972 edition of the Būkōng-attributed Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture and the 1005 Mahāpratisarā amulet found in the Ruìguāng pagoda crypt (figs. 40 & 25-26).\textsuperscript{183} In the 972 frontispiece the lodges are depicted with similar iconography as those in the Ōsaka handscroll—note, for example, the telltale jar-dwelling lodge Xū just to the viewer’s right of the front-facing assembly (fig. 41). In the 1005 print, by contrast, the lodges are stacked head-to-toe in vertical columns on either side of the Sanskrit incantation (fig. 42). They are completely de-individualized officials who stand robed and haloed, hands clasping the ceremonial tablet. Strikingly, they do not all face the Buddha but rather uniformly rightward, as though in audience with an imperial figure somewhere beyond the edge of the print.

This iconographic transformation signals more than just practical response to possible political pressure. It also represents a major shift in how astral correlations were meant to be made. For example, in the Ōsaka handscroll the connection between the lodge Xū and the zodiac sign Aquarius was expressed solely by the water vessel in which the anthropomorphic Xū is stationed.\textsuperscript{184} In the 972 frontispiece, the same pot-dwelling man is positioned next to the jeweled...

\textsuperscript{180} This decree was issued during a period of serious investment in Divine Empyrean Daoism by the emperor, which saw both intensive evangelization efforts and limitation of Buddhist power through measures including changing the names of temples and requiring Buddhist clergy to dress more like Daoists. These measures seem to have been at least as much about aesthetic standardization as belief or to some extent practice. As Ebrey notes, Huīzōng himself made this much clear in an edict “explicitly stating that Buddhist rituals and teachings should not be interfered with.” Ebrey, \textit{Emperor Huīzōng}, p. 365.


\textsuperscript{182} Warburg, “International Astrology.”

\textsuperscript{183} On the 972 print, see Wéi Bīng, “Rìběn xīn fāxiàn.”

\textsuperscript{184} The interspersed asterism graphs, however, do not correspond. Their own complex symbolic roles in this piece have yet to be examined.
vessel enclosed in a disk, which was the standard Sinitic sign for Aquarius. Thus Xū, like each other lodge, is correlated with its corresponding zodiac sign twice—once through attribute and again by proximity to the now-independent symbol for it. Again, this first approach is consistent with the Ōsaka handscroll and the pan-Eurasian tradition of deities with accumulated attributes. The second approach is closer to the Hora Chart, which relies purely on concentric spatial juxtaposition. The latter of the two approaches won out, and the accreted, trans-Eurasian zodiac symbolism of the lodges seems to have been largely lost in East and Inner Asia.

Unlike the lodges, the Chinese and Inner Asian planets never underwent such a radical or global transformation—once the planets gained their medieval anthropomorphic forms, this was virtually the only way they were representational. The planets did, however, undergo many significant changes that are essential for understanding larger transformations in astral visual culture and the cult of Tejaprabhā. We examine the pictorial lives of each member of the planetary group, which expanded and contracted between five and eleven between roughly the eighth and tenth centuries. Rather than providing an encyclopedic iconographic taxonomy or comprehensive collation of all textual sources on planetary appearances, in this chapter I focus on symptomatic cases and issues that stand to reveal something about not only the origin and/or transmission of planetary symbols, but also what it meant to embrace an imported tradition for depicting astral bodies in humanlike form.

We begin with the Sun and Moon, which, despite being the earliest iconographically distinctive astral bodies, did not develop into fully independent figures until after the planet gods emerged in roughly the ninth century. I then examine the productive tension between figurative depiction and disk-enclosed emblem—that is, between figure and ground—particularly in the depiction of what were sometimes conceived as the sun and moon’s antitheses, the pseudoplanets Rāhu and Ketu. Finally, we examine each planet individually, ending with the highly unstable and contested careers of the latecomer planets Zǐqì and Yuèbèi. We pay special attention to the development, in roughly the second half of the twelfth century, of a new Tangut Xīxià iconographic canon.

**Sun and Moon**

*Recursions of Perception and Symbol*

By far the most conspicuous objects in the sky and the most culturally prominent of the celestial pacers, the premodern Chinese Sun and Moon have much older and more complex histories in pictorial art than the planets do. By Han times, the Sun and Moon had attained relatively stable form as disks populated with mythological animals—a crow, often three legged, in the sun, and a hare and/or toad in the moon. The sunbird was associated with the tale of Archer Yi (Hòuyì 后羿), who shot down nine (in some accounts, eight) extra suns that had risen simultaneously instead of in daily alternation, thus scorching the earth. The mythological backgrounds of the toad and hare are somewhat murkier, though they came to be associated with Cháng Ē 嫦娥, Archer Yi’s wife. She ascended to the moon after ingesting an elixir of immortality that she stole from her husband after it was bestowed by the Queen Mother of the
Thus the mythology of the Sun and Moon stabilized into a gendered symmetry that corresponds with their respective embodiments of yang and yin.

In terms of sense experience, the mythological animals populating the Sun and Moon disks are thought to originate in pareidolia, or the seeing of pictures in non-pictorial visual stimuli, like a galloping horse in a cloud. The solar crow seems to derive from sunspots, the toad and hare for the shadowy contours of lunar topography. Large painted silk banners from Western Han tombs at Mǎwángduī 馬王堆 in Changsha contain many of the basic characteristics that would persist in solar and lunar visual culture thereafter (fig. 43). They are positioned, in circular form, at opposite sides of the top of the composition. The solid black sunbird (here shown with only two legs rather than the also commonly seen three) faces the central compositional axis, set within a saturated red disk (fig. 44). At left, the toad and hare appear not in a disk, but the unpainted recess of the crescent perhaps denoting its shadow (fig. 45). In both banners, the toad is large and rotund, shown in overhead view, while the hare is slight and bounds obliquely off of to one side.

The differences in viewpoint, posture, and position between the solar and lunar animals are significant to the extent that they originate in very different empirical conditions for viewing sun and moon. Although, as Needham and Wang wrote, early observation of sunspots is likely, they could scarcely have been objects of contemplative viewing. This contrasts sharply with the moon, which, when visible, presented the same face each night. By this logic, the crow can be understood as more conventionally symbolic whereas the lunar motif, as truer pareidolia, is more closely linked to existential fact: the hare bounds to the side and the toad is seen from above because this is how they were consistently pictured in the visual experience of the moon.

By Táng times, Buddhist painters had adapted the zoomorphic sun and moon disks to suit new needs and reflect new knowledge. The solar bird was now frequently depicted not as a crow-like bird but a decidedly more auspicious and emblematic phoenix (fig. 47). The sun also appeared frequently without its lunar mate, for example in Dūnhuáng paintings of Queen Vaidehī’s contemplation cycle and descent scenes of Marīcī 摩利支天, goddess of the dawn

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186 See Needham and Wang, who note that sunspots are visible to the naked eye at sunrise and sunset, in reflection, as well as through haze. *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 3, 436.

187 This observation is loosely derived from the tripartite division of sign, symbol, and index in the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, though, as James Elkins has noted, his theories can typically be applied only with difficulty and compromise to specific visual-cultural examples. Still, Peirce was the starting point for me to think about the fundamental semiotic distinction between these twinned signs. See James Elkins, “What does Peirce's Sign Theory Have to Say to Art History?” *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, 44:1 (2003): pp. 5-22.
In both cases, the disk is set within a landscape and emits rays of light as if to signal its active narrative role. For Vaidehi, it is the first in a sequence of Pure Land contemplations; for Marici, the object from which she and her two attendants emanate across the horizon. One booklet illustration now in the collection of the Musée Guimet makes the physical connection explicit, in the trail of red flames pulling diagonally from the goddess’s green-rimmed halo back toward the sun.

The moon underwent even more significant transformations. The contours of the toad and hare, along with the mythical cassia tree (guìshù 桂樹) and the mortar and pestle that connote the elixir of immortality, were softened by a looser hand and faint, wet ink as if to represent shadowy lunar maria (fig. 50)—as if, that is, to acknowledge these motifs’ basis in sense data. The crescent was a site of further visual play. In a Library Cave painting of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Avalokitesvara, a deity whose cosmological axiality is frequently indicated by paired sun- and moon-disk attributes, the moon is once again shown in crescent. Here, however, the sliver comprises just one portion of the otherwise full disk, which is uniformly white save for its shadowy mythical inhabitants. This makes it difficult to determine whether the picture ultimately represents crescent, gibbous, or somehow both.

The softened contours of the lunar shadows and the ambiguity between crescent and gibbous seems to be more than arbitrary results of workshop habits, given the frequency with which lunar imagery was invoked in Buddhist discourse to demonstrate fundamental doctrinal principles. The notion of the moon depicted in two different phases at once recalls, for example, a Moon parable in the Parinirvāṇa sutra. The Buddha preaches:

Good man, [what we see as] a full moon will manifest as only half full when viewed from another locale, and what we see as half full will be seen as a full moon when viewed from another locale. When people in Jambudvīpa see the first crescent of the moon they all think they perceive the first day of the month, and when the moon is full they think of that as the fifteenth day and have the idea that the moon’s cycle is complete. But the nature of the moon is such that it actually neither waxes nor wanes; the [perceived] increase or decrease in its size is due to Mount Sumeru.


189 The phases of the moon when viewed from earth do not in fact differ based on viewer’s position. However, fuller assessment of this statement would require in-depth study of the text’s cosmology.

The point made over and over again in this passage is that sense data, particularly that which is visual, are viewer-dependent and thus unreliable. The moon as understood in the Parinirvāṇa sutra was a particularly fitting analogy for the doctrine of expedient means, in that the Buddha “becomes visible much like the moon does, appearing to those who are in this or that locale as if he is being born where they are.”

The two types of pictorial transformation that I have so far discussed in the moon emblem—the suggestion of shadows and the representation of multiple phases—indicate that by the Táng, we are dealing as much with the issue of opticality as iconography. Changes are expressed not just in the transformation of isolated motifs to better suit local symbolic knowledge but equally importantly changes in technique and style. The sun and moon disks, in other words, were not passive objects that served simply to facilitate the identification of a deity or narrative. They are also pictorial translations of theologically or philosophically significant optical phenomena.

It would be difficult to overstate the moon’s symbolic importance in medieval Chinese culture. Thus it comes as no surprise that Buddhist exegetes sought to integrate age-old lunar imagery into their tradition’s cosmology and doctrine. A passage in the thirteenth-century compendium Fózǔ tǒngjì compiled by the Tiāntái monk Zhìpán (1220-1275), for example, offers a striking interpretation of the lunar pareidolia:

Why do shadows appear on the moon? This great continent has a jambū tree. It is so tall that it shades the lunar disk. Once there was a rabbit that followed the bodhisattva practices. Śakra (Indra) wanted to eat him, and the rabbit sacrificed itself by fire. Taking pity on it, Śakra put the charred rabbit on the moon so that sentient beings may revere it.

In Zhìpán’s account we seem to find a case of self-conscious cultural translation. The cassia tree of ancient Chinese myth has been replaced with the rose-apple (jambū) of Indic cosmology. It is virtually inconceivable that Zhìpán could have been unfamiliar with the fundamentally distinct roles and characteristics of these two cosmic trees, yet here they have been swapped cleanly. Even more telling is what happened to the myth: instead of a Chang Ē story, we now read a version of the Sasajātaka, an Indian explanation of the same lunar hare pareidolia. Perhaps

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193 For an early comparative study, see Timothy Harley, Moon Lore (London, 1885), pp. 60-68.
Zhipán’s motivation for the swap was the issue of moral clarity. The *jātaka* follows the standard formula of a creature, tested, making the ultimate sacrifice of its own body only to reap subsequent reward. By contrast, the story of Cháng É, like many ancient-world myths, seems somewhat ethically nebulous. Was her flight to the moon—a decidedly positive goal in premodern Chinese longevity practices, particularly Daoist ones—194—a form of exile or transcendence? What is clear is that the visual sign needed undergo no change in the process of its Buddhist reframing. They are so interchangeable, in fact, that one cannot be certain on the basis of the pictorial motif alone which myth any given lunar disk in middle period Buddhist art is mean to reference. Such a tidy bivalence was no doubt an important factor in the persistent importance of this motif.

**Flatness and Reflection**

In the early period at Dūnhuáng, the sun and moon were sometimes depicted as spheres, for example when held by the asura in Mògāo Cave 249, produced during the Western Wèi 西魏 535-556 (fig. 51). By the Táng, they seem to have undergone a process of flattening. The question of whether astral bodies were historically perceived as flat is a complex one, particularly in its relationship to the concept of reflection. Take, for example, a passage in the *Fózǔ tǒngjì*:

The Moon deva’s aura-palace comprises 1,000 rays of light, 500 of which radiate outward, 500 of which radiate downward. What are the causes and conditions of this? Because the Sun deva has sixty rays that block the lunar disk, the moon palace only gradually manifests. As the sun gradually recedes, the moon gradually emerges. Furthermore, by what causes and conditions does the moon [attain] complete purification and fullness on the fifteenth day [of the month]? When the lunar palace has gotten furthest away from the sun, its rays cannot be obstructed. Furthermore, by what causes and conditions does the moon not appear at all on the fifteenth day of the waning period (*hēiyuè*)? During this time, the moon palace is closest to the sun. Sunlight covers it such that no moonlight manifests. 月天身光宮殿成千光明。五百旁照, 五百下照。何因緣故。月天宮殿漸漸現耶。由日天有六十光障彼月輪。去日漸遠，故漸漸現。復何因緣圓淨滿足當十五日。月宮去日最遠光不能障。復何因緣黑月十五一切不現。此時月宮最近於日。日光隱覆一切不現。195

Here we seem to read an explanation of the moon’s phases as determined by relative proximity to the more powerful sun. The moon loses visibility, in other words, as it

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194 On the flight to the moon as transcendence, see Wang, “Mirror, Moon, and Memory”

comes into conjunction with the sun. As a wheel (lún 輪), we may assume that it is flat, though a few things are important to keep in mind. First, the wheel was a powerful Buddhist symbol of transcendent authority, associated with both terrestrial reach and the turning heavens. That Tejaprabhā’s main attribute was, like the sun and moon, a wheel seems no mere coincidence. Yet the moon is also here a palace (gōngdiàn 宮殿) of the lunar deva (tiān 天) (an idea expressed, as we shall see below, rather literally in some Dūnhuáng paintings). Moonlight is its divine glow. It would be difficult to overstate the symbolic importance of the Moon in medieval Chinese culture, which extended well beyond the Buddhist terrain. Its import was often expressed in relationship to mirrors, in many cases as the explicit subject matter on decorated cast-bronze mirrors, which were themselves round and lustrous. The reflectivity of such mirrors was understood as not a passive or neutral property, but itself a revelatory form of emanation. In this sense, the mirror may not be so different from the palace of the moon deva’s.

**Iconographic Slips and Swaps**

For all the apparent dialogue between the ancient and medieval Chinese solar and lunar motifs, some of the earliest depictions of the Sun and Moon in unambiguously Buddhist contexts within what is now China did not adopt this iconography. Although much about its overall pictorial program is still unresolved, the Western Wèi (535-556) grotto 285 at Mògāo features solar and lunar deities in the upper corners of its main wall (figs. 52, 53). Here, the astral

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196 The concept of a spherical moon illuminated by the sun was first articulated by Chinese astronomers, according to Needham and Wang, no later than the first century BC. Music theorist Jing Fang 京房 wrote: “The moon and the planets are Yin; they have shape but no light. This they receive light only when the sun illuminates them. The former masters regarded the sun as round like a crossbow bullet, and they thought the moon had the nature of a mirror. Some of them recognized the moon as a ball too. Those parts of the moon which the sun illumines look bright, those parts which it does not, remain dark.” (trans. Needham and Wang, Science and Civilization in China, Vol. 3, 227.) A similar theory was formulated closer to Zhipán’s time by the Northern Song polymath Shén Kuò 沈括 (1031–1095), who analogized the moon to a silver ball or a sphere half-covered in powder. (Ibid., p. 415.)

197 For a compelling discussion of the heavens envisaged as a wheel, see Baumann, “By the Power of Eternal Heaven,” pp. 236-237.

disks contain topknotted, semi-clothed Indic gods riding in single-axle chariots. Each is led by a different animal—horses on the viewer’s left, and, although damage prevents conclusive identification, likely some kind of bird on the right.

The horse was among the most widespread solar symbols in the premodern Indo-European world, and this figure in Mògāo 285 has accordingly long been identified as the Sun. The symmetrical, outwardly diverging horses find specific formal counterparts in the Roman Mithras or the Indo-Iranian Mithra (figs. 54, 55), among the most prominently astral gods of the late antique/early medieval period.199 (The position of the wheel between the diverging gods in 285 is, to my knowledge, unique.)

A similar motif appears in later Dūnhuáng compositions, most notably depictions of the Thousand-Armed manifestations of Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, as in a particularly finely rendered hanging painting dated to the eighth century (figs. 56-59).200 Here, the chariot has disappeared, and the Indic deva-like Sun and Moon are seated on the backs of their respective animal vehicles (vāhana). They assume their usual positions near the top of the composition mirrored across the central vertical axis, which is now occupied by a large seated bodhisattva whose myriad arms and hand-held attributes fan out impressively and unhurriedly. The Sun and Moon gods, which are identified in inscriptions on other paintings not as devas but bodhisattvas, are themselves largely interchangeable—here, both gods hold the lotus buds that would identify the Sun in Indian visual art. The criteria for identification is thus left to the color of the disk and the vāhana, but the results, it should be no surprise, are not straightforward.

Considered as a group, both color and vehicle in this type of Dunhuang painting exhibit a significant degree of iconographic slippage. The standard disk hues—red for sun, white for moon—are inconsistently paired with their respective animals. In the present example, red is paired with geese and white with horses, which matches the positions of the donors below in terms of gender (man with sun, woman with moon). In other paintings, both disks appear to be white, perhaps the result of stylistic preference or pigment availability. Yet inscriptions on a large Library Cave painting explicitly identify the horse-riding deity, backed by a white disk, as Moonlight bodhisattva 月光菩薩 and his goose-riding, red-disk counterpart as Sunlight bodhisattva 日光菩薩 (figs. 59-61). Identifying more than a dozen deities with inscriptions, many of them rarely seen at Dūnhuáng, this is among the most sophisticated of all the Library Cave paintings in terms of content; the unexpected identifications seem quite unlikely to be a mistake.

A perhaps more plausible explanation has to do with the other Sun-Moon pairing that appears in this composition, the disks that emerge from the sea of helping hands on either side of Avalokiteśvara’s eleven heads (figs. 63-65). These take the mythological zoomorphic disk forms, which had by this time attained their fully mature and highly stable role as go-to symbols for the


non-anthropomorphic sun and moon, appearing in countless paintings with any number of subjects across East and Inner Asia. Perhaps the strength of the sun’s association with the ancient sunbird, combined with the weakness of any link between either sun and moon to the horse, forced a switch in the vehicles. Such an observation would also explain why the same phenomenon appears in the Fàntiān huǒluó jiùyào (figs. 66, 67), which, like the Dunhuang painting, has also been cast as a mistake. Regardless of whether we see the iconography as wrong now, like the painting, the scripture gives no internal reason to conclude that this was a simple error—unlike the planets, the text does not even describe the Sun and Moon’s appearances. In any event, the horse and goose vehicles for Sun and Moon went the way of the chariot in Dūnhuáng and are not commonly seen after the tenth century.

**Rāhu and Ketu: Astral Disk as Demon’s Halo**

Having established some of the complexity of the astral disk as a pictorial element, as well as the horizon of iconographic slippage in medieval Chinese Buddhist art, we turn to two circa-tenth century Tejaprabhā assembly paintings, one painted in the right side of the east wall of the antechamber of Cave 35 at Yúlín (figs. 68, 69), the other preserved in the Library Cave and now in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (fig. 70). Both use the same procession format of their well-known cousin, the silk painting in the British Museum dated to 897. Tejaprabhā travels leftward in his ox-cart with Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn stationed around him. The Yúlín 35 and the BnF examples share more with each other than with the 897 painting in terms of both style and formal features—so much, in fact, that they seem likely produced from shared preparatory materials. Unlike the 897 painting, each of these paintings features disk-enclosed elements in the areas surrounding the core assembly that have not been satisfyingly explained.

In the Yúlín 35 painting, two disks appear on either side of the space above Tejaprabhā’s assembly. Each contains a different anthropomorphic figure dressed in the long, full robes and headgear of Chinese royalty. Because one rides a horse and the other is a woman, they have been previously proposed to represent Sagittarius (Rénmǎ 人馬) and Virgo (Shìnǚ 室女). In Sinitic visual culture, however, the Hellenistic zodiac signs rarely appear independent of the entire group of twelve, and moreover the sign of Virgo is virtually never an unaccompanied woman.

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201 A cropped asterism appears at the top of the BnF painting. It likely represents Beidou (the Northern Dipper). The now-lost upper register may have originally featured a range of asterisms similar to those in the Japanese “Tang copy” cited below.


203 Bill M. Mak notes the doubling of Virgo (“pair of women”; shuāngnǚ 雙女) and speculates on possible reasons in “Central Asia Connection,” pp. 69-70. While the woman is doubled in some pictorial examples, in other cases one of the figures is significantly smaller, not Virgo’s double but her attendant.
A faintly visible inscription I observed on a site visit in 2014 identifies the woman as Tàiyīn 太陰, the Moon.204 This may well make the man on horseback across from her not Sagittarius but the Sun. This Sun and Moon would therefore assume the same balanced positions as their counterparts in the Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī paintings addressed above, only now in what would become their standard guises of secular rulers.205 A preparatory drawing produced in Japan in the mid-twelfth century modeled on a similar compositional template depicts very similar figures in twin disks above the buddha (though the solar figure is shown without a mount) (figs. 71, 72).206 The Yúlín painting is therefore one of the earliest known Chinese depictions of Sun and Moon as Emperor and Empress, an association that had been made in texts centuries prior.

A more curious and complex phenomenon is at work in the BnF painting. In the same positions as what I propose are Sun and Moon in the Yúlín 35 composition, two grimacing, demonic faces appear (fig. 73). These have been recognized by many as Rāhu and Ketu, the two invisible or imaginary planets of Indian origin who begin to make regular appearances in Chinese texts by the Táng. Their grimaces, perhaps ludic to the modern eye, might make it easy to overlook the scientific knowledge they express through sophisticated semiotic relays.

In early Indian texts Rāhu was known as an asura who stole the elixir of immortality and was punished by decapitation. Because he had consumed the elixir, Rāhu lived on as a disembodied head (or, in visual arts, a torso, fig. 74), and since then has exacted revenge by periodically swallowing the sun and moon. Ketu later joined him, becoming in Indian and Central Asian art the snakelike tail to Rāhu’s upper torso and head (fig. 75, 76).207 In Chinese and Tangut art the head-tail distinction was not observed—both hidden planets were depicted as wrathful demons often with serpentine features, as in the petite snake heads in the BnF painting that coil inward from behind the ears on both demons and around the entire head of the green-faced one.

Chinese understanding of these deities was multiple. The version of the astral compilation Qīyào rǎngzāi jué preserved in the Taishō, for example, gives them a number of names and descriptions, some of which are juxtaposed below.

204 I have not yet obtained a photograph of this detail. Moreover, a statue positioned in front of the painting has inhibited photography of the overall composition.

205 An emperor riding on horseback would be admittedly very unusual for medieval Chinese religious visual culture.

206 This drawing professes to be based on a Tang-dynasty version. For discussion and identification of the figures in this poorly published drawing, see Sū Jiāyíng. “Riběn Chìshèngguāng fò túxiàng,” pp. 75-76.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rāhu</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ketu</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of the Eclipse 蝕神頭</td>
<td>Tail of the Eclipse 蝕神尾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superposition 複</td>
<td>Lunar Surging 月勃力</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of the Sun 太陽首</td>
<td>Head of the Moon 太陰首</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retrograde 常逆行</td>
<td>prograde 常順行</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Descriptions of Rāhu and Ketu in the Qīyào rǎngzāi jué

Most of the descriptors demonstrate that Rāhu and Ketu in the Qīyào rǎngzāi jué were conceived as a complementary pair. Their second identity, head of the sun and head of the moon, is most immediately germane to the Dūnhuáng paintings at hand. The key to identifying each is in how these paintings position and frame the demons. In the BnF painting, they appear within red and white disks and assume the same positions in the overall composition as the Sun and Moon in the Yúlín 35 painting. Viewing the two paintings side by side, it becomes clear that these disks are not halos in any generic sense but instead representations of the very Sun and Moon that Rāhu and Ketu have blocked. This connection is supported by a number of Japanese pictures in which the Sun and Moon, Rāhu and Ketu are shown in opposite corners of the composition. Based on the Qīyào rǎngzāi jué, the green demon in the red disk should be Rāhu, the solar eclipse (ascending node); the paler, orange-haired one in the white disk is Ketu, the lunar eclipse (descending node). Rāhu’s crown of snake heads may also reflect the head/tail distinction in the first row of the chart above.

There is yet another element to address: the third disk-enclosed demon mask appearing at the bottom left of the BnF painting. This figure must represent either a third imaginary planet or an alternate identity for one of the two above. Though difficult to prove conclusively based on available evidence, there are a couple of possibilities. First, given that the third demon mask appears in a white disk and below the figure we have identified as Ketu, it is likely that this entity relates to Ketu and/or to the moon. This is supported by the Yúlín 35 painting, where a demon mask in the lower right is named Ketu (Jìdū 計都) by an inscription (fig. 69). However, the BnF mask lacks Ketu’s snakelike iconographic attributes, indicating that it has a distinct identity. We recall that some versions of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture, such as the “Bûkōng” version studied in chapter one, name the nine planets (navagraha 九執) but then go on to list ten different entities: “the five planets, Rāhu, Ketu, and Huibèi…五星、羅睺、計都、彗孛…”

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208 T 1308, 21:442b21-446a11.

209 T 1308, 21:446b12-448a21.


211 T 963, 19:338a11.
Huibèi is a comet, which is indeed one of Ketu’s identities, related to the Sanskrit meaning of the name as “banner.”212 Our tenth celestial pacer in the BnF Tejaprabhā painting could therefore well be the comet demon.

Another possibility is that it represents the lunar apogee, or the point in the moon’s orbit at which it is furthest from the earth. As Yano Michio and Niǔ Wèixīng have shown, this is how the ephemerides for Ketu in the Qīyào rǎngzāi jué define it.213 Moreover, one of the names for Ketu in the texts “Yuèbèili” 月勃(孛)力, “Lunar Surging,” This name is nearly identical with the name of one of the two final dark planets, Yuèbèi 月勃, which at some point began to be explicitly explained as the lunar apogee.214 We might identify another pictorial cue in the BnF painting beyond the whiteness of the disk: this invisible planet is significantly smaller than Rāhu and Ketu, which is suggestive given that a full moon in apogee is as much as fourteen percent smaller than one in perigee.215 By the ninth century, another invisible astral entity had emerged. Known in Chinese as Zǐqì 紫氣, it was seen to represent the intercalary month.216 Yuèběi’s and Zīqī’s intertwined careers as anthropomorphic deities are examined near the end of this chapter.

The history of the planets in medieval Chinese and Inner Asian sciences is typically cast as one of accretionary growth from the five classical Chinese visible pacers to the seven weekday planets, then nine Indic “seizers,” and finally the full group of eleven. However far the reader might go along with my interpretations of the disk-enclosed entities in the BnF and Yulin 35 Tejaprabhā processions, it is difficult to deny that the BnF painting documents a moment when the Sinitic planets numbered at ten.

**Departing the Celestial Palace: The Rise of the Planet God**

212 The binome huìbèi comprises two characters for comets, the first also meaning broom, the second “surging” or “burst” from the archaic bèixīng 孃星. See Hānyǔ dà cídiǎn 漢語大詞典, Pleco edition; and Niǔ Wèixīng 鈕衛星, Xīwàng Fàntiān 西望梵天 (Shànghǎi: Shànghǎi jiāotōng dàxué chūbānshè, 2004), p. 128. For examples of Ketu as comet in Sinitic Buddhist texts, see Niǔ, ibid., pp. 127-128, although he makes a potentially misleading distinction between divinatory and astronomical understandings of Rāhu and Ketu. The Persian polymath Al-Bīrūnī (973-1052) wrote of Ketu as a comet in his great treatise on India. See **Alberuni’s India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws, and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030** (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), pp. 235-245, with thanks to Brian Baumann for this reference.


As we have seen, already in the earliest surviving depictions of Tejaprabhā’s assembly such as the famous 897 Library Cave painting now held in the British Museum (fig. 4), planetary deities had achieved mature, independent, and strikingly stable iconographic forms. By the time of the Tanguts, the Sun and Moon had emerged from their suspended disks to join the five naked-eye planets as fully independent figures modeled on the imperial analogy (fig. 78). Along with them came fully embodied forms of Rāhu and Ketu, and, with much less stable iconography, Yuèbèi and Zǐqì. The careers of each of these deities are examined below. Again, my aim is not comprehensive text-artifact collation but instead to identify symptomatic cases that shed light on how the planets were understood in local contexts.

The history of planetary iconography in what is now China is filled with uncertainties, and generalizations about origins remain difficult. The planets’ distinctive appearances partake of a complex, occult symbolic code that reverberates in many parts of premodern Eurasia. Already in the 1940s S. M. Kochetova demonstrated that much about their appearances does not derive in any narrow or immediate sense from India, despite the professed origin of many Buddhist texts. Although this situation presents challenges to modern research, it is not without its analytic advantages. For example, this research should be unburdened by the search for a pure or originary symbolic form that often guided early generations of art historians. Moreover, as the concept of the planets as humanlike gods to be depicted and worshipped is readily demonstrated to be a medieval innovation in the Sinitic context, the search for symbolic meaning extends to processes more fundamental than the accretion and reconciliation of heterogeneous attributes, and to the issue of figuration as such.

The iconographic content in astral scriptures is best treated in an analogous manner to how historians of astral science have addressed their astral content, namely as compilations that offer a primarily synchronic view into premodern knowledge circulation. This knowledge was irregularly combined, making sections on the planets more akin to miscellanies than coherent, definitive descriptions. Such an approach demonstrates that iconographic transformation occurred in a highly irregular fashion—sometimes on the basis of individual symbols or deities, for example, sometimes more globally. Iconographic transformation depended on potentially any number of factors—synchronicity, accident, inertia, even mistranslation—that cannot be reduced to a single cause, linguistic or otherwise. Thus, while the sources for iconographic transmission remain as important a concern as ever, the need to balance this with attention to local symbolic knowledge is clear.

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217 As many have noted, depictions of planet gods are recorded in texts as dating from centuries before the late ninth century. For a catalogue of Tang works, see Schafer, Pacing the Void, pp. 270-280; see also Mèng, “Wǔxing túxiàng kāoyuán,” pp. 397-419.

218 As Stephen Markel has shown, the Indian planets were depicted in the guise of semi-clad ascetics and, in surviving examples, were indistinct until roughly the seventh century, with the exception of Surya, who was the center of a much older, independent cult.

219 Kochetova, S. M. “Bozhества svetil”; Kotyk, “Astrological Iconography.” I thank Kotyk for sharing a pre-publication draft of this essay with me.
The Sinitic Planets

The 897 Tejaprabhā assembly is a crystallized presentation of the iconography of the five Sinitic planets as it would appear consistently at least into the Ming dynasty (fig. 4). Stationed at regular intervals around Tejaprabhā and his ox cart, they float on a multicolored cloud raft, its narrowing tail rising into the deep distance at right to trace their path through the sky. Venus is dressed in white and plays a pipa (fig. 79); blue-robed Jupiter carries a plate of fruit and flowers (fig. 80); Mercury, a scribe dressed in black, raises an inky brush to paper (fig. 80). Red-skinned Mars brandishes weapons in his four arms (fig. 81), and Saturn, finally, is a dark-skinned brahmin carrying a mendicant’s staff (fig. 82). On each planet’s head is a version of its associated animal—rooster, boar, monkey, donkey, and ox. Although a comprehensive study of this iconography has yet to emerge, a general picture of the trans-Eurasian connections for these deities’ attributes has been presented by a number of scholars. They agree that the Near East played a strong role in their formation.

As many have noted, synchronicity is a uniquely important factor in transcultural study of the heavens across cultures due to their origins in shared empirical phenomena. Comparing Sinitic texts on the planets before and after the rise of their anthropomorphic forms sheds some light on this issue. Take, for example, pre- and post-Buddhist descriptions of Mars. In the Shìjì 史記 (ca. 94 BC), we read:

[Sparkling Deluder (Yínghuò 熒惑), i.e., Mars] is the South, Fire, and governs summer; its stem days are bǐng and dīng. When propriety is lost, punishment emanates from Mars and Mars moves anomalously… When [Mars] appears there is armed conflict, when it disappears troops disperse… Mars is rebellion, brigandage, plague, bereavement, famine, and war.

曰南方火，主夏，日丙、丁。禮失，罰出熒惑，[熒惑失行是也]。出則有兵，入則兵散。… 熒惑為勃亂，殘賊、疾、喪、饑、兵。222

220 Scholars have long observed that this iconography aligns closely with the descriptions of the planets in the Fāntiān huǒluó jiǔyào (T 1310), the illustrated Taishō text discussed above and in chapter one. However, as we have seen, the Taishō illustrations diverge from the text significantly—in addition to the purported switching of Sun and Moon discussed above, Mars seems to lack his equine headdress. Unlike the other planets, moreover, the physical forms of Sun, Moon, Rāhu, and Ketu, though illustrated, are not described in the text. These issues all signal that the illustrations may not be an original companion to the text. In any event, like many of the pictorial materials in the Taishō, they should not be treated as direct or unproblematic evidence for the Chinese tradition.


222 Simǎ Qiān 司馬遷, Tiānguān shū 天官書, translation after Pankenier, Astrology and Cosmology in Early China, with slight modifications, p. 477.
Mars of the *Shìjì* is thus understood as a punishing, martial planet and associated with the fire phase. In the ninth-century *Qīyào ràngzāi jué*, the second set of descriptions for the planets instructs devotees to depict Mars as:

Mineral red in appearance, wearing an angry donkey in his cap and a leopard-skin lower garment, with four arms. One hand grasps a bow, another an arrow, another a knife.

銅牙赤色貌, 帶嗔色駱冠, 著豹皮裙。四臂一手執弓, 一手執箭, 一手執刀。223

The Buddhist text thus folds the planet of early imperial Chinese understanding into the war-god Mars that was common to many parts of the ancient world.224 The red color of Mars’s skin now embodies both the planet’s bright red appearance in the sky and its classic Chinese cosmological association with the elemental phase of fire and the south.

A more synchronic analysis of the image of Mars is also possible. This brings us back to the fragmentary handscroll from the Tarim basin now held in Berlin discussed at the beginning of this chapter (fig. 36). One of its detached pieces features a fierce, haloed figure brandishing a sword in either hand and accompanied by a donkey (fig. 83). Grenet and Pinault propose that this figure may represent Niṛṣṭi, an Indian god of destruction.225 In a discussion of Indian depictions of Saturn, Gerd Mevissen notes that the donkey is a common vehicle of fearful deities.226 Iconographically, he corresponds closely with the Mars of Sinitic Buddhist astral texts, down to the leopard-skin garment he is said to wear in the *Qīyào ràngzāi jué*.

The link between this possible Central Asian Niṛṣṭi and the Sinitic Mars becomes much more direct on the basis of the Berlin scroll’s technical and stylistic similarities with the Ōsaka handscroll also discussed in the opening to this chapter (fig. 84). In some pictorial treatments, such as the 897 Tejaprabhā assembly, Mars’s animal attribute is easily seen as a horse (see fig. 81). In both the Ōsaka and Berlin scrolls, however, the artists have taken care to elongate the animal’s ears. Moreover, they share an economical feel for modeling in contour despite being produced in very different mediums—the Ōsaka handscroll made use of multiple brushes in a range of widths on high-quality silk, while the Tarim work was produced on paper with perhaps just a stylus or short-bristled brush. For example, the simple yet subtle contouring used to define the donkey’s shoulder and neck follow similar paths in both.

Here, however, a potentially salient difference emerges. In the Ōsaka scroll, Mars’s head takes the form of an emphatically red donkey head, as if to emphasize the identity of Mars with the donkey through symbolic reverberation between god and vehicle. This echoes the tradition known in China no later than the Táng for depicting the duodenary signs as animal-headed


224 Kotyk notes that the donkey was an Egyptian symbol in “Astrological Iconography,” p. 50.

225 Grenet and Pinault, “Contacts des traditions astrologiques.”

humans (fig. 85). Moreover, it seems to foreshadow a similar phenomenon of head-attribute reverberation in the Tangut materials. Even when switching between male and female aspects, Yuèbèi, for example, is depicted with a severed head attribute that uncannily resembles her or his own and in some cases even comes to rest atop it (fig. 86).

Over time, discussions of the planets came to read more like descriptions of their characters and social roles. The inscriptions on the Ōsaka handscroll advance what was then perhaps a nascent anthropomorphism, delivering a coherent précis of each planet’s skills and traits. This is particularly true for its discussion of Mercury (fig. 87), the woman scribe in the monkey crown and the planet associated with wisdom and hearing in the Jinshū. In the Ōsaka handscroll inscription, on Mercury we read in fine seal script:

The deity Chénxīng [Mercury] is a Merit Officer who knows the order of all-under-Heaven, administrator and transmitter of the literary, calligraphic, and calendrical arts. She manages and maintains the laws of the world. Chénxīng is called the solar carriage, [the one who] never parts from the sun. Make sacrifices to her with green-colored things: use green jade and green silk; offer vegetables and aquatic creatures. The temple may be located in the residence of the Grand Councilor.

辰星神, 功曹也, 知天下理, 文、墨、歴術典吏傳送, 執天下織紀, 辰星, 日御也, 常不離日, 祭用碧, 器用碧玉, 幣用碧色, 祭用蔬水類魚, 屬廟可致於相府也, 中書省是。

The description takes something of a poetic turn. It interweaves Mercury’s imported literary symbolism (Mercury as scribe is attested in many regions of western and central Eurasia, and is associated in particular Mesopotamian and Iranian counterparts), a nativized bureaucratic analogy, and empirical knowledge of this swiftest of the planets that always hangs close to the sun. Thus, the planet acquires here a more-or-less coherent personal character through the integration of multiple forms of knowledge and manners of expression.

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227 See Ho, “Twelve Calendrical Animals.”


229 Hucker 3489, p. 296

230 “Unranked subofficial.” Hucker 6609, p. 505.

231 The term is ambiguous, as 里的日御 can refer to a carriage for the sun or the emperor, as well as the title of an astronomical bureau officer. See Hányǔ dà cídìān.

232 Translation partially based on Yu Xin, “Personal Fate and the Planets,” p. 186.

233 Transcription follows Meng, “Wuxing ji nianba xiu.”

234 See Kotyk, “Astrological Iconography,” p. 51, where Kotyk also points out a connection between Mercury’s heretofore unexplained monkey attribute and the Egyptian god Thoth.
Mercury’s imported scribal image seems to have been particularly resonant in China. The woman scholar archetype dates back at least to the renowned Eastern Han author Ban Zhao 班昭 (b. 45-51 AD, d. 114-120 AD). The rather narrower image of Mercury as woman scribe may have gained renewed importance in the Sòng, when, as Hui-shu Lee has written, court women were important if rarely acknowledged participants in literary and calligraphic culture, serving regularly as imperial ghostwriters. 235

An exquisite depiction of Mercury attributed to the twelfth-century painter Zhāng Sīgōng 張思恭 indicates that this goddess, who Edward Schafer notes was a comparatively unremarkable planet among Táng poets, 236 had earned a special place in elite imagination (fig. 87). This is the largest and arguably most technically sophisticated known Chinese painting of a planet (the fact that she is depicted alone may not be significant, however, as the painting could easily have been part of a now-dispersed set 237). The painter has moved fully beyond the taxonomizing, declarative approach of the Ōsaka handscroll and into the realm of the lyrical. Whereas in many roughly contemporary Tejaprabhā tableaus, Mercury is, as a rule, depicted in action—paintings from Dūnhuáng, Kharakhoto, and Shanxi temples all show her prepared to put brush to scroll (or, in some cases, to booklet) (figs. 80, 89-91), the Sòng painting marks a new level of investment in Mercury’s psychological being, and, as Lee puts it, her worldliness. 238 Here Mercury is shown in an intimate moment of engagement with her simian companion, turning away from the roll of paper on her knee to gaze down at him as he offers up an inkstone to refresh her brush (figs. 92-93). Moreover, Mercury is shown not in an otherworldly assembly or cloud-borne descent, but rather a domestic setting, seated in relative ease, as though composing a poem. As Lee argues, an analogy between the celestial scribe and the refined elite woman is clear. 239

The pipa and fowl attributes of Venus, the other woman planet in the Sinitic tradition, are quite consistent across Chinese sources. In the Ōsaka handscroll, however, Venus holds no instrument as she sails on the fantastically airborne fowl (fig. 94). By the time of the 897 Tejaprabhā tableau, Venus’s bird vehicle had, paralleling the transformation of the solar crow, morphed into a phoenix-like crown (fig. 79), felicitously bolstering her embodiment of the feminine ideal. 240 Venus’s pre-Buddhist astral valence was decidedly less auspicious. The brightest object in the sky after the moon and observed in daylight hours, this “Great White” 太 風 is...
白 is “governor of killing” in the *Shiji*,\(^{241}\) the inverse of her amorous counterpart in western Eurasia.

Not only was a generic stringed instrument an imported attribute, but the pipa/lute itself is a particularly important object in the history of trans-Eurasian cultural exchange. Played by heavenly musicians in countless Dūnhuáng wall paintings, it was strongly associated with Buddhism. In courtly settings, the image of the woman musician was much less rarefied than that of the woman scribe. A variety of celebrated women pipa players were recorded in the premodern period,\(^{242}\) and they were frequent subjects in pictorial art (fig. 95). Although Venus held on to her attributes most consistently of all the Chinese and Tangut planets, her appearance did change in important ways. Sometime around the twelfth century, it seems, Venus began to be shown carrying the pipa draped or wrapped in a textile instead of uncovered or actively playing it (figs. 96-98). While the specific reasons for covering up the pipa seem to vary, in all instances this transformation introduces, in a similar fashion to Mercury shown interacting with her monkey, a degree of interpersonal and temporal specificity unseen in earlier periods. As we shall see in the next chapter, this element was self-consciously deployed as a narrative device.

The deified planet Jupiter, the “Year Star” 太歲, although nowhere near as prominent as the Sun and Moon, was the center of an independent cult that dates back to pre-imperial antiquity. This relates to the planet’s sidereal period of 11.86 years, which corresponded closely with the 12.37 lunations in a solar year.\(^{243}\) Jupiter’s unique relationship to timekeeping explains his allegorical role as judge in many cultures. In China, by the Warring States period a “Counter Jupiter” (Tāisuì 太歲) had emerged to account for irregularities in the planet’s actual orbit. The annual positions of this counter-Jupiter corresponded with the duodenary reckoning system, which in turn were correlated with the twelvefold animal cycle. In keeping with the general trend, anthropomorphized depictions of the Jupiter stations appeared in diverse contexts, including religious paintings, almanacs and tombs, by the tenth century, and were connected to a variety of divination practices. In an unfinished Dūnhuáng almanac dated to 978, a square-shaped assembly of youthful officials surround an older, bearded man seated at a desk (fig. 99).\(^{244}\) They represent, according to the inscription, the “True Forms of

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\(^{241}\) See Pankenier, pp. 481-482.


\(^{244}\) The almanac, Or.8219/S.612, is entitled “Large-format calendar established according to the official version of the Bureau of Celestial Affairs” 請司天臺官本勘定大本暦日 for the “Empire of the Great Sòng” 大宋國. See Kalinowski, ed., *Divination et Société*, pp. 182-184; Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism*, pp. 153-155.
Counter Jupiter and the Twelve Primes 太歲並十二元神真形圖.” Each of these subordinate “twelve primes” is, in turn, identified by one of the duodenary animals perched in the young officials’ caps. The officious, scaled-up Counter Jupiter seated at center recalls the ten fearsome Hell Kings of Chinese Buddhist purgatory and the cult of Ksitigarbha (fig. 100). Although this Counter Jupiter scene lacks the gruesome violence of many Ten Kings illustrated sutras and transformation tableaus (biànxiàng 變相), this stellar magistrate of sorts was nonetheless a consistent source of fear in premodern China. The Jinshū associates Jupiter with the emperor, which reflects the latter’s virtue “by its brightness and rich color,” just as a loyal official should. As with Venus’s bird, the origin of Jupiter’s porcine companion is unknown to me, and may predate or have a different source than his attributes of flowers, fruit, and nectar. These various offerings had transformed by the eleventh century into peaches, a Chinese symbol of longevity that were perhaps also a nod to Jupiter’s classic five-phases association with the season of spring (figs. 101-103).

Finally, we arrive at Saturn, the planet with perhaps the greatest allegorical consistency across the whole of Eurasia. Many medieval civilizations conceived of this planet as an elderly, rather unpleasant man who carries a sickle or staff. As many have noted, this relates to the fact that Saturn has the longest sidereal period of all the naked-eye planets. In India, he came to be known as the “half-lame” one, greatly dreaded and revered (fig. 104). As with Mercury, Saturn’s symbolic role in pre-Táng Sinitic culture seems to have been relatively insignificant.

By the heyday of the Tejaprabhā cult, Saturn had assumed a singular pictorial importance among the planets. With few exceptions, he was stationed front-and-center in every tableau (figs. 4, 78). So important was his spatial position that the Qiyào ránzāi jué apparently alludes to it: “one hand carries a staff, the other points ahead” 一手柱杖, 一手指前. As discussed in the chapter three, this may well reflect the five-phases association of Saturn with the center. Saturn also seems to have maintained a special connection with Tejaprabhā himself suggested by their shared association with the ox. Moreover, in one section of the Qiyào ránzāi jué, each planet is


246 Schafer, p. 216.

247 Ho, Astronomical Chapters, p. 122

248 Kochetova suggested that Jupiter’s association with the duodenary animals, of which the pig is one, may explain his otherwise unaccounted attribute. “Bozhestva svetil,” p. 485.

249 Mevissen, “The Lame Planetary God Saturn.”

250 Schafer, Pacing the Void, p. 217.

251 T1308, 21:449b01-449b02.
linked with a specific scripture. Saturn’s is none other than an incantation containing the name “effulgent” 熾盛 itself. 252

Despite Saturn’s general consistency across Eurasia, his appearance underwent an important transformation in China and Inner Asia. Sometime before the early eleventh century, he went from a dark-skinned, semi-clothed “brahmin”-like figure carrying a monk’s staff and leading an ox to a stooped, elderly man often capped and clad in an animal-skin outer cloak (fig. 105). The 972 Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī frontispiece and the 1005 Ruiguāng pagoda amulet mark either side of this transformation (figs. 40, 25). From Xīxià Kharakhoto to Yuán-dynasty Shānxī, Saturn now carried an incense brazier, talismanic seal, or both (figs. 106-108). This transformation recalls Dǒng Yōu’s curiosity, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, about why Saturn should now appear as a “holy man” in place of what in the Daoist canon had been simply an elder.

One key to understanding Saturn’s pictorial transformation may lie in his acquisition of the attribute of the seal, a multifaceted and highly charged object in Chinese material culture used frequently in occult or esoteric contexts. As agents and receptacles of all manner of numinous powers, seals, like the closely related talisman, were known from early on for their ability to contain and confer astral forces. 253 They are also carried by Mars or the wrathful imaginary planets as a reflection of that power. Though dangerous in the rest of Eurasia, however, Saturn was considered relatively benign in early Chinese astral science. By the medieval period, he had acquired a special role—as the Jìnshū states, Saturn can “scintillate even when the other four planets cannot.” 254 The seal is particularly suggestive in this context. It may be that the seal of the anthropomorphic Saturn relates precisely to a notion of his covert powers, as a kind of medieval ritual overlay of his central positionality in the wǔxíng schema.

In general, we might understand Saturn as having developed from Indic brahmin to Sinitic or Inner Asian ritual specialist. This transformation may have been a way for Saturn to maintain at once his wizened appearance and stooped posture, relatively positive Chinese astral valence, and compositional centrality (not to mention the decorum he would have regained in the eyes of Huīzōng and like-minded reformers by becoming fully clothed). As we shall see in the next chapter, Saturn’s role in Tejaprabhā assemblies is by far the most multivalent: as the

252 On the link between Saturn and Tejaprabhā, see Liào Yáng, “Míng Zhīhuà sì běn,” pp. 113-125.


The special talismanic power of Saturn is also well documented in occult sources of the medieval Abrahamic world, where the planet’s talisman was the base-three magic square, which, by Song times, was none other than the cosmological diagram known as the Luòshū 洛書. In Latin and Hebrew contexts, it is often depicted as an angular cipher representing the linear path through the diagram by ascending number. For discussion with respect to one medieval European manuscript, see Erwin Panofsky, “Giotto and Maimonides in Avignon: The Story of an Illustrated Hebrew Manuscript,” The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery Vol. 4 (1941), p. 42n3.

254 Ho, Astronomical Chapters, p. 123.
compositions grow, shrink, and transform around him, Saturn alternates between guide, anchor, offerant, and the primary point of contact with the viewer, much in the way that the seal itself relays between printing device, ritual implement, and sign of office.

**A New Tangut Planetary Canon**

Tangut planetary iconography diverges in important ways from the deities we have just discussed. Most strikingly, at some point the Moon was depicted as masculine, a transformation virtually inconceivable in Sinitic culture. The gender shift is not easily explained by available Tangut texts, in which the deity is often explicitly described as a woman (e.g., “a heavenly maiden holding a moon” and known, as she was in Chinese, as Supreme Yin (Tha  de  ). In the Chinese context, this absolutely feminine designation is inseparable in cosmological terms from its absolutely masculine counterpart, Supreme Yang, the Sun (Tha so  ). In Tangut a painting featuring a masculine Moon (fig. 109), both this figure and the still-masculine Sun maintain their imperial appearances and paired position, thereby becoming dual rulers, a curious proposition in terms of the both Chinese imperial universalism and the standard Chinese bureaucratic analogy in visual art that was explicitly advocated by, as we saw earlier, Emperor Huizong. To complicate matters further, the other planets remain iconographically consistent with Sòng examples, such as a běimíáo 白描 Daoist album dated to the Southern Sòng currently in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art (see figs. 98, 102, 107). However we might interpret this phenomenon of the masculine Tangut Moon in more specific terms, it generally signals that yin-yang terminology had become decoupled, at least in the case of Tangut astral gods, from gender. A similar decoupling of name and elemental phase also occurred in the Tangut planets, a phenomenon examined in detail in chapter three.

A new, perhaps more systematic shift toward Indic or Central Asian iconography can be identified in another case of gender transformation. In roughly the twelfth century, Mercury began to appear with bow and arrow instead of brush and pen (fig. 110). This was another major attribute of the Iranian Mercury. As Liào Yáng has noted, all known instances of this new iconography appear in the context of Tangut-language productions of Tejaprabhā texts. This includes both astral mandala texts and the painted astral mandala itself, which are examined in chapter four, and, finally, the illustrated print edition of the version of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture that was revised during the reign of the Tangut emperor Rénzōng (r. 1139–1193).

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255 Liào analyzes this shift in “Zhihuà si běn,” pp. 127-139.


258 See chapter one.
A section in the “offerings root” liturgy for the Grahamāṭkā mandala (IOM 4737) discussed in depth in chapter four features individualized discussions of the planets. Of Mercury, we read:

Praise for the Water Star

In the lhew direction [i.e., northeast] is white-bodied Water Star, with one face and two arms, holding a bow and arrow, like a heavenly ruler, wise and wonderfully distinguished, of unsurpassed eloquence. In reverence to the Water Star, Honored One of Great Yin, transformed by the tathāgata to protect sentient beings. [In veneration of] Great Yin Water Star.

Here, Mercury is still praised for her intellectual qualities despite the substitution of the stationery with a bow and arrow. As descriptions of appearance and character, the passages on the planets in this text resemble the Taishō texts examined above, but their purpose is different. Whereas the passages on the planets in the Fāntiān huōluó jiāyào and especially the Qiāoào rângzâi jiâué have the quality of a divination miscellany, the Tangut-language passage is a eulogy addressed directly to the planet, to be read during the performance of a mandala-based rite.

It would be misleading to treat this apparent iconographic shift as a firm chronological limit and therefore predate all Tangut depictions of Mercury as scribe prior to the Rénzōng era—as we have seen, contemporary devotees evidence little trouble accepting multiple iconographic canons at once. Instead, the swap points to what was likely a concerted effort by a relatively small group of people to establish a distinctive Tangut planetary canon, one that might benefit from a rhetorical proximity to “original” (i.e., Central Asian or Indian) sources and point to new, tantric ritual techniques.

This shift may well have occurred in dialogue with South Asian Buddhists. The Nispannavagvali, a mandala compendium by the eastern Indian Buddhist tantric master Abhayākaragupta (d. ca. 1125) at Vikramaśilā, features a similar cast of planets in its Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara mandala, including Mercury in the guise of an archer.

Sun, red, seven-horse chariot, discs of sun on lotus;
Moon, white, goose, discs of moon on lotus;
Mars, red, goat, dagger, eating a human head;
Mercury, yellow, on lotus, carrying bow and arrow;
Jupiter, yellow, frog or begging bowl, beads and jar;

Venus, white, lotus, string of beads and jar;
Saturn, black, tortoise, bearing a staff;
Rāhu, red-black, carrying sun and moon in right and left hands;
Ketu, black, bearing sword and snare.260

A side-by-side comparison of the planet illustrations in the two known Tangut-language versions of the Tejaprabhā dhāranī—the translation of the Héxī version and the Rénzōng-era Tangut-language version—demonstrates that the planets’ transformation was concerted and systematic (figs. 111, 112).261 Following the Nispāṇa-yogvālī descriptions closely, Sun and the Moon carry solar and lunar disks, respectively, instead of tablets of office. Jupiter now carries a begging bowl instead of the peaches, Venus a string of beads (or bones?), and Saturn, still a staff but no seal. Particularly striking is the sharp distinction now made between Rāhu and Ketu: whereas Rāhu raises sun and moon disks in either of his two hands, Ketu holds a snare in the form of a hook-ended rod and a sheathed sword on lashed onto his back. Apparently only Ketu is depicted with a snake, which writhes over his now-smoothed down hair.

In the Tangut context, these transformations in the planets’ appearances occurred with very little stylistic change—though their costumes differ in ways that deserve greater attention, their proportions, postures, and somewhat sharp-edged contours are all generally consistent. The woodblock print was an ideal medium for effecting and disseminating such a global-scale transformation while maintaining the aesthetic unity of the cult. It is, moreover, precisely the inverse of a similarly ambitious, global transformation in Mògāo Cave 465 (fig. 113), in which Tejaprabhā and the planets are integrated into the east side of a five-buddha ceiling mandala (fig. 114).262 Here, the core planet’s iconography is largely consistent with the older Sino-Tangut canon—Mercury holds a scroll, Venus a pipa, and so on (figs. 116-118)—but with virtually no stylistic continuity with that tradition.

Liào Yáng has demonstrated the broad and lasting presence of this new planetary iconography and its complex relationship to style, comparing wall paintings at the ca. mid-fifteenth century monastery Gongkar Chöde southwest of Lhasa with a 1462 Ming edition of the Tejaprabhā dhāranī. A testament to the complicated relationship between iconography and style, the latter example includes both iconographic canons: the older one, what Liao terms “Han” style, appears in the frontispiece procession scene. The newer one appears in the “Sino-Tibetan”-style inventory illustrations.263 There is, however, one conspicuous difference between the


261 See also the side-by-side comparisons in Liào “Zhìhuà sì běn,” pp. 133-135.

262 This important new identification was, to my knowledge, first made by Liào Yáng in “11-15 shiji Fójiao yishù,” pp. 363-393.

263 As Liao acknowledges, these stylistic designations are often more heuristic than historical fact. The term “Sino-Tibetan” is of course not an ideal designation for Tangut visual culture, given the implication of a Tangut cultural synthesis that remained somehow non-Tangut.
Tibetan and Ming planets: the presence in the latter of Ziqi and Yuèbèi, the final two invisible planets discussed above and the closing topic of this chapter.

**Ziqi and Yuèbèi**

In contrast with Rāhu and Ketu, who quickly matured into serpentine warrior figures (fig. 119), the third and fourth pseudoplanets, Ziqi the intercalary month and Yuèbèi the lunar apogee, never attained lasting pictorial stability among the Chinese planets. They are not mentioned in any Chinese-language Tejaprabhā sutra of which I am aware or in any major Chinese Buddhist astral text.264

Ziqi and Yuèbèi’s origins have been a source of confusion since at least the Yuan dynasty, when the scholar Mǎ Duānlín 馬端臨 (1245-1322) wrote that they were “said to originate in Indian Brahmanical studies” 或云天竺梵學也.265 There is some debate about whether they are of Chinese origin. Some have associated them with the now-lost Duiliyusī jīng 都利聿斯經, a text on western astrology, based in part on speculation by Song scholars that this was their source. Niǔ Wèixīng has recently argued that they emerged during the Táng-Five Dynasties through a dialogue between with Daoist astral worship.266 Others have shown that the astronomical parameters for Ziqi indicate a non-Chinese origin.267

These two deities were firmly entrenched in the Tangut astral cult and are both explicitly discussed and depicted in Tangut Buddhist scriptures. In IOM 4737, the Grahamātkā liturgy quoted above, Ziqi and Yuèbèi are directly described. Ziqi (Tshijj lwe 尊 銀) is the “offspring of Wood 銀 銀” [i.e., Jupiter], purple, extremely auspicious, a great yang deity, and holds a rosary. Yuèbèi (Lhij me 銀 月) is the “offspring of Earth 月 月” [i.e., Saturn], wrathful and red bodied, roaring and bellowing, a “great yang 月 月” deity.268 Ziqi’s connection with Jupiter, the great regulator of time, is consistent with his identification with the intercalary month.269

264 They do appear, however, in at least one later Buddhist scripture, for example the short Shòushēng jīng 壽生經, Wàn xǔcāng jīng 仏錫藏經 X 1n0024, 001 and IOM Karakhoto manuscript A-32. See Wēi Bing, “Ecang Heishucheng wenxian Foshuo shousheng jing luwen——jiannun shiyi—shishi shiji de shoushenghui yu shousheng jikut xinyang,” 俄藏黑水城文獻《佛說壽生經》錄文——兼論十——十四世紀的壽生與壽生寄庫信仰 Xixia xue 西夏學 5 (2010).

265 Cited in Niǔ Wèixīng, “Táng-Sòng zhīji jiaojiao shiyi yao xingshen chongbai de qiuyuan he liuxing” 唐宋之际道教十一曜神崇拜的起源和流行, Shi jiè zōngjiào yán jì 世界宗教研究 1/2012.

266 Niǔ Wèixīng, ibid.


269 See Schlegel, Uranographie chinoise, p. 645.
Yuèbèi’s connection with Saturn, meanwhile, reinforces an ultimate link back to Ketu, who, as Schlegel noted, was conceived as the “superfluity” or “excess” (yú 餘) of the Earth Star.270

Visual culture demonstrates that unlike Rāhu and Ketu, these third and fourth invisible planets did not have a symmetrical relationship. In virtually all known examples, Zǐqì is indeed a protégé of Jupiter (fig. 120), and in Tangut paintings his robe and/or cap are often purple (fig. 122). Yuèbèi is generally a loose-haired, barefoot warrior not unlike the then-emergent typology for Zhēnwǔ 真武, the personification of the snake-tortoise Xuánwǔ 玄武 associated with the north (fig. 124). Yuèbèi is somewhat ambiguously gendered in Sòng examples and overtly switches between masculine and feminine in the Tangut context (fig. 123). As mentioned above, the Tangut Yuèbèi is often shown carrying a severed head, recalling the Niśpannayogvalī image of Mars (figs. 124, 125). In three paintings from the Hóngfō Pagoda, Yuèbèi, now a bulky, masculine warrior, acquired a poorly understood attribute resembling a false mountain (jiāshān 假山). Yuèbèi seems to have had an independent cultic status in the Tangut context, as two individual icons representing the deity (one of which is labeled) have survived from the site.

Zǐqì’s and Yuèbèi’s visual appearances indicate that they emerged through a different process than the core planetary group. Whereas the core planets’ attributes are both symbolically arcane and highly conservative, Zǐqì and Yuèbèi’s are at once fluid and, aside from the latter’s mysterious fake-mountain attribute in the Hóngfō Pagoda paintings, comparatively generic within the context of Tangut Buddhist art. Unlike the Jupiter’s boar or Mercury’s stationery, the iconography of the official and the wrathful, severed-head brandisher were preexisting symbols in regional visual culture. To be sure, this is not to say that the scientific values for these entities therefore must have emerged natively, but only that their anthropomorphic forms appear to have done so.

A final, little-studied set of paintings from Kharakhoto indicate that not only were the Tangut planets modeled to some extent on Daoist deities, but they may also have been worshipped in a Daoist context as well. Produced in ink and color on paper, each composition depicts an individual planet (figs. 106, 126-128). The set is incomplete, but Yuèbèi’s survival indicates that they originally comprised the full roster of eleven. An individual Tejaprabhā painting that has been heavily restored but bears unmistakable resemblance to the others was likely the central deity around which the planets must have been arranged (fig. 129), possibly centered on an altar. However, a triad of Daoist deities—among the few indisputably Daoist works of art in the Tangut corpus—also share much with these individual planets, including format, style, average size, materials, and palette (figs. 131, 132). Perhaps the planets at Kharakhoto also came at some point to be worshipped alongside exclusively Daoist deities. It is worth noting that, of all the Tangut paintings of planets paintings, these are stylistically and technically the most unusual, combining a number of wash and line techniques that seem in clear reference with Chinese ink traditions. Yuèbèi’s hair, for example, was painted with what seems to have been a large and very wet brush, while the red ink spilling from the bloody severed head

270 Schlegel, ibid.
indicates a splashing or spraying technique. Perhaps this experimentation with style and technique reflects a similar degree of ritual innovation.
Chapter Three

Figure-Schema Worldmaking in Tejaprabhā Assemblies

Introduction: A Painted Pilgrimage to Mount Wūtái

Sometime in roughly the twelfth century, a multiethnic group of monks and one nun were memorialized as donors in a partial repainting of a large grotto at the Mògāo Grottoes, the most expansive of the numerous Buddhist cave-temple sites in the Dūnhuáng region (figs. 131-133). They chose to depict a Tejaprabhā procession, a subject not surviving at any regional grotto between Yulin 35 and the Tangut period,271 and in its largest and most complex rendition known anywhere at that time. On the better-preserved south wall, Tejaprabhā is seated, legs crossed, on the familiar two-wheeled cart (fig. 134). His golden wheel attribute is unusually active, balancing, ablaze in white flames, on his right index finger (fig. 135). The full ensemble of Tangut astral deities is attendance: the planets as full-scale figures surround his cart; the lodges, who take their standard bureaucratic guises, cluster on clouds above; and the zodiac emblems are scattered throughout the sky among them.

Known in the modern numbering system as Cave 61, the cave chosen by this multiethnic group of monastic donors was one of the most prominent and unusual among the hundreds honeycombing the southern sector of the Mògāo cliff face by then (see Appendix for donor names). Originally built in the mid tenth century by the local governor Cáo Yuánzhōng 曹元忠 (d. 974) and his wife Lady Zhái 翟,272 Cave 61’s exceedingly complex pictorial program centered not on a buddha but the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. (Though now missing, scholars have inferred his presence by the remnant of the sculpted lion that would have served as his vehicle.) This inspired the cave’s historic designation as Mañjuśrī Hall (Wénshū táng 文殊堂).273

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271 Other Tejaprabhā tableaux in the Dūnhuáng region dating to the Tangut period or later include Wūgèmiào 五個廟 Cave 1 and Mògāo Cave 465 (discussed in chapter two).

272 Literature on the tenth-century production of Cave 61, like that of Mount Wūtái itself, is extensive. Representative texts include Lin Wei-Cheng, Building a Sacred Mountain: The Buddhist Architecture of China’s Mount Wutai (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), pp. 178-194; Dūnhuáng yánjiùyuan, ed., Dūnhuáng shíkū yìshù. Mògāokū dì liùyī kū (wǔdài) (Jiāngsū měishù chūbǎnshè, 1995); Dorothy Wong, “A Reassessment of the Representation of Mt. Wūtái from Dūnhuáng Cave 61,” Archives of Asian Art vol. 46 (1993): pp. 27-52. The corridor has received much less attention, which has focused primarily on subject matter and debates about whether it was repainted in the Xīxià or Yuan. For a recent summary of the dating controversy, see Zhū Shēngyún 朱生云, “Xīxià shíqí chóngxiū Mògāokū dì 61 kū yuányīn fēnxì” 西夏时期重修莫高窟第61窟原因分析 Dūnhuáng xué jikān 敦煌學輯刊 (2016, no. 3).

273 The name Wénshū táng appears no later than 1011. See Lin, Building a Sacred Mountain, p. 178.
as the backdrop to the central icon, the west wall features the largest and most detailed extant representation of the Wǔtái mountain range (Wǔtáishān 五台山) in Shānxī province, which, beginning in the early medieval period, was believed to be Mañjuśrī’s earthly field of activity. By Xīxià times, it was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the Buddhist world and maintained a strong link to temporal power.

After some seven centuries of more-or-less continuous artistic production of Mògāo, repainting grotto interiors had become the dominant mode by the time the Tanguts gained control over northern Gansu in the mid eleventh century. “Renovating” a cave shrine (a term more in line with the spirit of these projects than, say, “repainting” or “redecorating”) was a form at once of stewardship and appropriation, a source of both religious merit and social capital. Renovations were carried out in a number of different ways, most commonly by adding new donors to the east wall or the entrance corridor. In others, such as the seventh-century Cave 220, the entire pictorial program was plastered over and painted with a new one. Structural or architectural modifications were also often made, such as changing the shape of the entryway into the cave, or erecting temple structures on the cliff face. In some cases, renovations were carried out by members of a single clan over multiple generations. Not all of these approaches involved altering the main-chamber pictorial program significantly. Of those that did, most do not seem to respond directly to the specific contents of the caves they modify.

The Cave 61 corridor is a major exception to these standard modes of renovation. Our first sign of something unusual at work is its subject matter. Painted over what had most likely been larger-than-life paintings of the male Cáo clan members, a buddha now appears, in a categorically subordinate position to the central bodhisattva in terms of the overall cave program. Moreover, according to the reconstruction I propose below, this buddha and his retinue appeared twice in the original renovation and in two very different configurations, a phenomenon also virtually unknown at Dūnhuáng.

This repetition, I contend, was designed to establish a before-and-after temporal structure between the north and south corridor walls into which the rest of the cave contents were enfolded. The purpose was to enact a pictorial pilgrimage to Mount Wǔtái, which was not just a holy Buddhist site but one with deep astral and cosmological associations. Mañjuśrī, we recall, is a patron of astrology and the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture’s interlocutor. The mountain range, moreover, had long been associated with numinous celestial events. It was the site of imperial-sponsored astral propitiation rites carried out by none other than Būkōng himself. Tangut rulers had been denied access to this site since Wéimíng Yuánhào 嵬名元昊 (r. 1032-1048) declared himself the first Tangut emperor in 1038, precipitating a diplomatic break with the Northern Sòng. As with the original tenth-century cave production, the purpose of this virtual pilgrimage was to re-center the sacred Wǔtái landscape at Dūnhuáng, only now for the benefit of a non-Chinese empire.

How did this all work pictorially? Primarily, I argue, not through iconography or painting style but spatial configuration, both within and among discrete compositional units. As we shall see, Tejaprabhā assemblies had an unusual degree of investment in pictorial schema, owing not to the buddha alone but also his stellar retinue, and the special cosmological significance with which they were invested. The positions and orientation of the corridor’s monastic sponsors provide important cues to the meta-historical pilgrimage perpetually unfolding on the walls of this particular cave. But the way in which the astral gods are configured around Tejaprabhā does
a deeper, more historically and ideologically entangled kind of structuring work. Understanding how requires a significant excursus into the relationship between figuration and underlying cosmological schemas in Chinese art, their instantiation in depictions of the planet gods, and the reception and transformation of that heritage within Tangut culture.

**Figure-Schema Dialectics in Sinitic Culture: Seeing in Fives**

Scholars such as Aihe Wang and John Henderson have shown that the foundations of Chinese empire are inextricable from the ideological maturation of *wǔxíng* 五行 cosmology, according to which the universe is composed of *qì* 氣 that cycles through five elemental phases (*wǔxíng*) that are in turn inflected by rising and falling levels of *yīn* 陰 and *yáng* 陽 (fig. 136). The system of fivefold correlations was meant to account for the entire universe and all its phenomena, including the five planets visible to the naked eye.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planet</th>
<th>Elemental Phase</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter Suīxīng 岁星 (Year Star)</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Blue-green Dragon</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars Yinghuò 燎惑 (Sparkling Deluder)</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Vermillion Bird</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn Zhènxīng 鎮星 Quelling Star</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Four Quarters</td>
<td>Yellow Dragon</td>
<td>(Four Quarters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venus Tāibái 太白 (Great White)</td>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>White Tiger</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury Chénxīng 辰星 (Chronographic Star)</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Dark Warrior</td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 3.1. Classic Sinitic planetary correspondences, after the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, 2nd century BC.\(^{276}\)

As with many other forms of knowledge, astrological-astronomical expertise required, for most of imperial Chinese history, mastery of *wǔxíng-yinyang* cosmology, regardless of the specific application or context. The ascendancy of *wǔxíng* in the early centuries BC over other forms and possibilities in Chinese cosmology was part of a dialectic process, Wang has written, that produced empire itself. *Wǔxíng* superseded other forms of numerical correlation in contemporary circulation and moreover appropriated the much older *sìfāng* 四方 cosmology, which divided the realm into four quadrants (*sìfāng*), at the center of which was the ruler.\(^{277}\) The productive tension between this primarily spatial system (which, following Aihe Wang I refer to as *sìfāng*-center),\(^{278}\) and the primarily temporal *wǔxíng* is essential to keep in mind when examining the compositional structure of astral visual culture from the Sinitic realm.

Representations of the four (or two) quadrants in zoomorphic form as the *sìxiàng* 四象 are well known from early imperial times. They comprise the Blue-Green Dragon (Qīnglóng 青龍) of the east, Vermillion Bird (Zhūquè 朱雀) of the south, White Tiger of the west (Báihǔ 白虎) and, finally, Dark Warrior (Xuánwǔ 玄武) of the north (see table 3.1), which came to be represented as a serpent coiled around a tortoise. Used as orienting and framing devices, they frequently adorn the walls or ceilings of tombs or portable objects such as the famous lacquer casket in the Warring States tomb of Marquis Yī of Zēng (Zēng Hóuyǐ 曾侯乙) (c. 433 BCE) (fig. 137). Though only two of the four animals, the dragon and tiger, appear on the casket, their role as celestial markers is unmistakable, as they flank one of the earliest known Sinitic spatialized representations of the ring of twenty-eight lodges.\(^{279}\)

By contrast, the history of *wǔxíng* in early Chinese pictorial art—whether and when it acquired graphic notation—is unclear. Some scholars, including Wu Hung, have argued that a tomb at Jīngǔyuán 金谷園 (near Luòyáng dating to the Xin 新 dynasty (8-25 AD) contains one such example (fig. 138). In the flat, rectangular recess of the tomb’s vaulted front chamber

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\(^{277}\) For a critical review of modern, and particularly western, approaches to Chinese cosmology across a range of disciplines, see Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*, pp. 1-14.

\(^{278}\) Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*.

\(^{279}\) See Tseng, *Picturing Heaven*, pp. 236-299. The dragon-tiger juxtaposition appears as early as the Neolithic, for example in a burial site at Xīshuǐpō 西水坡, ca. 3000 BC (tomb 45). It preserves a tiger and a dragon formed in shells on either side of human skeletal remains. See Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*, p. 39.
ceiling, a protrusion appears at each corner and in the center to form a quincunx, like the five on a modern playing card or the number as written in archaic Chinese scripts.280

By the Sòng, a “golden age” of diagram culture that produced many of the earliest known visual renditions of classic charts and pictures (tú 图) discussed in ancient and early imperial texts, we are on solid footing.281 A poorly published handscroll depicting a Sòng-dynasty procession of the imperial “honor guard” in the collection of the National Museum of China, Beijing, known as the Dàjià lǔbù túshū 大駕鹵簿圖書 (Picture-book of the Grand Imperial Carriage and Honor Guard) demonstrates a refined attunement to the relationship between pictorial composition and cosmological order (fig. 139).282 Each class of officials in the procession can be identified not just by the ranked regalia of its constituents or accompanying labels in white cartouches, but also by the arrangement of each class into perfectly spaced sub-formations. Each individual figure, in other words, physically embodies his position within this crystalline representation of court-as-cosmos.

The Lǔbù túshū has a special astral orientation consistent with the nature of the imperial rite to which the honor guard is in the process of escorting the emperor, namely the sacrifice to Heaven in the Southern Suburbs. This much is made clear by the ranks of astral entities who appear just after the city officials (who, cloistered in their vermilion carriages, are essentially the opening act). In the middle of the first astral rank, a guardsman carries a banner that displays a graph representing Běidǒu 北斗, the Great Dipper, shown scoop-down and with its eighth “assistant”

280 Wu Hung writes that a “contemporary viewer would immediately recognize” the pattern on the tomb ceiling, “as a representation of the Five Elements (wood, fire, metal, earth, and water), and would mentally connect the isolated dots into a dynamic process of transformation that enlivens the universe. Indeed, as rudimentary as it is, this pattern was able to signify all natural and human phenomena.” Wu Hung, Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 152.


star Fǔxīng 輔星 (Alcor), forking the handle. Běidǒu is flanked on either side by banners depicting meteorological gods.

The row immediately following the dipper comprises, as the inscription at the top tells us, the “Five Planets Banner 五星旗.” Each planet is identifiable by its classic wǔxíng color, which appears in the clothing of both the gods on the banners and the riders who carry them. (These five-planet colors, in turn, conform to those of the classic sìxiàng, with the addition of Saturn, the planet of the center, who takes yellow.) Top to bottom, they are Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, and Mercury, a linear representation of the mutual production (xiāngshēng 相生) cycle, which, along with mutual conquest (xiāngkè 相剋), constitute the two major orders of cyclic transformation (fig. chart). This much is confirmed by the inscription above the planets, which affirms the correlations.

Zooming out, it becomes clear that cosmological notation is not limited in the Lǔbù túshū to explicitly denotative groups like the planets, whose very names told of their wǔxíng correlations, but also governs the visual mechanics of the entire handscroll. For example, the predominantly red color of the procession—in the banners, vehicles, and costumes—no doubt reflects the wǔxíng color association of the Sòng imperial house.

A passage ahead of the stellar ranks exemplifies the cosmological dynamism of this handscroll, in the spectacular, gold-finial dào 矛 banner that kicks off the entire main procession (fig. 140). Towering atop an implausibly slim mast, the banner features an arcane looking configuration of dots and lines. This pattern is in fact known as the Hétú 河圖, or River Diagram, a numeric configuration held to have appeared on the back of a dragon-horse (lóngmǎ 龍馬) in high antiquity and was seen as divinely conferred. Although mentioned in much earlier texts, the Hétú’s earliest known graphic notations (of which the Lǔbù túshū is one) do not predate the tenth century. As seen in other documents, the chart itself comprises ten groups of dots and lines arranged to form nested squares (fig. 141). Each group stands for a number from one to ten, white for odd and black for even. The Hétú, along with its pair the Luòshū 洛書, which takes in the Sòng the form of a base-three magic square, were associated with a range of divination techniques and generally seen to symbolize the conferral of heaven’s mandate.

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283 This fainter companion to the seven stars of Běidǒu is common in depictions of the asterism. The ability to see it was particularly valued in the Daoist tradition. See Schipper and Verellen, eds. The Taoist Canon vol. 2. pp. 1244-1245. See also Mollier, Buddhism and Taoism, p. 135ff; Huang, Picturing the True Form, p. 41ff.

284 “According to the [weft text] Shàngshū kǎo líng yào, Suìxīng (Jupiter) is the essence of wood, Yinghuò (Mars) is the essence of fire, Tàibái (Venus) is the essence of metal, and Chénxīng (Mercury) is the essence of water. 尚書考靈曜曰：歲星木精，熒惑火精，鎮星土精，太白金精，辰星水精也。”


286 On the Hétú as imperial regalia and its use in religious Daoism, see Michael Saso, "What Is the Ho-t'u?" History of Religions Vol. 17, No. 3/4, (Feb. - May, 1978): pp. 399-416. References to the Hetu and its counterpart, the Luoshu, are frequent in modern scholarship but a definitive study is not, to my knowledge, available.
The passage is further dynamized when we turn our attention to the figures in black on horseback beneath the Hétú banner (fig. 142). Surrounding the rider who holds the banner mast are four other riders positioned around him to form a square. They each hold a vertical rod similar in height and width to the central figure’s banner mast, as well as a string that connects just under the large fur tuft at the base of the Hétú banner’s gold finial. The figures thus physically embody the cosmological quincunx, becoming the five nodes that converge in the Hétú diagram on the banner above. Thus the two schemas are inextricably linked in causation.

To see both the Hétú and the quincunx requires an important shift in aspect that reveals the rigorous figure-schema dialecticism of the overall painting. The Hétú itself is depicted in the same in notational form it took in other contexts, such as printed in a book. Binary in nature, it can be “read” in a straightforward sense of the term. By contrast, in order to see the quincunx in the riders beneath the Hétú banner, they necessarily transform from the pictorial to the diagrammatic. It is less important, in other words, to see them as humans on horseback occupying real physical space (however little the painting discloses about what type of space it is), but rather that each figure is one node of the fivefold schema. (This schema might appear to be more generic than the Hétú, but it is no less culturally specific or numerically and cosmologically significant.)

Seeing the five riders as quincunx prompts a similar process of discovery throughout the handscroll that creates a dynamic chain of connectivity. The quincunx formed by the Hétú banner personnel links, for example, with the two side-by-side quincunxes formed by the riders of the banner dedicated to the deity White Marsh (Báizé 白澤) a few ranks behind them. Together the Hétú and White Marsh banners thus form three-fifths of a would-be meta-quincunx composed of fivefold sets of riders on horseback. And so on, in a dance of figure-schema alternations that propels the eye through the painting. Here, visual order emerges through a dialectic process of discovering parts of one schema in what seemed a moment ago to belong to another, like the trans-Eurasian motif of the three rabbits who share three ears in an endless mutual chase. In the Lǔbù túshū, however, the movement is not cyclic but progressive: though one may telescope between sub- or meta-schemas, the telos is always ultimately leftward toward the emperor’s carriage, and, implicitly, his destination beyond the painting at the sacrificial altar at the Round Mound (Yuánqiū 圓丘) in the Southern Suburbs. The Hétú, taking its rightful position at the beginning of this action, thereby enacts the very cosmogenesis of its own origin myth.

Vernacular Cosmologies and Seeing in Nines

Sinitic Buddhist astral texts readily incorporated the wǔxíng cosmological order with other ways of knowing the planets. For example, the Ōsaka handscroll discussed at the beginning of chapter two, despite drawing heavily on the Hellenistic zodiac and a still largely cryptic Indian or Iranian iconography, orders the five planets at the front of the scroll according to the mutual production sequence. The sìfāng-center spatial schema was also incorporated with non-Sinitic planetary knowledge in Buddhist texts including the Qīyào ràngzāi jué and the Fàntiān huǒluó

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287 However, the planets in the Míng-dynasty copy in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (see chapter two), follow the sequence Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mars, and Mercury.
jiǔyào. The wǔxíng and sìfāng-center schemas thus became important components of East Asian Buddhist astral visuality. This is nowhere more lucidly demonstrated than in the Japanese Hora chart, in which Saturn appears in the center, Mars in the south, Mercury in the north, Jupiter in the east, and Venus in the west (note that the east-west positions are reversed from modern orientation).

Given how powerful the classical wǔxíng schema was as an engine of correlation in Chinese culture and moreover its ideological success, it might be easy to overestimate the extent and importance of its historical application. All of the materials cited in the previous paragraph, for instance, feature more than one planetary schema. This includes the Japanese Hora chart, which in addition to the wǔxíng planetary directional schema features a second set of planets in a horizontal line across the very top of the composition, ordered as Venus, Sun, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Mercury, and Moon.

One likely reason that the wǔxíng did not ultimately supersede other medieval astral schemas has to do with simple numeric incompatibility. Quinary planetary systems were not prevalent in other parts of medieval Eurasia—many traditions conceived of seven planets, and nine had become the norm in Indian visual culture by the early seventh century. Septenary systems were known in a range of medieval Chinese texts, but seven-planet groupings are uncommon in Chinese pictorial materials, perhaps reflecting the number’s relatively weak symbolic significance there. In any event, seven would have stood no chance against the nine-planet system, which was easily spatialized into a symmetrical grid and corresponded with one of the most cosmologically resonant numbers in Sinitic culture.

Again, the Hora Chart is instructive, demonstrating how the first four deified planets (Sun, Moon, Rāhu, and Ketu) added to the group of five could be simply slotted into the ordinal directions to create a three-by-three grid. If anything, these additions should have only enriched the five-directions schema, introducing a binary reverberation reminiscent of the eclipse relations I argued for in tenth-century Tejaprabhā tableaus in chapter two. Outside the Buddhist context, moreover, the nonary schema was at least as important in Sinitic culture as the quinary one. It was the plan, for example, of the Míngtáng 明堂, a classic form in imperial Chinese architecture and ritual. No later than the tenth century, the nine-unit grid had also come to structure the Luòshū magic square, the mate to the Hétū discussed above, which, also redolent of divine favor, had become by Sòng times an important computation device in a range of divination practices.

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289 Literature on the Míngtáng is extensive. For a recent treatment see Tseng, Picturing Heaven in Early China; ch. 1.

290 On nonary cosmology, see Henderson, “Chinese Cosmographical Thought.”

Apart from the problem of how to reconcile culturally and numerically distinct systems, on-the-ground materials demonstrate that even when the quinary unit remained in play in Sinitic culture beyond the imperial court, it was often not oriented according to the orthodoxy wǔxíng or sìfāng-center schemas. Take, for example, the so-called “Divination of the Five Western Qin (Xīqín) States” 西秦五州占 system that emerged in the Hexi corridor during the time of Tibetan (Tǔbō 吐蕃) control (781-848). In this system, each of five regional city-states was correlated with one of the five planets.292

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town (East to West)</th>
<th>Planet</th>
<th>Yin-yang valence293</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wūwēi 武威</td>
<td>Yínghuò 炅惑 (Mars)</td>
<td>Great yang 大陽</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhāngyē 張掖</td>
<td>Tàibái 太白 (Venus)</td>
<td>Lesser yin 少陰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiǔquán 酒泉</td>
<td>Zhènxīng 鎮星 (Saturn)</td>
<td>中</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jìnchāng 晉昌</td>
<td>Chènxīng 辰星 (Mercury)</td>
<td>Great yin 大隕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dūnhuáng 敦煌</td>
<td>Suìxīng 岁星 (Jupiter)</td>
<td>Lesser yang 少陽</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2. Town-Planet correspondences in the Divination of the Five Xīqín States

Dūnhuáng manuscripts that record this system paint a bleak picture of invasion, civil unrest, and astral and meteorological calamity, instructing a “great general 大將” to purify himself, dress in clean clothes, bury the proper stellar talisman written on a peachwood slip at each of the four gates of the city, and recite a prayer.294 These documents are of great interest for the history of astral divination, but for our purposes it is most important to note that the planet-state correspondences does not seem to follow any standard wǔxíng system of correlation. It is unclear precisely how they emerged in this strongly Daoist rite,295 but in terms of their geographic positions along the Hexi corridor, the overall sequence is a mirrored alternation between yin and yang centered on Saturn. Thus it apparently makes use of longstanding cosmological principles without conforming to any orthodox or imperial order.

A similar phenomenon is at work in the 897 Tejaprabhā tableau (fig. 4). Among its remarkable features—its inscribed date, named producer-patron, and iconography—the

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293 This information is not in the text; here I extrapolate conventional understanding.

294 The Chinese term, zhòu 咒 is normally translated as “spell” or “incantation,” but the script that follows is standard Chinese and not the transliterated (pseudo-)Sanskrit one would expect of a spell.

295 As Yu Xin notes, the system does not indicate foreign influence, perceived or actual. See “Personal Fate and the Planets,” p. 184.
painting’s compositional peculiarity is seldom noted. Here, the planets are not so much assembled as *stationed* around the buddha—spaced at regular intervals, with ample space between each, they appear more like objects of worship in their own right than attendants. Compare, for example, a roughly contemporary Library Cave painting of a similar compositional format that depicts a procession of the guardian king Vaiśravaṇa (Pīshāmēn 呢沙門) over the sea (fig. 144). Here, a motley crew clusters behind the enlarged Vaiśravaṇa, filling the purple cloud conveyance to the point that it seems just barely to accommodate them. The contrast with the 897 Tejaprabhā painting is revealing: the Vaiśravaṇa assembly is dense in both the standard meaning of “compacted” and in Nelson Goodman’s sense of being pictorially replete, or in other words, “non-notational.” Unlike the *Lūbì tūshū* or the *Hora Chart*, that is, the specific and unique positions of each assembled figure in the Vaiśravaṇa painting do not together constitute a separate, semiotically distinct layer of meaning.

This is precisely where the 897 painting differs. The four yin-yang planets form a square about the central buddha, while the neutral planet of the center, Saturn, guides the ox cart to share a central axis with him. Manipulating spatial projection, the tableau expediently solves a serious hierarchical problem in the *Hora Chart*, namely that the major deity (in that case Mahāšiṣṭī) and a planet god, who was neither exclusively Buddhist nor an unequivocally auspicious figure, were both meant to occupy the center (a problem it tacitly seems to acknowledge in Saturn’s diminished scale). The position of Saturn at the center would remain one of the most consistent and cosmologically rich features of all Tejaprabhā assembly paintings.

Turning back to the other planets, we see again that their arrangement in the 897 painting does not follow that of any standard *wǔxíng* or *sìfāng*-center schema. Instead, it is closer to the apparently colloquial or vernacular order of the Xīqín divination system, which is based on yin-yang alternations about a centralized Saturn. There are, of course, any number of ways to read the planets’ relationships in the 897 Tejaprabhā painting: the gender likenesses in opposite corners of the square (Venus-Mercury and Jupiter-Mars), or the gender opposition across the central axis of the ox cart (Venus-Jupiter and Mars-Mercury). One might also read their sequence according to the clockwise direction of ritual circumambulation and end in the center, resulting in an order of Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn. This sequence is precisely the one used for the individual planetary mantras in the unknown-Táng translator version of the Tejaprabhā *dhāraṇī*. Moreover, the sequence is highly suggestive in transcultural terms—it is used, for example, in the *Yavanajātaka*, the seminal early Sanskrit work of Greek astrology, and was also known in early China. As Pingree writes, this sequence reflects the planets’ declining favorability in Greek astral sciences—Venus and Jupiter were beneficent, Mercury neutral, and Mars and Saturn baleful.

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Here we return to a central concern of the previous chapter, namely what happened when the classically variable entities of the planets were transformed into gods with distinct and highly recognizable individual identities. In the 897 Tejaprabhā procession, it seems that the nexus of variability has not so much disappeared as gone undercover, into the modified cosmological quincunx that I am arguing the deified planets collectively embody. That variability emerges now in the number of possible ways to read their relationships within the very schema they instantiate. The point is not that the planets’ positions in these tableaus never change—of course they do, even among just the four extant Tejaprabhā processions from Dūnhuang—but that their positionality as such had become an essential component of their symbolic meaning.

**Tangut Astral Schematics: Hierarchy and Containment**

A general or systematic theory of Tangut cosmology and its role in society does not survive in any known source. However, Tangut knowledge of a range of Chinese cosmological concepts and forms—among them wūxīng, yin-yang, and Míngtáng—is attested in many documents. These include dozens of divination records written in Tangut or Chinese and datable to the Xīxià related to a variety of practices and techniques. The academies of Chinese learning that were established during the Chóngzōng 崇宗 (Qiánshèn 乾順, r. 1086-1139) and Rénzōng reigns, moreover, may well have incorporated a systematic curriculum in Chinese cosmological thought, as did likely the calendar bureau. In any event, much remains unknown about how or to what extent wúxīng cosmology factored into Tangut knowledge of the planets, Buddhism, or statecraft.

In the absence of direct written statements about the composition and structure of the cosmos, Tangut linguistic reference works offer some insight. For example, the bilingual lexicon *Fan-Han Timely Pearl in the Palm* (Tang. Mji-Zar nflu dzjij bua pja gu njĩ 番漢合時掌中珠; Ch.: Fān-Hàn héshí zhǎngzhōng zhū 番漢合時掌中珠; hereafter *Timely Pearl*), dated to 1190, contains a variety of cosmological and astrological entries. One section lists a range of divination and horoscopical terms, indicating that the associated practices were known at least by name in Tangut culture by then. However, it is important to stress that just because the glossary features Sinic cosmological terms such as the sīxiàng, this is not, on its own, evidence that the associated concept was applied in a certain way, let alone that it was understood the same as in Chinese culture.

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298 See Niè Hóngyín "Xīxià wénxiàn zhōng de zhān bù." As Niè writes, hexagrams and Yījīng-based divination knowledge is documented, but techniques related to the sexagenary system, that is, gānzhī 干支 were more widespread (p. 3). Based on the famous bilingual Tangut-Chinese stele at the Gantong 觀通 monastery, which records a person who was both high-ranking monk and director of the Calendar Board, it seems that Buddhist institutions and calendar/mathematical divination were in some sense linked. See Dunnell, *Great State of White and High*, pp. 120, 136, 149.

299 On these educational institutions, see Galambos, *Translating Chinese Tradition*, pp. 111-113.

300 For a concise and up-to-date overview of Tangut textual sources, see Galambos, ibid, pp. 2-5.
The *Timely Pearl* offers more insight into Tangut cosmology when we examine its own structure. As compiler Gûlê Mâocâi骨勒茂才 (fl. twelfth c.) notes in the preface, the glossary is organized on the Sinitic “Three Powers三才” division of heaven, earth, and humankind,\(^{301}\) a cosmological schema developed in antiquity that was later used to structure encyclopedic works. Each section is then subdivided into three sections, as in the table below.\(^{302}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heaven</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Humankind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>天形上帝</td>
<td>地體上</td>
<td>人體上</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Heaven’s Constitution (^{303})</td>
<td>1. Earth’s Constitution</td>
<td>1. Human Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>天相中</td>
<td>地相中</td>
<td>人相中</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Heaven’s Marks</td>
<td>2. Earth’s Marks</td>
<td>2. Human Marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>天變下</td>
<td>地用下</td>
<td>人事下</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Heaven’s Transformations</td>
<td>3. Earth’s Functions</td>
<td>3. Human Actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3. Structure of the *Timely Pearl*

The upper, middle, and lower subdivisions conform to a threefold ontological hierarchy of essence, outward manifestation, and function. The first class of the three sub-categories is much smaller than the other two, lending a sense of multiplication that one might loosely compare with Daoist or Yijing cosmology. This is one of many promising lines of inquiry that could be taken with the *Timely Pearl*, but for now let us examine section 1.2, “Heaven’s Marks,” which features all of the astral entities in the Tejaprabhā cult. The lodges appear first, after the Sun, Moon, and the golden bird, jade rabbit, and cassia tree. They largely follow the standard Chinese order, with one or two variations or errors depending upon the edition.\(^{304}\) A series of terms related to divination follows. The four directional animals appear, again in the standard

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\(^{301}\) For a study, see Luc Kwanten, *The Timely Pearl: A 12th Century Tangut-Chinese Glossary* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997).


\(^{303}\) According to Huáng, et al, eds., ibid, in some editions 形 is replaced with 體. The equivalent Tangut character is consistent, and my translation reflects that consistency.

\(^{304}\) Huáng, et al, eds., ibid., p. 4.
Chinese order of Green Dragon, Vermillion Bird, White Tiger, and Dark Warrior. Subsequently the western zodiac signs are listed but, according to the version I consulted, only eleven appear and their sequence completely differs from any other of which I am aware.\textsuperscript{305} Table 3.4 compares this sequence with those in several other traditions and sources—Hellenistic astrology, an important Daoist text, and the 972 Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī frontispiece (see fig. 40).\textsuperscript{306}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timely Pearl in the Palm\textsuperscript{307}</th>
<th>Hellenistic</th>
<th>Dàomén dìngzhì 道門定製\textsuperscript{308}</th>
<th>972 Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī frontispiece\textsuperscript{309}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquarius</td>
<td>Aires</td>
<td>Libra</td>
<td>Leo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capricorn</td>
<td>Taurus</td>
<td>Scorpio</td>
<td>Virgo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>Gemini</td>
<td>Sagittarius</td>
<td>Scorpio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sagittarius</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>Capricorn</td>
<td>Libra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scorpio</td>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>Aquarius</td>
<td>Sagittarius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libra</td>
<td>Virgo</td>
<td>Pisces</td>
<td>Capricorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgo/Gemini?</td>
<td>Libra</td>
<td>Aires</td>
<td>Aquarius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>Scorpio</td>
<td>Taurus</td>
<td>Pisces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taurus</td>
<td>Sagittarius</td>
<td>Gemini</td>
<td>Aries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aires</td>
<td>Capricorn</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>Taurus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pisces</td>
<td>Aquarius</td>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>Gemini</td>
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<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Pisces</td>
<td>Virgo</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4. Various zodiac sequences

The planets are listed following a series of miscellaneous astral phenomena. First comes the core group of five with their elemental phase names, though not in either of the production/conquest sequences. Instead, they follow the same sequence of the Tejaprabhā planetary mantras discussed in reference to the 897 Dūnhuáng painting of Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, Earth (i.e., Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn).

More generally, the structure of the astral entries in the Timely Pearl sheds light on one of the most consistent compositional features of the all Tejaprabhā tableaus associated with

\textsuperscript{305} Visual evidence indicates that this was not the result of loss or other type of corruption, as the eleven terms start and end on a single page, and moreover the group is punctuated at the end by a decorative embellishment.

\textsuperscript{306} For an in-depth comparison of western zodiac sequences in many more Chinese sources, see Song, “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac during the Tang and Song Dynasties.”

\textsuperscript{307} Huáng, et al, eds., ibid., p. 15.

\textsuperscript{308} Dàomén dìngzhì 道門定製, compiled by Lǚ Yuánsù 吕元素 (fl. 1188-1201); edited by Hú Xiānlóng 胡湘龍; preface dated 1188. DZ 1224. See Verellen and Schipper, eds., Taoist Canon, vol. 2, pp. 1010-1012.

\textsuperscript{309} Read counterclockwise from the twelve o’clock position.
Tangut production, namely the segregation of different classes of deities into distinct vertical registers. Just as both the lodges and the zodiac appear ahead of the planets in the cosmological vision of the *Timely Pearl*, in Tejaprabhā tableaus they are uniformly positioned above them. However, this vertical hierarchy was not exclusive to the Tangut context—niche 169 at Bēishān fǒwān 北山佛窩, Dàzú, and the print found inside the Liāo pagoda cache at Yīng County 應縣, Shānxī, both do so too (figs. 23, 145). Disaggregation and spatial compartmentalization of astral entities by class—very different from the earlier integration we saw in the Ōsaka handscroll—had become by the eleventh century a mature transregional phenomenon.

Other sites, such as the Bezeklik grottoes near Turpan, demonstrate yet another tendency. This Buddhist grotto complex formerly housed a large-scale Tejaprabhā assembly (in the twentieth century it was detached from the wall, taken to Germany, and destroyed during World War II) (fig. 146). 310 Produced in roughly the eleventh-twelfth centuries by Uyghur Qočo-period (843-1209) artists, the tableau also segregates deities by astral class. However, it includes the twelve gods of the zoomorphic earthly branches (sometimes referred to as the Chinese zodiac), a subject unseen in Chinese paintings of Tejaprabhā and unknown in Tangut visual culture but unsurprising in a Turkic context. 311 The Bezeklik painting differentiates astral classes not by changes in scale and vertical position but simply by positioning them to different areas within the same ground plane. This reinforces the sense that these various groups of deities belong to different departments within an otherwise homogenous celestial bureaucracy. The Tangut paintings, by contrast, lend the sense that each astral class not only belong to different classes but perform very different functions.

The terms wǔxīng and yin-yang both appear in the *Timely Pearl*, but their positions do not necessarily reveal much beyond a general association with divination and/or cyclical reckoning. Yīn-yang appears before a series of meteorological terms (different types of wind, cloud, snow, mist, and so on.). Wǔxīng comes before the sexagesimal characters. The western zodiac, finally, merit extra mention, as their category term “twelve stellar palaces” (yà niǎo mìjiāng mǐ 米角 堊；shì’èr xīnggōng 十一星宮) appears not with the individual houses named toward the beginning of the section, but between the sexagesimal characters and the eight hexagrams. This seems a clear indication that the twelve “stellar palaces” represented primarily an abstract reckoning system in the Tangut context and not necessarily just specific constellations or divisions of the sky.

**Seven Regulators & Four Residuals vs. Center & Periphery**

As with the earlier Dūnhuáng cases, it is the planets who stand to reveal the most about Tangut astral visuality. In the *Timely Pearl*, the four hidden planets are listed after the five visible planets but alongside the sun and moon, which are designated “Great Yang and “Great

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310 Dating of Bezeklik materials remains a challenge. On this painting, which Lila Russell-Smith reidentified as Tejaprabhā based on photographs decades after the wall painting itself was destroyed, “Stars and Planets”; see also Mèng Sìhūì, “Tūlūfān Quīcī diqū Chīshèngguāng fō.”

311 For a summary of scholarship on the twelve duodenary animals and their use in Turkic cultures, see Baumann, *Divine Knowledge*, pp. 118-120.
Yin.” They are sequenced Ziqi, Rāhu, Ketu, Great Yang, Great Yin, and Yuēbèi.\textsuperscript{312} Two things are worth noting: first, given their position alongside the other planets and elevated titles, it seems that “Great Yang” and “Great Yin” here refer to the anthropomorphic Sun and Moon in contrast to the “sun” (be 我; rt 日) and “moon” (liji 青; yue 月) that open the same section. More importantly, the sequence of the hidden planets indicates no connection with the rising Chinese discourse of the “seven regulators and four residuals” (qízhèng-siyù 七政四餘) known in Ming textual sources. This binary classification effectively divided the pacers into good and bad camps—the visible and relatively predictable planets versus the unpredictable, invisible, or baleful, and ultimately, to critics, heterodox. The dichotomy played in an important part in the eventual calls for the expulsion of Ziqi and Yuēbèi, for whom scholars could find no astronomical utility, from the roster of planets.\textsuperscript{313}

The qízhèng-siyù grouping is a pivotal moment of transition in astral visual culture of the tenth to fourteenth centuries. It furnished a new structure for later Tejarūbhā tableaux, most notably the colossal Yuán-period wall painting once adorning the Main Hall of the Guāngshèng Monastery Lower Temple in Hóngdōng 洪洞 County, Shānxī, and now housed in the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City (fig. 147).\textsuperscript{314} In this triadic assembly, the bodhisattvas Sūryaprabha 日光菩薩 and Candraprabha 月光菩薩. The planets are relegated to the upper margins and divided into two groups: the “regulators” of Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn gather at Tejarūbhā’s right (fig. 148), and the “residuals” of Rāhu, Ketu, Ziqi, and Yuēbèi at his left (fig. 149).\textsuperscript{315}

\textsuperscript{312} Huáng, et al, eds., Timely Pearl, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{313} See Nǐ, Xīwàng Fǎntiān, pp. 175-179. The “four residuals” grouping was also used by Schlegel, who identified them all as Indian in origin. Uranographie chinoise, pp. 643-646.

\textsuperscript{314} As Anning Jing writes, the monastery came into prominence when some 4,700 juan of a Jīn-dynasty (1115-1234) Buddhist canon were discovered in the monastery in 1933 (Jing, Water God’s Temple, p. 204). For a study of the monastery and in particular its important sub-temple dedicated to the cult of the local water god, see Jing, Water God’s Temple.


\textsuperscript{315} Various identifications for the four dark planets in this painting have circulated. High-quality photographs reveal scaly, serpentine tails on the two demonic figures at rear, leaving little doubt that they represent Rāhu and Ketu. The loose-haired, sword-brandishing figure in front of them is consistent, as we have seen, with eleventh- and twelfth-century depictions of Yuēbèi, making the refined young official directly to the viewer’s right Ziqi. The painting shares much in common with the astral assembly at the Daoist temple of Yōnglè gōng. In both paintings, Mars, for example, is shown emitting a burst of flames from his raised arm. On Yōnglè gōng, see Lennert Gesterkamp, The Heavenly Court: Daoist Temple Painting in China, 1200-1400 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
This new twofold structure for the planets was the result of no simple shift. The Nelson-Atkins painting is shot through with many kinds of binaries—the elegantly counterposed bodhisattvas, a carefully alternated major palette of red and green (fig. 150), and, most obviously, the Sun and Moon, who have been plucked from the two main planetary groupings to be stationed at opposite sides of the painting’s lowest, front-most position. This takes advantage of a broader and much older phenomenon in Buddhist “transformation tableaus” (biànxiàng) in which historical figures are conflated with rulers who appear in scriptural narratives, for example the Táng emperor who appears in Dùnhuáng Vimalakīrti-Mañjuśrī tableaus as though personally attending their revered debate in ancient India (fig. 151). This tradition continued to transform into the Yuán, notably in Maitreya transformation tableaus, in which king and queen assume similar positions on either side of the assembly that the Sun and Moon now occupy in the Nelson-Atkins painting. Although it survives in a much less complete state, this same convention was clearly also used in the second Tejaprabhā wall painting from the Guǎngshèng Lower Monastery, the smaller-scale and probably later wall painting originally in the Front Hall that was discussed in the opening to chapter one of this dissertation (see fig. 19). Now separated from the core group of planets into which they had gradually become integrated in previous centuries, the Sun and Moon gained in these large-scale monastery wall paintings a new type of interpretative symbolic richness not limited to astral subjects.

In addition to elevating and enriching the figures of the Sun and Moon, the Nelson-Atkins painting’s new binary mode draws out the most important distinction in the Tangut Tejaprabhā tradition: the unique symbolic agency retained by each individual planet, expressed through relative position in the overall schema. In the Lower Monastery painting, aside from the Sun and the Moon, the individual positions of the nine remaining planets are unimportant in terms of the overall binary schema, much like the astral gods in the Bezeklik wall painting. In this sense the Tangut paintings are the more direct heir to the Dùnhuáng Tejaprabhā processions, inheriting the same symbolic mechanism (if not the specific five-phases cosmological discursive tradition).

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316 The colossal painting was cut into rectangular sections when removed from the temple in the early twentieth century. They are now installed, reassembled, in Kansas City. Losses that resulted from the removal and a subsequent heavy-handed restoration by the dealer C. T. Loo (1880-1957) present serious challenges to art historical research, particularly with respect to materials concerns such as pigment. Recent conservation work by the museum, however, affirms that the palette originally used in the painting was overwhelmingly red and green. On conservation issues, Kathleen M. Garland, “Surveying Paradise: The Conservation Survey of a YuanDynasty Wall Painting on a Clay Base,” in Conservation of Ancient Sites on the Silk Road: Proceedings of an International Conference on the Conservation of Grotto Sites, ed. Neville Agnew (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1997), pp. 297-302. On the painting’s distinctive use of color, see Ling-en Lu, “Pigment Style and Workshop Production in the Yuan Dynasty Wall Paintings from the Lower Guangsheng Monastery,” in Original Intentions: Essays on Production, Reproduction, and Interpretation in the Arts of China, Nicolas Pearce and Jason Steuber, eds. (University Press of Florida, 2012). On the overall temple complex, see Anning Jing, The Water God’s Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery.

This observation is particularly useful for understanding the Tangut conceptualizations of the four “dark planets.” As we saw with their iconography in chapter two, their compositional positions evince a relatively fluid understanding of their roles and identities. But this was far from arbitrary or superficial. In the *Timely Pearl*, Yuèbèi is listed after the deified Moon, another suggestion of the deity’s association with the lunar apogee as discussed in chapter two. Moreover, in the Rènzōng-era revision of the Tejaprabhā *dhāraṇī* scripture (which we recall features the new Tangut planetary iconography) Yuèbèi appears immediately after Ketu. Zǐqì follows Jupiter, who again is a kind of master to this sole benevolent imaginary planet. In the Grahamātṛkā mandala liturgy discussed in chapter four, we will see this tradition continue, with important implications for the history of Tangut astral sciences. While these relationships between Yuèbèi and Ketu or Saturn and Zǐqì and Jupiter are consistent with what scholars understand to have been their astronomical values (i.e., as lunar apogee and intercalary month), a somewhat different scenario plays out in the Tejaprabhā tableaus.

In all but one of the five paintings published from Kharakhoto that survive sufficiently intact, as well as both of the badly damaged Tejaprabhā tableaus from the Hóngfó 宏佛 pagoda north of the Xīxià capital of modern Yīnchuān 银川, Rāhu, Ketu, and Yuèbèi are stationed, along with Mars, at the four corners of the overall planetary group (figs. 78, 152-156). The one painting that does not follow this convention, which also features a masculine Moon (see discussion in chapter two), positions Zǐqì and Yuèbèi on either side of the buddha at the rear (fig. 157). The remaining seven planets gather to form an inner assembly arranged symmetrically about the central axis. As with the 897 tableau, their positions are not completely fixed from composition to composition. However, their mates are—Mercury always pairs with Venus, Jupiter with Zǐqì, and Sun with Moon. The exception, yet again, is Saturn, who remains locked to the central vertical axis. In some examples, such as the best-published Tejaprabhā tableau from Kharakhoto (identified by the Hermitage inventory number X-2424) (fig. 78), the compound schema is reiterated through halo colors. The four outer deities all have orange halos, while the inner deities share the same color as their partner: red for Venus and Mercury, blue-green for Jupiter and Zǐqì, and green for Sun and Moon green. Ever-singular Saturn’s halo is a conspicuous mineral white.

Spacing, viewpoint, posture, and pose also perform a strongly schematizing function. The planets in X-2424 are packed in around the buddha, their binary relationships further expressed through spacing at tight, symmetrical intervals and ladder-step recession. Another high-quality but more decayed painting from Kharakhoto, X-2426 (fig. 154), arranges the planets in a looser, near-circle in front of Tejaprabhā. Here, the logic of containment becomes even more explicit, as the four wrathful planets, now uniformly masculine and unclothed from the waist up, mirror each other across the diagonal. Dark Rāhu and a blood-red Mars cry out, mouths agape, their curtains of hair flying madly (fig. 159). Shadowy Ketu and a bulked-up Yuèbèi—now a warrior bearing the unidentified mounded object, miniature head atop his own—are shown in a sharply contrasting repose (fig. 160), their loose hair hanging calmly down their backs. Once again, pictorial evidence indicates a close connection between Ketu and Yuèbèi.

In these Tangut paintings, instead of the “seven regulators and four residuals” model we saw in the Guǎngshèng monastery tableau, the five-planets schema of the 897 tableau, or any other configuration suggested in known texts, we encounter something that could be described more along the lines of “nine gods and four guardians.” We are heading straight into the realm of the mandala. X-2426 makes the point most explicit, allotting the planets what appears to have been a larger area than that given to the buddha. Their already high ground plane is raised even
further by means of the flattened checked floor pattern. Thus, in six Tangut paintings found at two sites separated by hundreds of miles and great distinctions in quality and style, the external discourses of astrological correspondences and ritually unmediated cosmos came to be replaced by an original, internal, almost tantric logic of enclosure and containment, center and periphery.

**Staging a Tangut Mount Wūtái**

Newly sensitized to the importance of compositional structure and figure-schema dynamics in astral visual culture, we return to the Cave 61 corridor in an attempt to reconstruct its substantial missing portions. Immediately apparent is that a large amount of content is duplicated on both walls. Full sets of the lodges and zodiac can be inferred on both, as in the duplicated signs of Capricorn, Libra, and the pair of girls in non-Han robes normally identified as Virgo (figs. 160). (Side-by-side comparison also suggests that the zodiac signs on the south wall may have been reworked in a later period.) Although portions of only four planets survive on the north wall, Venus is readily identified on both by her pipa (figs. 161). Therefore, not only were seemingly minor or non-narrative elements repeated, such as the bands of seated buddhas across the top border of each wall, the assembly itself was depicted twice and, most importantly, in two different configurations. Filling in the north wall’s gaps, then, and following the surviving planets’ gestures and gazes, all signs indicate that the portion on the entrance side of the north wall once contained none other than a second depiction of Tejaprabhā and his remaining assembly members (fig. 162).

What, then, can be made of the relationship between the two assemblies? And why take such pains to make them so distinct? The planets, once more, play an essential role. As we saw in chapter two, beginning in roughly the tenth century, Venus was sometimes shown playing the pipa, and at other times with it covered. Here that distinction is not simply an elegant variation, but also a narrative device. On the north wall, she actively plays the instrument and her golden headdress is exposed as the procession enters the main chamber. On the south wall, where the procession moves in the opposite direction toward the exit, her hands, headdress, and instrument are all draped with cloth, her performance evidently finished. Similarly, the Sun carries a ceremonial tablet on the north wall, his solar disk floating on a cloud in front of him, but has evidently put it away on the south.

If my reconstruction is accurate, the two assemblies thus together depict a coherent narrative, namely the act of entering and leaving the main chamber, having paid their respects to

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318 A photograph taken in 1935 by Desmond Parsons of the south wall shows a rather straight diagonal cut down through the entire assembly that levels out toward the cave main chamber, suggesting that its bottom portion was intentionally removed. An attempt was also made to remove the figure I identify as Jupiter.

319 It is uncertain, however, how many lodges would have constituted a complete set, as some Tangut materials seem to have originally depicted more than twenty-eight.

320 Although some Dūnhuáng cave-shrines depict the same scriptural tableaux twice, all other cases of which I am aware are straightforward duplications of complete compositions. Here, their content is repeated but their configurations are completely distinct.
Mañjuśrī at a Mount Wūtái transposed onto the rear wall of a colossal cave built more than a century prior. This basic structure is made clear by the tableaus’ treatment of atmospheric phenomena alone (figs. 134, 162). On both walls, the horizontal bands of mist behind the lodges establish the general deep-space celestial setting. The thinner, diagonally striated wisps indicate their approach from afar. The billows of cushiony banks, finally, both record and anticipate the specific movements of the groups they support—upward and inward on the north wall, downward and outward on the south.

The question remains: of all the deities documented in the Tangut corpus, why should Tejaprabhā—again, a buddha—be chosen to make this act of homage to the venerable but hierarchically subordinate bodhisattva? To answer this, three issues need to be examined. The first two are primarily historical, namely Mañjuśrī’s and Wūtái’s association with astral portents and propitiation rites and the relationship of Tangut rulers to them. The third issue capitalizes on the major issue we have been working through this chapter, namely the role of Tejaprabhā’s assembly in creating a uniquely Tangut astral visuality.

Upon the order of Táng emperor Dàizōng 代宗 (727-779), in the summer of 770 AD Bùkōng dispatched an inauspicious comet on Mount Wūtái (huìxīng 彗星) with Buddhist ritual, thereby delivering the realm from calamity and the emperor from disfavor. Recounted in a Sòng-dynasty hagiography, this biographical snippet exemplifies a classic trope of Táng-dynasty Buddhism—a charismatic monk, in collaboration with the emperor, employs occult ritual techniques to intervene in the workings of heaven in order to protect the state. It demonstrates the great power Bùkōng had attained at the Táng court, as well as Wūtái’s importance as a site of meteorological and astral prodigies, and therefore its role in gauging imperial mandate.

Whether or not Tangut rulers were aware of Bùkōng’s legendary feat of astral propitiation on Mount Wūtái on behalf of the dynasty whose greatness they, like their rivals, sought to equal, they were certainly in touch with Wūtái’s importance as a nexus of spiritual and temporal power. Some of the earliest recorded activity for Tangut rulers is petitioning the Sòng to establish temples and worship at Mount Wūtái, for example when Xià Tàizōng 夏太宗 (Lǐ Démíng 李德明; r. 983-1032) sought to memorialize his mother there. Tangut official access to the site was cut off after Wéimíng Yuánhào declared himself emperor of the Xià dynasty in 1038, and the Tanguts subsequently established a “Northern Wūtái,” which is thought to have been located in the Alashan (Hèlán 贺蘭 mountains) near the Tangut capital. The Tanguts


322 Chou Yi-liang’s translation of this record in the Song Traditions of Eminent Monks 宋高僧傳 reads: “In the summer of the fifth year [770 A. D.], when a comet appeared, an imperial order was issued to invite Amoghavajra to Mt. Wu-t’ai to recite sutras. After the religious ceremony was over, the comet vanished immediately.” 五年夏有詔。請空往五臺山修功徳。于時彗星出焉。法事告終星亦隨沒。T 2061, 50:713a17-713a19. See Chou, “Tantrism in China,” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 8, No. 3/4 (Mar., 1945), pp. 241-332.

323 This “northern Wūtái” is mentioned in a variety of Xīxià sources, including inscription at the Mògāo grottoes. See Shǐ, Xīxià fójìào shìlùē, pp. 118–119; Dunnell, Great State of White and High, pp. 35-36; It
thereby joined a longstanding tradition across East Asia for geographically transposing the hallowed site, of which the topographic painting produced by the Tanguts’ predecessors on the west wall of Mògāo 61 is one of the most spectacular examples.

There is some reason to think that Tangut rulers also responded to astral calamity by making mountain retreats. Nineteenth-century historian Wú Guǎngchéng 吳廣成 (fl. 1820s) recorded that in the fall of 1030 Mars entered the asterism of the Southern Dipper 南斗 (π Sagittarii), which was held to signal a ruler’s impending downfall. In response, then-ruler Xià Tàizōng (1004-32)—the same figure who petitioned to travel to the “original” site, reportedly went into the Alashan to perform ritual austerities. This reference clearly reflects outsider values and views of the Tanguts at least in part, as Mars threatening the Southern Dipper had developed into a Chinese literati trope for inauspicious fate from the time of Hán Yù 韓愈 (768-824)—it even appears, we recall, in the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture as one of the few astral events mentioned with any specificity. In any event, Tàizōng’s purported mountain propitiation clearly worked, and in the decades that followed the Tanguts expanded their control eastward, taking over Guāzhōu 瓜州 (modern Ānxī 安西) and eventually Shāzhōu (Dūnhuáng). Numerous modern commenters on Tejaprabhā visual culture have suggested that specific works can be interpreted as apotropaic responses to specific natural disasters. It may be possible to make such a connection with the Tangut repainting of Cave 61. For example, Chinese sources indeed record a series of major calamities and disasters in the earthquake-prone Tangut country during the early years of the Rénzōng reign, as a result of which the reign title was changed from Dàqìng 大慶 to Rénqìng 人慶 in 1143. This, of course, is the emperor whose


On these transpositions, see Lin, Building a Sacred Mountain, esp. chapter six.

Wú Guǎngchéng 吳廣成 Xīxià shūshì 西夏書事 (preface 1826), in Xīxiā sikū quānshū 續修四庫全書 v. 334 (Shānghǎi gǔjí chūbānshè, 2002), 283–700; See Galambos, Translating Chinese Tradition, p. 59, on the limitations of this and the other nineteenth-century Xīxià history, Zhāng Jiàn’s 張鑒 (1768–1850) Xīxià jìshì běnmò 西夏紀事本末 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe,1998).

As Wéi Bǐng has argued, Nándǒu was considered vulnerable in part because, as Hán Yù lamented with respect to his own inauspicious nativity, it was the lodge of Capricorn. See Wéi Bǐng, “Wēnrén hé tāmen de Mójìe gōng.”

The standard date of 1038 for the beginning of the Xīxià period at Dūnhuáng is problematic, since, as Galambos points out, the local Dūnhuáng community was still sending its own envoys to Sòng in 1036, and the earliest inscriptive evidence for Tangut control dates to 1074. See Galambos, Translating Chinese Tradition, pp. 106-107.

For example, Gridley writes in “Images from Shanxi” (p. 10) that the hand-colored Liao-period Tejaprabhā assembly print was sealed in a central cavity of a central buddha sculpture on the fourth floor of the Yingxian pagoda in response to the Crab Nebula of 1054, which is famously recorded in East Asian sources.

Sòngshǐ 宋史 486, 14024. Galambos, Translating Chinese Tradition, p. 112. See also Dunnell, Alien
more than fifty-year reign saw the publication of multiple versions of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī, including the imperially sponsored edition featuring the updated eleven-planet pictorial roster. It is clear that the cult was more generally on the uptick at this time.

Moreover, even if the Mògāo 61 Tejaprabhā tableaus were produced in reaction to a specific astral event, this still does not explain why they should look any particular way, and most importantly, why the artists chose to depict them in procession format. The cultic reason, again, is clear: to connect Tejaprabhā directly with Mount Wutai and Mañjuśrī. Narrative was the engine powering this connection, both within and among discrete compositions. Given the sensitivity, as we have seen, with which Tangut Tejaprabhā painters made their compositional decisions, it is important to emphasize that Cave 61 is the only example of a Tangut Tejaprabhā procession known from any site. The two other roughly contemporary works in the Dünhuáng region, for example, take the forms of a standard frontal assembly (at Wugemiao 五個廟) and, as discussed at the end of chapter two, the completely original Himalayan-style ceiling mandala in Mògāo 465. The choice to depict Tejaprabhā’s assembly in procession, I suspect, may have been self-consciously tailored to local precedent.

Archaicism was a well-established practice for certain subjects at Dünhuáng, most famously the Miraculous Image of Liángzhōu (Liángzhōu ruixiàng 涼州瑞像), which was consistently depicted in a rigid, contour-heavy Six Dynasties (220-589) style by later makers (fig. 163). The Tangut understanding of the Liángzhōu ruixiàng is a topic in need of more study, but, as Zhāng Xiǎogāng 張小剛 has shown, they were at least minimally engaged in the pictorial tradition—the original miraculous icon, after all, was in Xīxià territory (fig. 164).

In any event, the configuration of the Mògāo 61 procession seems too close to its local Dünhuáng predecessors to be mere coincidence. The similar angle of rotation, the oversized wheel, the double banners flying behind: all point to a self-conscious appropriation of the older procession model. From what we can make of them, the positions of the planets even retain

Regimes, 199.

330 See Zhao Feng and Michelle McCoy, “Cat. 10: Miraculous Image of Liangzhou,” in Cave Temples of Dunhuang: Buddhist Art on China’s Silk Road, exh. cat., Neville Agnew, Marcia Reed, and Teyvy Ball, eds. (Los Angeles: Getty, 2016), pp. 200-203.


332 The Gantong temple, which historically housed and/or commemorated the “miraculous visage” (shèngróng 聖容), is the subject of the bilingual Chinese-Tangut stele that has long been an essential source in Tangut studies—it is the centerpiece, for example of Ruth Dunnell’s monograph on Buddhism in Tangut history (Dunnell, Great State of White and High). One of the only Tangut paintings known to contain textual dating evidence is a crowned rendition of this icon from Kharakhoto. The statue holds a coin with a Northern Yuan reign title. This is extremely significant for the dating of not just the overall site of Kharakhoto, whose finds, one would reasonably expect, a very broad historical range but the main stupa cache, since this where Kozlov is normally thought to have found this painting. The absence of systematic excavation records by Kozlov and his team, their destructive methods, and Kozlov’s own later conflicting, even fanciful accounts of the physical arrangement of materials in the stupa make this a great unsolved mystery of Tangut art and architectural history.
traces of the late Táng schema. The four corners of the square formed about the central axis of the 897 painting are there, in Venus and Mercury’s position out front, and Mars and what appears to be Jupiter behind them. Saturn is easily pictured leading the group in the large swath now lost in front of them. Like the lodges and zodiac, the additional planets were simply slotted in around them: Sun and Moon trail the buddha on either side of the banners; Yuēbèi, identifiable by the severed head dangling from his lower right hand, fills the space behind them. Rāhu, indicated by a disc held aloft in the partially surviving left hand that appears in front of Venus was stationed, it seems, next to the youthful official who most likely represents Zǐqì (fig. 165). Thus, the center-periphery model that proved so robust in the portable Tangut assembly paintings has been broken down, and a bulked-up version of the five-planet schema now quietly takes its place.

If this all comes off as analytic overreach, it is worth recalling that the Wǔtái mountains was itself a colossal five-phases schema—its name, of course, literally means “Five Terraces,” and each “terrace,” or peak, embodied one of the directions (fig. 166). This, in fact, structures many of the depictions of Wǔtái at Dūnhuáng, including the entire panoramic tableau on the west wall of Cave 61’s main chamber. From the viewer’s left, we proceed from South to West, North, and East peaks, anchored by the Middle peak, elevated in the center. Comparatively inconspicuous sun and moon disks appear at left and right margins of the panorama, quietly but powerfully anchoring the overall cosmological schema. Too little is known about Tangut cosmology to say whether we can read the five planets in the Tejaprabhā procession as asserting one-to-one correspondence with the peaks. But this much is clear: the Tangut presence in this cave is asserted on a much more fundamental level than simply the insertion of new donors. It is more fundamental, as well, than the addition of overtly Tangut imperial symbols, such as the dragon insignias that have replaced the clouds on Tejaprabhā’s banners (figs. 167, 168). This new procession sought no less than to remake the Wǔtái cosmos in the Tangut imperial image.

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333 See, for example, Cave 237, which assumes even more of the quincunx shape, as Mañjuśrī, haloed, materializes in the air above the central peak. The schema is maintained in different spatial formats as well, for example the “double niche” folding screen-like example in Cave 361. See Lin, Building a Sacred Mountain, p. 169.
Chapter Four

The Kharakhoto Astral Mandala

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how the schema served to accommodate and organize the growing panoply of astral deities within the Tejaprabhā cult. Particularly for the Tanguts, the schema played a more active role than simply to predetermine the positions of figures within any given composition. Instead, because these figures necessarily both responded to and produced certain basic pictorial constraints and principles such as spatial uniformity and symmetry, I have argued that the schema effectively served to condition the identities of the planet gods. This explains, for example, why fiery Mars came to be consistently grouped with the three wrathful pseudoplanets Rāhu, Ketu, and Yuèbèi instead of the benevolent fourth pseudoplanet Zǐqì. Moreover, we examined a general trend in the Tangut materials for nesting multiple schemas within a single composition. This created a type of compound visuality in which one schematic layer dialectically interacts with another. The nature of the Tangut compound schema in the Tejaprabhā tableaus we saw to be that of enclosure and containment, within which multiple sets of binary relationships flash into view through mirroring and, in some cases, color coding. I suggested that all of these features would seem to point in the direction of the mandala, a pictorial form that by this period deployed many of the same relational devices I have just noted.

It is striking, then, that when we do encounter a Tangut astral mandala (fig. 169), the ordered compound schema of the vertical Tejaprabhā tableaus seems to be missing. Instead the planets are configured in an unusual, asymmetrical, and somewhat haltingly rendered array of nine shapes—pairs of circles, squares, triangles, and teardrops (representing grain, see below), and finally a single covered bottle. This configuration is not attested in any other Buddhist mandala of which I am aware. Moreover, it is centered on not a Buddhist deity but the Sun in the guise of a worldly ruler. Despite the planet deities’ Sino-Tangut appearances, the closest sources for this nine-unit array that I have been able to identify are found in planetary propitiation rites that were a widespread feature of medieval pan-Indian religion.334 A sufficiently historical explanation for why this form appears in the Tangut mandala is not yet possible. Thus, many of the comparisons in this chapter are of a primarily structural or visual rather than historical nature.

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Despite the widely acknowledged historical importance of this painting, many of its significant features cannot be discerned in published reproductions. They have therefore not been sufficiently examined. For this reason, this chapter offers an in-depth analysis of this single painting based on in-person study in St. Petersburg in December 2015. I also examine the painting’s close connection with Tangut ritual texts belonging to the cult of the “Planet Mother” Grahamāṭṛkā, one of which was studied and partially translated by Nikolai Nevsky before it went missing after he was arrested by Soviet authorities in 1937. Nevsky’s study, especially in its partial English and Chinese translations, has in turn become the painted mandala’s primary textual reference. Another important Tangut Grahamāṭṛkā document has been studied and translated into Chinese in a forthcoming publication by Wèi Wén 魏文 and Xiè Háoyuè 謝皓月 under the advisement of Kirill Solonin (Suǒ Luóníng 索羅寧). I examine these texts for the sake of elucidating or affirming aspects of the painting and not to suggest that it was produced in direct consultation with the them (as we shall see, visual evidence indicates that it was not), or even used as a ritual object in ways it is now possible to understand.

Although further study is needed before many of the questions that this material poses can begin to be addressed, the visual evidence indicates that the mandala was in a state of active formation when this painting was made. Considered alongside other Tangut materials, moreover, the painting documents a link between the Sinitic dhāraṇī cult of Tejaprabhā and two other astral incantatory goddess cults, the “Great Peahen” Mahāmāyūrī and Grahamāṭṛkā, and their mutual transformation into a tantric mandala.

**Mandala as Pictorial Composite**

Produced with opulent materials by high-status patrons yet seemingly experimental in content and composition, the Kharakhoto astral mandala is easily among the most distinctive works of Tangut visual culture (fig. 169). Roughly five feet square, its exceptionally large ground was constructed from three pieces of fine plain-weave silk stitched together at horizontal and vertical seams that have been backed with a lightweight, flexible textile by modern conservators. Pin-sized holes around the outer edges of the silk indicate that the painting was originally mounted, presumably with a heavier-weight textile border attached to a backing textile. Three seals appear on the painting’s reverse (fig. 170)—two are square, and the third is in

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335 Literature on this painting includes Samosyuk, Buddijskaya zhivopis’, pp. 62–69, 197–199; idem, “The Planet Cult in The Tangut State of Xixia–The Khara Khoto Collection, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg,” Silk Road Art and Archaeology 5 (1997/98): 353–368; and Pi-fen Chung, “Visible and Invisible,” 106–204. The latter study contains errors of fact regarding directional orientation, the presence of seals on the painting’s reverse, and the names and relationships of key deities. Just as I was completing this dissertation, Liào Yáng generously shared a pre-publication version of an essay on this painting with me. I have done my best to address her findings and analysis in the limited time that remained. Liào, “Hēishuǐchéng xīngyào màntūluō,” Dūnhuáng yánjiū 敦煌研究 (forthcoming).

336 Suǒ, Wèi, and Xiè, “‘Shèng yàomǔ zhōngdào fāshì gōngyǎng gēn’” (forthcoming). I thank Kirill Solonin and participants for inviting me to participate in the seminar in which this text was read.
the shape of a gourd. Though all are decayed past the point of legibility, one bears resemblance to seals used by Xīxià Buddhist officials (fig. 171).337

The painted surface has also sustained significant loss, making it difficult to identify features such as specific zodiac signs and even more so to comment definitively on its use of pigments. That said, the approach to medium seems to be similar to that in other Tejaprabhā paintings—bright colors and ink are applied lightly enough that the texture of the silk ground remains partially visible. Contrasting sharply with the darker, opaque pigmentation of many Tangut paintings on hemp or canvas, this pigment style puts the mandala in company with a subset of Tangut works cited for their importance to the history of early Sino-Tibetan art.338

Unlike its approach to medium, which is relatively uniform in stylistic and technical terms, the pictorial subjects themselves are readily bisected into two distinct stylistic and iconographic canons. First, the Sino-Tangut astral gods and zodiac signs we have come to know in this dissertation appear in the central precinct (figs. 172, 173). Second, Himalayan iconography and style are used for many of the surrounding deities, as well as the overall palace structure that encloses the central precinct (fig. 174). This structure comprises four multi-layered square walls bisected by t-shaped gates, thinner outer rings of lotus petals and flames, and vajra prongs that extend to each corner as though a double vajra stabilizing and protecting the entire array.339

One major element is left unaccounted for, namely the shapes in the central precinct. Before we turn to the task of identifying the deities, several formal issues stand out as unresolved. First, the central deities do not come close to filling their chambers, which themselves bleed into other zones (fig. 175). Moreover, other deities appear in the spaces between them, lacking distinct enclosures of their own. Such issues are not found in other Kharakhoto mandalas with similar outer palace structures, for example a pair depicting Uṣṇīṣavijaya (fig. 176).340 In these mandalas painted on wooden boards, each element in the

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337 As with coins, Tangut seals were some of the first elements of Tangut material culture to be assessed by modern scholars. See Luó Fúyí 羅福額, Xīxià guānyìn huì kǎo 西夏官印匯考 (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin Press, 1982). See also Bai Bin, “Xīxià guānyīn, qiánbì, tóngpái kǎo” 西夏官印、錢幣、銅牌考, in Xixia wenwu 西夏文物, Shǐ Jīnbō 史金波, et al eds. (Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1988); and ibid., cats. 144–183.

338 See Stoddard, Early Sino-Tibetan Art, pp. 9–25. It seems that although Chinese-style coloration and line were notionally linked to the silk ground (which, like paper, was by all appearances a Chinese-identified material in the Tangut context), the actual use of silk was not necessary to invoke its visual effects. The Xīxià-period wall paintings of Yulin Cave 3, the ground for which is plastered conglomerate, are among the most robust examples of this type of play with pigment stylistics.

339 On this feature, see Liào, “Hēishuǐchéng xīngyào màntúluō” (forthcoming).

340 The Tangut inscriptions that survive, faintly, on the surface of these Uṣṇīṣavijaya mandalas recall Dunhuang drawings that also feature inscribed incantations, as though to bridge the amulet and mandala. On the Kharakhoto Uṣṇīṣavijaya paintings and their possible husband-and-wife donors (who seem to have been added to the mandalas by another artist with different training), see Cats. 125–126, “Mandala Ushnishavidhajyā” (after Ol’denburg), in Samosyuk, Buddiskajya zhivopis’, pp. 288–289; Kira
central precinct fills its enclosure nearly completely—the goddess’s head and limbs within the white stupa; the stupa, pedestal, and attendants within the ring of multicolored light; the radiant ring that neatly skirts the ground of the deities within each directional gate; and so on. Through consistent proportionality and regular alternation between figure and ground, the entire composition unfolds from center to periphery and back in again at an even, predictable tempo. Asymmetry, moreover, is subtle and its pictorial purpose readily identifiable within the overall array. Another Uṣṇīṣavijaya appears with very similar proportions and iconography on a painted wooden leaf (which may originally have been part of a stupa-shaped reliquary) (fig. 177).341 This indicates that these wooden paintings were composed from multiple preexisting subunits, including the central deity and its surrounding structure. The astral mandala was likely produced through a similar composite function, only without the same continuity of form and style.

Another issue is how the astral mandala arranges shapes geometrically. Though a formal definition of the pictorial mandala is notoriously difficult to circumscribe, one of its most common features is radiality. Instead of being positioned at regular intervals around a visually more prominent central figure like petals of a lotus, here each shape is given more-or-less equal space, occupying one square three-by-three grid. Any sense that the eight planets surround the central sun is conveyed not by their positions in an absolute sense but by an inward angling of those that could be easily rotated: the teardrop shapes and the triangle in the lower right corner. The sense that the planets surround the Sun is conveyed more uniformly and explicitly instead by how the deified planets are oriented. They are all positioned with their feet pointing inward as if to suggest that they are standing upright, facing him.

I make these observations of pictorial, stylistic, and iconographic discontinuity not with the goal of criticizing the overall value of the painting, but instead to better understand how it came together. Several conclusions may be drawn: first, the use of two figural canons indicates that multiple artists worked on the painting who were trained not in different skills (contour, coloration, and so on) within the same workshop tradition, but likely different traditions altogether. Moreover, the relative formal unevenness of the central precinct—and the fact that some of the inner chambers encroach onto surrounding gates—makes it highly unlikely that it was painted first as would have been standard in mandala ritual procedure. A trickier problem is whether the painting’s composite formation can tell us anything about the historical character of the cult it represents. Before attempting to answer that question, we first examine its structure and its more than twenty assembled deities in detail by comparing it with available Tangut ritual texts.


341 On this painted wooden leaf, see Samosyuk, Bud’ijskaya zhivopis’, p. 292; and Cat. 15, Piotrovsky, Lost Empire, pp. 134–135.
Tangut Grahamāṭṛkā Mandala Texts

The first Tangut text to be identified with something known as the “Grahamāṭṛkā mandala” was studied and partially translated by Nikolai Nevsky (1892–1937) sometime around 1930, before he was arrested and subsequently executed by Soviet authorities. As Nevsky himself observed, the mandala in this text is strikingly similar to the painting addressed in this chapter. The second text I examine is another ritual manual that, though its first section was detached and is now lost, includes prayers of praise for the individual planets and other deities, a Tangut-Sanskrit glossary, prayers of repentance, and a sending-off of the assembled deities. As we shall see, both texts have a strongly tantric orientation.

Nevsky Text: Assembling the Mandala

Nevsky rendered the title of the now-lost Grahamāṭṛkā mandala text “Rite of the Mandala Offering to the Holy Star Mother.” For the sake of clarity, and moreover to emphasize the fact that I have not had access to the original document itself, I will refer to it as “the Nevsky text.” My discussion should be regarded as somewhat provisional, in particular on the issue of specialized terminology. Information about the document’s codicological features is currently unavailable.

The portion of the text translated by Nevsky instructs on how to produce the mandala and the offerings to be made to each deity. He summarized but did not translate or transcribe the contemplation procedure that follows, which involves the ritualist’s identification with Tejaprabhā, revelation of the surrounding deities’ buddha families, and the contemplative subjugation of demons.

The section that instructs on the production of the mandala opens with a general promise to alleviate suffering caused by inauspicious planetary appearances. The ritualist is directed first to prepare an altar of tamped earth, draw a “palace of the gods” upon it, and populate this palace with several classes of deities, both narrowly astrological and otherwise (see Table comparing names of planets in relevant languages). The series of geometric shapes representing the nine planets that constitute the central precinct begins in the center with the Sun. Moving to the east, the proper base of the painting when oriented for the anthropomorphic depiction of the Sun that appears inside the central red circle, the eight surrounding planets appear in two successive clockwise sequences—Venus, Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter in the cardinal directions, then Mercury, the Moon, Rāhu, and Ketu in the ordinals. Each takes one of five distinct forms (circle, square, triangle, “barleycorn,” and lidded water vessel) and colors (red, white, yellow, black, and “smoke-colored”).

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343 Nevskij, “Kul’te nevesnikh svetil.”

344 Nevskij, ibid., p. 62.

345 Nevskij, ibid.
The painting is highly consistent with the configuration described in this passage, down to the banners flying from the top and bottom points of the teardrop shapes that represent Rāhu and Ketu’s “barleycorns.”

Moving outward to the first layer of gates, the ritualist is instructed to depict Tejaprabhā, the fierce dharmapāla Acala and the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī. As with the innermost precinct, the itinerary begins in the east (i.e., near Venus), and progresses clockwise around the Sun. The deities’ appearances here are distinguished in terms of posture, attribute, color, and pedestal/altar.346

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Attributes &amp; Posture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tejaprabhā</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>right hand preaching, left hand in lap holding golden, 8-spoked, blazing wheel; seated cross legged on lotus and lunar disk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Inner surrounding deities, “Nevsky Text.”

The painting corresponds closely with this section of the text as well. Although some of the image has been lost, Tejaprabhā’s form and posture—seated, legs crossed, and draped in monastic robes, his right hand apparently raised—are clearly quite similar to that in the Kharakhoto tableaus that position him at the center (figs. 178, 179). The remaining deities in this group, who are also depicted frontally, in cross-legged seated positions, all take a generic Indic or Himalayan form, their slender, curvilinear torsos unclothed from the waist up.

The Nevsky text proceeds to the northeast corner of the mandala, where the ritualist is instructed to depict a second set of planets, here including the two remaining two pseudoplanets, Ziqi and Yuèbēi (see Table 4.3). This time, instead of following a directional sequence, they are listed in accordance with the days of the Egyptian-Hellenistic week (which, again, had appeared in India by the fourth century but may have arrived in China via Persia), modified to accommodate the four additional pseudoplanets.

Another feature distinguishing this second planetary group is that each deity manifests in either “celestial” or “wrathful” aspect, implying anthropomorphic figuration in distinction to the geometric shapes of the inner three-by-three precinct. Their humanlike forms are further detailed in terms of each deity’s number of faces and hands and his or her attribute and color. All of them manifest in clothing and jewelry befitting gods.

As with the Rénzōng-era revised Tangut print edition of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī, in the painting and the text Mercury holds not brush and paper but bow and arrow (fig. 180). Perhaps reflecting a new link with Indian or Iranian sources, Mercury has also become a masculine god. Like the masculine Moon in the Kharakhoto Tejaprabhā tableaus discussed in chapter two, this phenomenon is markedly outside the fixed gender associations of the Sinitic planets. Moreover, the color associations of yellow and dark blue for Jupiter and Saturn, respectively, further depart from Sinitic five-phases models. Their sequence, moreover, is nearly identical to the Rénzōng inventory, with the exception that Yuèbēi and Ketu, still next to each other, are switched.
Here the painting differs in critical ways from the Nevsky text. Instead of depicting the secondary, anthropomorphic manifestation in the northeast as the text directs, the group of eleven planets was simply painted into the corresponding shapes of the inner precinct. In chapter three, I connected the sequence for the eleven planets in the Rénzōng-sponsored revision of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī with their positions in the Tejaprabhā tableaus, arguing that the wrathful planets (Mars, Rāhu, Ketu, and Yuèbèi) were made to perform the containment and protection roles of directional guardian deities. It is then striking that in the mandala these two functions, among the most common in modern descriptions of a Buddhist mandala, are no longer performed by the fierce planets themselves but instead two layers of explicitly Buddhist deities. Zi qi and Yuèbèi are simply inserted into the spaces beside their master planets, respectively. As a result, the numeric incompatibility between the Indic and Sino-Tangut systems—that is,
between nine and eleven—becomes more obvious in the mandala than in the tableau. This owes to the fact that the mandala allows for less spatial ambiguity than the vertical tableau and thus allows for less play in the simultaneous expression of multiple relationships among deities.

In contrast to the second planetary sequence, I have not found a source or corollary for the first planetary sequence in the history of astral sciences. Instead, it may relate to the spatial choreography for the creation of a mandala in ritual (though, again, there is no reason to assume that the painted mandala was made this way). For example, the planetary mandala in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*, although only featuring eight planets, also contains a dual sequence. One accords with the planetary week. The other, though different in both directional sequence and planetary positions, is also described in relation to the central figure, again according to first cardinal then ordinal directions.347

The second, anthropomorphic set of planets also diverges on important iconographic points from the text. Painted Rāhu does not carry the sun and moon disks described in the text but instead a sword, as in the Tangut Tejaprabhā tableaus. Saturn, moreover, does not seem to be depicted with the textually prescribed vajra staff (although there could have been one that is now lost to decay or damage), but more importantly he holds the incense burner of the Tejaprabhā assemblies (see fig. 173).

After describing the second group of planets, the Nevsky text then advises the ritualist to depict the lodges in the mandala’s southeast, the precinct of the Moon. The lodges are listed by name and, according to Nevsky, translated from Chinese, though only twenty-seven appear, thus corresponding with an Indian, not Chinese, count.348 The sequence begins with Džiā功德 (Ch. Shen 参; Skt. Ārdrā).349 They appear, we read, in regal dress and posture, with one face and two arms, each with a distinctive color and attribute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nakṣatra</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ārdrā</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>glowing lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punarvasū</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>rosary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puṣya</td>
<td>blue-green</td>
<td>lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aślesā</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>trident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghā</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pūrvapālgunī</td>
<td>blue-green</td>
<td>sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttarapālgunī</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>whip(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasta</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>tree fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citrā</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>flame/torch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


349 Ibid.
In the painted mandala, the lodges are depicted as the familiar Sino-Tangut officials. They are clustered into four groups around the circular chamber of the Moon, reflecting as Liao Yang notes their longstanding division into four quadrants.\(^{350}\) Despite the lodges’ near-miniature scale, an attempt was made to depict individualized attributes, as in the fine-line trident held by one of the lodges at right in the front row of his respective group (fig. 181).

Returning to the Nevsky text, the ritualist is instructed to paint in the northwest corner the goddess Mahāmāyūrī, the Great Peahen, in light blue. Mahāmāyūrī is the central deity in one of the oldest dhāraṇī traditions transmitted to China, known particularly to protect against snakebites, bad weather, and, by the eighth century, astral deities as well.\(^{351}\) Her significant

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\(^{350}\) See Liào, “Hēishuǐchéng xīngyào màntúluō” (forthcoming).

presence in the Tangut corpus, however, seems largely to originate in Tibetan sources.\footnote{Some twenty-seven documents identified with the title 明呂母大孔雀經 (Ch.: 明呂母大孔雀經) are listed in Kychanov’s catalogue of Kharakhot Tangut Buddhist texts. According to Nishida Tatsuo, these were translated from the Tibetan. See the online version of Nishida Tatsuo 西田龍雄 “Catalogue of Tangut Translations of Buddhist Texts” (1977) at http://babelstone.co.uk/Tangut/Nishida_Catalog.html#No_313. See: On Mahâmâyûrû in Tangut translation, see “Shèng yào mǔ tuólùóní jìng” de xīxià yìbēn” 《聖曜母陀羅尼經》的西夏譯本 Ningxià shèhuì kēxué 休夏社會科學, Mahâmâyûrû’s role in Tangut Buddhism and art is a topic deserving fuller study.} Mid-seventh century depictions of the goddess with a peacock or peacock feathers appear in India.\footnote{See Gerd J. R. Mevissen, “The Indian connection: Images of Deified Spells in the Arts of Northern Buddhism, Part I.” Silk Road Art and Archaeology 1 (1990): pp. 227–246; and Mevissen, “The Indian Connection: Images of Deified Spells in the Arts of Northern Buddhism, Part II.” Silk Road Art and Archaeology 2 (1991/92): 351–382.} This iconographic type is preserved in early printed form in Kharakhoto materials, in an Indic style. The text describes Mahâmâyûrû seated in a solemn posture on a lotus-moon-disk pedestal, holding “precious beads” in her left hand and a peacock feather in her right.\footnote{Nevskij, ibid.} The painting, again, is largely consistent with this description, depicting an Indic goddess seated between Ketu and Jupiter who holds a large, apparently coruscating feather (fig. 182). Like Žìqì and Yuèbèi, Mahâmâyûrû floats between the enclosures of the central navagraha assembly, lacking one of her own.

Following the goddess, the heavenly kings are to be depicted, clockwise and beginning in the east. Their directions and attributes are standard for these deities in the Chinese and Himalayan traditions (see Table), though stylistically the figures in the painting belong to the latter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guardian King</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhṛtarāṣṭra</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>white, one face, two arms, playing the lute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virūḍhaka</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Black, one face, two arms, sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virūpākṣa</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Red, one face, two arms, right hand serpent lasso, left hand stupa, on which sits a Buddha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaiśravaṇa</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Light blue, one face, two arms, trident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5. Guardian Kings, “Nevsky Text”
The instructions for making the mandala conclude with a description of the crisscrossed vajra, walls of vajra, and flame patterns that are to enclose it.355

Nevsky Text: Offerings and Contemplation

According to Nevsky’s summary, once the mandala is erected, the ritualist is to make a complex series of offerings to the gods manifested within it. First, multiple gifts are presented to the deities in the central precinct, including water, milk, honey, precious metals and jewels, animals, grains, and legumes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Offering 1</th>
<th>Offering 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>orange cow</td>
<td>rice pudding, red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>white shell</td>
<td>rice gruel, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>red bull</td>
<td>rice with green peas, red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>gold jewelry</td>
<td>milk rice, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>yellow net</td>
<td>rice with cream, yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zǐqì</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>same as for Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venus</td>
<td>white horse</td>
<td>rice and butter, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn</td>
<td>black cow</td>
<td>dried pancake, porridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāhu</td>
<td>sword</td>
<td>bloody meat, smoke colored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuèbèi</td>
<td>clothing?</td>
<td>same as for Saturn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketu</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>mixture of all, blue-green</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6. Offerings, “Nevsky Text”

Here the text again observes a distinction between the two planetary groupings, as a first set of offerings (made from wood or paper in the event that the devotee cannot afford or obtain the genuine article) is presented to each member in the group of nine planets. Next, a grain or legume in the color associated with each planet is offered to each of the eleven (see Table).356

The instructions then move to a multi-stage incantatory and meditative procedure centered on Tejaprabhā, which, we recall, Nevsky summarizes but does not translate. First, the ritualist, having washed his or her hands and face and sitting on a cushion next to the altar, makes a vow on behalf of all sentient beings. The ritualist then visualizes an “incantation” on a lotus bathed in golden light while invoking the directional buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities of


the mandala, repenting, and seeking divine wisdom. The ritualist, through the contemplation of emptiness, then identifies personally with the Tejaprabhā, visualizing him- or herself in the same cross-legged position atop a lotus-moon disk, holding a golden wheel in the left hand. Tejaprabhā is then comprehended as a manifestation of Vairocana.357

After further visualizations centered on water vessels arrayed around the mandala; a blue deity who manifests with a sword and lariat in each hand358; and contemplation of the mandala as Mount Sumeru, the identities of the principal deities with each of the five buddha families are revealed—Acala with Aksobhya, Avalokiteśvara with Amitābha, and Mahāmāyūrī with Ratnasambhava. Both Maṇjuśrī and the Tejaprabhā are identified with Vairocana, reflecting the bodhisattva’s strong link in both Tibet and China with astrology.359 The ritual identification then comes full circle, as the planetary deities, four heavenly kings, and myriad world guardians are finally identified with the Effulgent Buddha himself.360

The contemplation sequence summarized by Nevsky offers a final critical insight into the painting. After initiation, the ritualist is to concentrate on a dark blue “hum-sign”361 (presumably a seed syllable) manifested on Acala’s chest. The sign emits rays of light, the ends of which transform into multicolored demons who seek out the causes of evil from all corners of the world and drive them into the southwestern corner of the mandala, where, as Nevsky writes, “they merge with the demons painted there” and are subdued.362 This description clearly corresponds to the beastly and demonic figures rioting outside Rāhu’s grain-shaped southwestern precinct, down to their bright, alternating colors. On the basis of Nevsky’s study, this brief mention seems to be the first time these demons, so conspicuous in their asymmetrical placement within the painting, appear in the text.

Nevsky’s summary of the rite closes with incantations of Tejaprabhā, the planets, and, in what also seems to be their first mention, the twelve solar zodiac signs.363 As mentioned above, the ring these emblems would normally form is abruptly truncated in the painting. Moreover, two signs that remain legible, which appear consecutively outside Mercury’s chamber, seem to depict the double figures of possibly Gemini and the offering vessel of Aquarius (fig. 180). These are not contiguous signs in any tradition known to me, nor am I aware of a horoscopic explanation for their positions.

357 Nevskij, ibid., 68.

358 The name of this figure is unclear.

359 On Maṇjuśrī’s astrological role in Tibet, see Phillipe Cornu, Tibetan Astrology (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2002), 31.

360 Nevskij, ibid., pp. 69–70.

361 Nevskij, ibid., p. 70.

362 Nevskij, ibid.

363 Nevskij, ibid., pp. 70-71.
The second Tangut-language Grahamāṭkā mandala text analyzed here, which I will call IOM 4737 after its shelf number in St. Petersburg, bears the end-title *Offerings Root for the Holy Planet Mother Mandala Rite* (Śījī gij mja gu rejī tṣiuj t Śju kju tshwew tshīj). The first section of this scroll was detached at some point and is now missing. The latter, surviving portion has sustained little damage. It was written in a neat, non-cursive script on paper with ruled margins. The surviving text begins with a sequence of verses in praise of first Yuēbēi, then the Wood Star (Jupiter), Ziqi, the Moon, Rāhu, Ketu, and the Water Star (Mercury), the Twenty-Eight Lodges, the four Guardian Kings, and, finally, various nāgadevas and guardian deities.

Each prayer begins with the name of the deity, and none seems to accord with any standard meter. The directions, attributes, and other distinctive characteristics of each deity or group of deities are described.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>southeast</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>one face, two arms, moon deva</td>
<td>Great Yin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>northeast</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>one face, two arms, holding bow, deva</td>
<td>Great Yin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>north</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>one face, two arms, holding [nectar] vessel, lives in clouds</td>
<td>Great Yang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziqi</td>
<td>&quot;child of Jupiter&quot;</td>
<td>purple</td>
<td>one face, two arms, rosary</td>
<td>Great Yang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Venus)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Saturn)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāhu</td>
<td>southwest</td>
<td>smoky</td>
<td>one face, two arms, holding sun, wrathful</td>
<td>Great Yang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuēbēi</td>
<td>&quot;child of Saturn&quot;</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>one face, two arms, bellowing, wrathful</td>
<td>Great Yang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketu</td>
<td>northwest</td>
<td>radiant</td>
<td>holding hook, subjugating</td>
<td>Great Yang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7. Surviving planetary data, “IOM Manuscript”

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For example, the verses for Jupiter and Ziqi, the second and third planets in the surviving list, read:

Praise to the Wood Planet
Wood Planet, of the north and color yellow, marvelous in form, with one face and two arms, holding a [??] vessel, residing in the place of unfathomable brightness and splendor. In reverence to the Great Yang Wood Star, transformed by the tathāgata to protect sentient beings. Great Yang Wood Star, [we venerate you.]

Praise to the Planet Ziqi
Wood-efflorescence Zi Planet, with purple body, one face and two arms, holding prayer beads, with great supernatural powers and replete in merit. In reverence to the Great Yang Ziqi Honored One, transformed by the tathāgata to protect sentient beings. Great Yang Ziqi, [we venerate you.]

Following these prayers is a glossary of Sanskrit terms first translated and then transliterated into Tangut, such as the very word “mandala” and “seven treasures” 瑣

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366 Two characters are lost here. Standard textual iconography for Jupiter is a nectar vessel, be a nectar vessel or peaches.

367 Chinese translation: 木星之赞歎：北方木星色黃，形妙好，一面二臂，持器，居不可思议光明雲華處，恭敬禮敬大陽木星尊，（因受）如來變化，守護有情，（禮敬）大陽木星。After Suò, Wèi, and Xiè, ibid.

368 Ibid.

369 The meaning of this character is unclear.

370 Chinese translation: 紫炁星之赞歎：木子紫星，身似紫色，一面二臂，執待念珠，神通廣大，功德具足，恭敬禮敬大陽紫炁尊，（因受）如來變化，守護有情，（禮敬）大陽紫炁。
The subsequent repentance rite comprises a series of nine- and seven-character verses on the transformative power of the Tejaprabhā tathāgata; the purification of all sins before this assembly of nine planets, twenty-eight lodges, and guardian kings; and transferring the merit generated by this rite. Finally, the now-fêted deities are sent back to their “pure land” (Tang. 處壇, Ch. 净土), with hopes that they may again assemble and descend in the future. As Suô, et al, have shown, much of this content is found in other Chinese-language Tangut texts.\(^{371}\)

Two verses translated by Nevsky from another Tangut-language astral cult manuscript, the *Scripture in Praise of the Nine Planets*, contain similar prayers.\(^{372}\) Compare:

IOM 4737:

Praise to Rāhu

Rāhu of the southwest\(^{373}\) and smoke-colored body, with one face and two arms, holding a sun [disk]; manifesting in wrathful aspect, with flames emitting upward, coarse and fierce in appearance. In reverence to the Great Yang Rāhu Honored One, transformed by the tathāgata to protect sentient beings. [To] Great Yang Rāhu, in veneration.\(^{374}\)

Scripture in Praise of the Nine Planets:

By your power, you take away the light of the sun and the moon, Presiding over the four kinds of greatness, delivering fortune, status, respect, richness, and abundance Great Rāhu, honoring you, we praise!\(^{376}\)

IOM 4737:

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\(^{371}\) Suô, Wèi, and Xiè, ibid.

\(^{372}\) I have not yet accessed this text.

\(^{373}\) Suô, Wèi, and Xiè, ibid.

\(^{374}\) Ibid.

\(^{375}\) Chinese translation: “羅呪讚歎：離真方上，羅睺身煙色，一面二臂，持日，發發上舉，大粗惡相，恭敬禮敬大陽羅睺尊，（因受）如來變化，守護有情，（禮敬）大陽羅睺.”

\(^{376}\) Nevskij, ibid.
Praise for Ketu

Ketu, of the northwest, darkly radiant, with one face and two arms, holding an iron hook, appearing in wrathful aspect. With manifest skill, [you] subjugate evil demons. In reverence to the Great Yang Ketu, transformed by the *tathāgata* to protect sentient beings. [To] Great Yang Ketu, in veneration.

Scripture in Praise of the Nine Planets:

> With the flame of brightness illuminating the whole world,
> With his power to remove the greatest evil demons,
> Controlling fortune as well as misfortune
> Great Ketu, honoring you, we praise!

Though both texts address each planet individually, based on Nevsky’s translation the verses from *Scripture in Praise of the Nine Planets* apparently lack the directions, colors, and other descriptors that in the IOM manuscript imply a direct relationship with a mandala. For its part, the IOM manuscript corresponds in important ways to both the Nevsky manuscript and the Kharakhoto painting, for example the distinctive bow-and-arrow attribute for Mercury. Moreover, the phrase “from Shen to Jing and ending with Zui” (*džiā khja dzjwa mu* 諸彌祿聶) indicates the same sequence for the lodges as that in the Nevsky text (which, again, I have been unable to identify).

We may tentatively reconstruct the planets’ full sequence in IOM 4737 by comparing it with the Nevsky text and the Tangut version of the Tejaprabhā *dhāranī*: Sun, Venus, Mars, and Saturn should precede those preserved in the text (see Table). Moreover, how IOM 4737 treats Ziqī and Yuèbèi lends two further insights. First, as we might expect, the text explicitly characterizes them as “efflorescences” or “offspring” (*gi* 彼) of Jupiter and Saturn, respectively, again affirming their appearances and positions in other Tejaprabhā materials, including the

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377 Suō, Wèi, and Xiè, ibid.

378 Suō, Wèi, and Xiè, ibid.

379 Chinese translation: “風方計都，明亮玄色光輝，一面二臂，（持）鐵鉤，（現）忿怒相，顯現善巧，能降伏邪魔，恭敬禮敬大陽計都尊，（因受）如來變化，守護有情，（禮敬）大陽計都。” After ibid.

380 Nevskij, ibid.

381 Nevskij, ibid.
painted tableaus and the pictorial inventory in the Rénzōng-era revised Tangut dhāraṇī. Turning back to the painted mandala, it becomes clear, yet again, that the “four excesses” (siyú 四餘) grouping (of Ziqi, Yuèbèi, Rāhu, and Ketu) of the later Sinitic tradition discussed in chapter three is not operative here. Moreover, due to the structure of the inner precinct, in which Ziqi and Yuèbèi are not accommodated, their alternate binary correspondences seen in the Tejaprabhā tableaus (i.e., Yuèbèi with Mars, Ziqi with Jupiter) are also missing. The important point is that here Ziqi and Yuèbèi become dependents of other planets not because of a preordained, text-based order from which a pictorial schema then emerged but rather because they could not be fully accommodated to a preexisting spatial form, namely the nine-planet grid centered on the sun.

**Mutual Constitution of Dhāraṇī and Mandala**

I have emphasized how unusual the Kharakhoto astral mandala is as a painting. It might therefore seem best to treat it as a one-off, a unique and therefore valuable but ultimately uninfluential solution for containing a motley array of deities and symbols. Comparison with pictorial materials, however, indicates that there might be more to the story, specifically in the dialogue between this mandala and the Tangut version of the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī. Their relationship, ultimately, may add to the long-running debate among Buddhologists about the relationship between dhāraṇī and tantra,³⁸² as in this case the two demonstrate a process of mutual transformation.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the frontispiece to the Rénzōng-sponsored, evidently revised print edition (Inv. 7038) incorporated new figures beyond even the tenth and eleventh planets (fig. 183). These are precisely the same deities who appear in the mandala’s two nested layers of palace gates. Counterclockwise from the rear is Avalokiteśvara 藩龍第龍, holding a lotus. Holding a sword in front and to his right is Acala 阿剎夜 傳使, behind him Mahāmāyūrī 驚准以 彌, raises a peacock feather. At bottom left is Mañjuśrī 麗進龍, also holding a sword. Finally, a kneeling Vajrapani 無量師 傳使 presses his hands together before Tejaprabhā’s altar. The four guardian deities, the deities of the mandala’s outer gates, cluster behind Tejaprabhā’s halo. Though unlabeled, they are distinguished to some extent iconographically, for example the figure standing immediately behind Tejaprabhā whose pipa identifies him as Dhartrāśtra, guardian of the east, and the figure in front whose trident makes him Vaiśravana of the north. With the full roster of eleven planets lined up in two neat rows in the section following, this extended frontispiece thus represents a disassembled (or perhaps a not-yet-assembled) version of the mandala. The only potential outlier is Vajrapani, but his presence in fact makes a lot of sense, given his role as petitioner in the Mahāmāyūrī dhāraṇī tradition.

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Unfortunately, not enough of the text survives to assess what, if any, other transformations may have occurred in the Tejaprabhā dhāraṇī scripture after these mandala deities were introduced. Even without the text, however, it is clear that this scale of transformation is more global than an accommodation of several additional deities. The print medium plays an important though potentially misleading role in this. As Susan Huang has shown, Buddhist print culture at this time knew a relatively fluid circulation of pictorial elements, or “modules,” ranging from individual motifs or figures to entire compositions. In part such a phenomenon reflects the constraints and requirements of the medium: any pictorial transformation had to be planned and staged on a wooden block, where technology dictated that it be carved in reverse, subordinated to a relatively fixed layout concerns, and ultimately transferred through a more or less uniform mechanical process (hand-coloring notwithstanding). The Tangut Tejaprabhā frontispiece could be compared then with many other visually similar frontispieces, including, for example, the famous early example from Dunhuang, the 896 Diamond Sutra. Here, however, the comparison is not primarily visual, and depends on the transposition of a uniform mandala schema to a completely different spatial and stylistic environment.

Moreover, just as it seems influence flowed both ways between dhāraṇī and mandala, the reuse and transfer of motifs was of course not limited to the print medium. This issue can help us better understand one aspect of the central precinct in the painted mandala, namely the direction in which the planet deities are oriented. By the tenth century, the gazes of supporting deities in Chinese and Inner Asian religious art were often dynamic and fluid, serving, like gesture and posture, to enliven the assembly socially and invite intersubjective identification or visual engagement rather than to assert a specific doctrinal message or value. The postures of the counter-Jupiter stations in the unfinished 978 Dunhuang almanac discussed in chapter two demonstrate the point (see fig. 99). As with contemporaneous Chinese tomb epitaph covers, the positions of the twelve “original spirits” (yuánshén 元神) around counter-Jupiter are varied just enough to create the sense of a unified, overall movement around the center. Whereas the six deities on the left and bottom sides of the square-shaped surround face uniformly rightward, the remaining six on the right and top face opposite, bookended at front and rear by a yuánshén in three-quarters frontal and reverse views.

One exception to this general rule is the Buddhist mandala, in which deities’ gazes are more likely to be directionally uniform. This marks another unusual feature of the Kharakhoto astral mandala. Here, the central deities face a variety of directions, and not a single one—not even the sun—faces forward. Contrast this with numerous Sūrya and Candra mandalas from Nepal, in which all deities assume rigidly frontal poses, for example a rare dated example from the fourteenth century (which also depicts a homa sacrifice in the lower left register) (fig.

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The contrast is particularly striking given that the planets in the Nepali example are arranged in similar positions as their counterparts in the Kharakhoto mandala.385

The unusual orientation in the Kharakhoto mandala is likely an artifact of transfer between different local sources across media and formats. At least two (and likely four) planets in the Kharakhoto Grahamātṛkā mandala face each other—Rāhu and Saturn; Mercury and (based on surviving traces) Mars. The remaining deities, when isolated and lined up on the same ground plane, are all shown in left-facing three-quarters view (see fig. 173). Consistent three-quarters view is precisely how the Tangut planets are depicted in Tejaprabhā’s retinue, whether in the linear sutra inventory or the facing pairs of painted assembly tableaus. In fact, there is no known example of a Tangut planet depicted in a fully frontal position—this was reserved for Tejaprabhā alone. This, therefore, can explain his posture in the painted mandala, in which Tejaprabhā and Avalokiteśvara in the opposite gate are the only frontal deities in the entire painting (fig. 178).

This consistency of orientation and posture suggests that the mandala deities were not just iconographically informed by preexisting Tejaprabhā works, but may have been lifted from those materials almost completely intact, with little adaptation beyond scale and technique.

At this point, we may make a couple of observations about the relationship among dhāraṇī, tableau, and mandala: two different preexisting figural canons were featured, unmerged, alongside each other in this single painting. In the case of the planets, posture and orientation indicate that they were drawn more-or-less directly from external contexts. The mandala, in turn, also seems to have influenced the dhāraṇī. This entailed a global change that both introduced a new company of deities and subordinated the final two pseudoplanets, likely an effect of the navagraha altar schema.

**Navagraha Schema**

Planetary propitiation rites featuring geometric arrays of the navagraha were an important feature of medieval pan-Indian religion.386 Their configurations varied by tradition or place.

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385 Though Venus here is positioned at proper top, not bottom. See Bangdel, “Cat. 6: Surya Mandala,” p. 76.

386 These forms have commonly figured into pacification rites that preface any number of other liturgies and have been widespread across the medieval Indian devotional landscape since roughly the fourth century. For discussion of normative texts on planetary propitiation rites, see Marianna Kropf, “Rituelle Traditionen der Planetengottheiten (Navagraha) im Kathmandutal: Strukturen, Praktiken, Weltbilder,” PhD dissertation, Heidelberg University, 2005; Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* vol. 5 (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute), pp. 749-751; and Gudrun Bühnemann, *Puja: A Study in Śmarta Ritual* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie, Universität Wien, 1988), p. 139; On navagraha altars in South India, see
According to Liào, despite the fact that the Tibetan version of the Grahamāṭṛkā dhāraṇī features one such navagraha array, the specific configuration of the planets is completely different than the Kharakhoto mandala.\footnote{Liào helpfully identifies versions of the Grahamāṭṛkā texts in Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Tangut, and Sanskrit. In-depth comparison of their contents is needed. See Liào, forthcoming.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deity</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāhu</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Red-Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketu</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Smoke cloud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8. Tibetan Grahamāṭṛkā dhāraṇī (after Liào, forthcoming)

Instead, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, the Kharakhoto mandala corresponds with a spatial configuration in the influential *Matsya Purāṇa*,\footnote{The *Matsya Purāṇa* is among the more encyclopedic of the Purāṇas, a major genre of Sanskrit literature, and encompasses a range of topics including cosmogony, mythology, architecture and art, festivals, and rites of passage. *Matsya Purāṇa* ch. 93, vol. 1, \url{https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036357583;view=1up;seq=270}, accessed 4/27/2017. See also chapter 11 of the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti.*, trans. SC Vidyarnava (1918), p. 381; \url{https://archive.org/stream/yajnavalkyasmrit00yj#page/380/mode/2up}, accessed 4/27/17.} and in a nearly identical color scheme.\footnote{https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036357583;view=1up;seq=270, accessed 4/27/17.} How knowledge of this specific configuration may have been transmitted to Tangut country is unclear, though further research on South Asian clerics working for Tangut sponsors will likely soon shed light on the matter.\footnote{A synthesizing history of Tangut-Indian (or Tangut-Tibetan) interaction has yet to be written. For now, the presence of South Asian clerics in Tangut country, among them the prominent Kashmiri monk Jayānanda, is recorded in Tibetan and Tangut sources. Leonard van der Kuijp, “Jayānanda: A Twelfth Century Guoshi from Kashmir Among the Tangut,” *Central Asiatic Journal* Vol. 37, No. 3/4 (1993), pp. 188-197. On recent research into Tibetans in Tangut country, see Hou Haoran, “Notes on the Translation and Transmission of the Sampaṭa and Cakrasaṃvara Tantras in the Xixia Period (1038–1227), *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, eds. Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar (Brill, 2017).}

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\footnote{Liào helpfully identifies versions of the Grahamāṭṛkā texts in Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Tangut, and Sanskrit. In-depth comparison of their contents is needed. See Liào, forthcoming.}

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\footnote{https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036357583;view=1up;seq=270, accessed 4/27/17.}

\footnote{A synthesizing history of Tangut-Indian (or Tangut-Tibetan) interaction has yet to be written. For now, the presence of South Asian clerics in Tangut country, among them the prominent Kashmiri monk Jayānanda, is recorded in Tibetan and Tangut sources. Leonard van der Kuijp, “Jayānanda: A Twelfth Century Guoshi from Kashmir Among the Tangut,” *Central Asiatic Journal* Vol. 37, No. 3/4 (1993), pp. 188-197. On recent research into Tibetans in Tangut country, see Hou Haoran, “Notes on the Translation and Transmission of the Sampaṭa and Cakrasaṃvara Tantras in the Xixia Period (1038–1227), *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, eds. Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar (Brill, 2017).}
Modern practices also shed light on issues in the Kharakhoto mandala, such as that of sequence. In a short 1929 article, Giuseppe Tucci documented a navagraha mandala at the Kāmākhyā temple in Assam, northeast India, observing that the sequence for assembling the grahas within the mandala differed from that used in the offering ritual (pūjā) he observed on site. The first sequence, Tucci noted, was determined by rules governing the construction of a mandala (although he does not specify which set of rules). The second sequence followed the planetary weekdays. This latter sequence, according to Tucci, conforms to “the daily rotation of the planets” as known in other Indian ritual systems. Of course, the second weekday sequence also accommodates another pervasive South Asian visual tradition, that of the linear navagraha lintel sculptures (see fig. 104).

The similarities between the Kharakhoto mandala and the instructions in the Matsya Purāṇa extend beyond the positions and colors of the planets and into the offerings for each planet, first of food and then of animals. Although the original Tangut terms used for each of the offerings in the Nevsky text are currently lost, Nevsky’s Russian translations accord closely with the Matsya Purāṇa—Rāhu, for example, is the only planet in either text to receive an offering of meat (fig. table). (Zǐqì and Yüébèi are simply given the same food as their “master” planet.) The second round of offerings, consisting of animals, is also strikingly consistent with the Nevsky text.

In addition to the range of documented spatial configurations, the many different contexts, formats, forms, and materials for graha mandalas and altars distinguish various traditions, and with rich art historical implications. Their formats and sizes vary widely, from small copper sheets circulating today to domestic architectural sculpture and entire temple plans. The forms in which the planets are represented fall into several general categories, including temporary, nonfigurative (“aniconic”) representations such as colored grain, documented in detail by Marianna Kropf; phallic linga, such as the Kāmākhyā mandala documented by Tucci; simple geometric shapes or objects; and, finally, figurative anthropomorphic deities (figs. 185, 186). Multiple categories are sometimes combined, such as


392 On how to reconcile the differences between the two sequences, Tucci writes, “The reply is to be found in the fact that the temple represents the mandala, or sacred circle, the construction of which is subject to certain rules and must follow a special order, which is different from the series of the planets as they appear when the mandala has been completed.” ibid., p. 250.

393 Tucci, ibid.

394 For the navagraha in domestic architecture (e.g., wood carved ceiling coffers), see Stella Kramrisch, “Drāvida and Kerala: In the Art of Travancore,” Artibus Asiae: Supplementum Vol. 11 (1953): 22, 34.

the simple shape and the anthropomorph. Our interest here is in the latter two categories, shape and anthropomorph, which are what the Kharakhoto mandala combines.

The precise combination of shapes associated with the navagraha also varies widely throughout South Asia. Such shapes may be associated with yantra, or a specific graphic “device” or “tool” associated with a deity, were not necessarily thought of as seats or enclosures, as the painted Grahamāṭrkā mandala from Kharakhoto implies. In some cases, they seem to derive from symbolic associations with the planet in question, such as a crescent for the moon or banner for Ketu (a word that can mean “banner”). We recall the banner flying in the Kharakhoto mandala from not only Ketu’s but also Rāhu’s grain-shaped enclosures (fig. 187).

I have yet to find a full South Asian corollary to the chamber shapes in the Kharakhoto mandala. However, it may not be necessary to look beyond the local context in order to understand them. In a 1997 article, Kira Samosyuk explored briefly but provocatively how the painting’s inner precinct may represent a multilayered system of correlations, noting two particularly clear types of binary juxtaposition. One round of the matching game is based on shape: Venus and Mars are squares, Jupiter and Mercury triangles, Sun and Moon circles, and Rāhu and Ketu seeds or husks. The other is color: Venus and Moon are white, Sun and Mars are red, Jupiter and (it seems) Mercury are yellow. Saturn, reflecting his singular status, stands alone in his gray/blue water vessel—or he would, were Rāhu and Ketu not stationed on either side to form a flattened, sidelined version of the ominous three-man front in the Tangut Tejaprabhā tableaus.

Grahamāṭrkā & Mahāmāyūrī

We have yet to address the issue of why Grahamāṭrkā does not actually seem to appear in this mandala after which she is named, having been apparently substituted with Mahāmāyūrī. Possible reasons are many: the two goddesses may have been simply conflated, or Grahamāṭrkā may have lacked an independent pictorial identity—though the textual sources on the Grahamāṭrkā dhāraṇī in the Tangut corpus are, by all appearances, strongly Chinese, contemporary central-plains depictions of the goddess are not known. Given the clear perception by Tangut Buddhists of Mahāmāyūrī as an Indic goddess, and moreover the growing importance of the pañcarakṣā in Tangut Buddhism and Buddhist art, she may have seen as better suited

396 See especially the charts in Kropf, PhD dissertation, chapter 6.
397 This oscillation between shape, symbolic object, and device or tool makes this class of representation particularly difficult to characterize with the western iconographic term “attribute.”
399 Ibid. Samosyuk suggests that the inner precinct shapes may represent a kind of disassembled stupa, given each of its discrete structural elements: a square base surmounted by a round body (i.e., circle), a cone (i.e., triangle), dome, and teardrop. No source is indicated, however.
than Grahamātṛkā for advanced mandala practice. Or perhaps iconography for the goddess had simply not circulated to Tangut country.401

A painting from a Vajrāvalī cycle commissioned by Nor-chen Kun-dga bzan-po (1382-1456) and now in the Kimbell Museum of Art (fig. 188) demonstrates transformations the goddess underwent after the Tanguts.402 Here, Grahamātṛkā and her retinue form one subcomposition in a pañcarakṣā fivefold mandala (fig. 189). Its great formal lucidity and stylistic homogeneity shed further light on some of the peculiarities discussed in the Kharakhoto mandala throughout this chapter.403 Based on identifications in Wisdom and Compassion (2000), the titular deity, Grahamātṛkā, is firmly positioned in the northwest (fig. 190), leaving the center to Śūrya and his surrounding retinue of the remaining eight navagraha, all of whom face fully outward (fig. 191). (Their positions and iconography, however, are quite different from the Kharakhoto painting.) A second set of planets do appear in the northwest, unlike in the Tangut painting. Numbering at eight, in the Kimbell Museum painting this second set of planets takes the form of semi-clothed humans in a range of beige and tan skin tones (fig. 192). The twenty-seven naksatras appear in the southwest, brightly colored and differentiated slightly (fig. 193). Last but not least, the southeast corner apparently features personifications of the “five disasters” (fig. 194), in roughly the same position as the demons outside Rāhu’s barleycorn chamber in the Kharakhoto painting. The Kimbell Grahamātṛkā mandala, like the Kharakhoto painting, also features a tathāgata among its inner layer of Buddhist deities, again positioned in the east (fig. 189). This inner surrounding group, moreover, does not appear in directional gates as in the Tangut painting but instead between the second layer of deities and the inner square.

Unsurprisingly, the Kimbell mandala does not feature Zǐqì and Yuèbèi. More notable is the absence of the nine discrete shapes of the square inner precinct. It is unclear whether the painting’s makers (who are thought to have been Nepalese) or their Tibetan patron were aware of the pan-Indian diagrammatic form adopted for the Kharakhoto Grahamātṛkā mandala, but if they were, there would have been few better technologies for obscuring its non-Buddhist origins than the mature tantric mandala, a powerful force of normativity and regularization. Indeed, the Ngor painting is so technically refined and consistent that one might hardly notice the some of the


latent tensions that so strongly characterize the Kharakhoto painting to modern beholders, were it not for the fact that the Sun still appears in its center.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have addressed in depth a single painted mandala that brings together the entire panoply of deified heavenly bodies and virtually all Buddhist deities known to control them. The non-radial schema chosen for the central precinct seemed to attenuate the classic role of the mandala as a force of order and symmetry, a place to systematize, regularize, and hierarchically arrange potentially limitless deities. The basic work of identifying each deity and its position within the schema revealed that this mandala was in active dialogue with the dhāraṇī frontispiece illustration. This was done not by any exclusively visual means, but through two different types of schema: one for the planets, which conformed to a navagraha order while accommodating the full assembly of elven; the other, a Buddhist meta-schema of gods, goddesses, and bodhisattvas that ultimately serve to contain the center but not occupy it.

We discussed the range of forms for navagraha arrays similar to the mandala’s central precinct, and discussed possible sources. Whatever its ultimate source, the central precinct seems, as Samosyuk suggested, to develop its own internal logic of correlation. This ultimately speaks, I think, to a different set of priorities than formal orthodoxy and fully resolved taxonomy or hierarchy, encouraging a variety of other pictorial responses, including disaggregation, flattening, and stratification. By the time of the Kimbell mandala, any fundamental incompatibility that may have existed between the non-concentric planetary array and the advanced Buddhist mandala had disappeared.

On the one hand, by showing its seams—that is, by not quite succeeding as a painting in a generic sense—the Kharakhoto Grahāmātrkā mandala offers a rare view into its own historical formation. Yet even when absorbing a central precinct form that by all appearances originated beyond the better-traveled circuits of Chinese and Tibetan culture, it still preserves traces of the local Tangut schematic thinking. The compare-contrast, pattern-seeking mode of viewing is precisely the conceptual thread that runs through most of the surviving materials in the Tangut astral cult. Ultimately, the interest is in a form of depiction that can both stage and regulate its own interpretive dynamics through chains of internal reference—that can create worlds, and teach the beholder how to see them, by setting up its own dynamic mechanisms of self-containment.
Conclusion

In the mid thirteenth century, some fifty years after the Tangut state became one of the first to fall to the Mongols, Marco Polo (1254-1324) wrote of various divination practices he observed on his travels through China and Inner Asia. Passing through Saciou (Shāzhōu, modern Dūnhuáng), he took particular note of Tangut astrology. Polo described something perhaps akin to “eight characters” (bāzì 八字) divination, a chronomantic method based on the sexagesimal characters for a person’s year, month, day, and time of birth, which the Tanguts reportedly used to determine the proper time for burying the dead. Reaching the capital, Khanbaliq (Dàdū 大都; present-day Beijing), Polo reports in detail on nearly 5,000 “astrologers and soothsayers, counting Christians, Saracens, and Cathayans” who received food and clothing from the Great Khan himself. He writes of these diviners:

They are constantly practicing their arts in the city. They have a kind of almanac in which the movements of the planets through the zodiac, hour by hour and minute by minute throughout the year, are written. And every year these aforesaid Christian, Saracen, and Cathayan astrologers, each sect independently of the others, follow in this almanac the course and shape of the whole year and of each successive moon. [...] And they will declare that this is how things will unfold according to the ways and principles of nature, but that God has the power to do more or less according to his will. And so they produce many little pamphlets in which they set down everything that will happen in the course of the year, month by month. These pamphlets are called tacuim and are sold for one groat to anyone who wishes to buy one in order to know what will happen that year. And those who prove to be most accurate in their predictions are held to be more perfect masters of the art and gain the greater honor.

We began this dissertation in a diviner’s kiosk in the back alley of a Buddhist temple fair and end some 150 years later in a capital apparently teeming with prognosticators of all stripes and their freely circulating “almanacs.” There would be many productive angles from which to examine the changes that the two near-contemporary travel writers, Mèng Yuánlǎo and Marco Polo, who bookend this dissertation seem to register—the Buddhist institutional relationship to divination and astrology, for example, the Yuan government’s support for many different forms of

404 On bāzì fate calculation see Ho, Chinese Mathematical Astrology, pp. 156-160.

divination at once, or the circulation of popular divination texts. The concern in this dissertation has been with the visual character of this pervasive and consequential feature of Chinese and Inner Asian culture, and its expression through the belief in a deified heavens. Our interest, in other words, has been less to locate the figure of the diviner in premodern society than to understand what and how he, as well as his patrons, supporters, and critics, saw.

We have examined how, over a period of nearly four centuries and across various regions in Asia, how the stars came down to earth—how they became the subjects of, were alluded to, and generated distinctive forms of visual culture. In these materials we have seen, for example, that Marco Polo’s “Christian, Saracen [likely Muslim], and Chinese” forms of astrology were in contact long before his time. This contact was facilitated by the receptivity and capaciousness of Buddhist visual culture with respect to new forms and new knowledge, as well as its special investment in anthropomorphic representation.

Like the complex range of astral materials within the Buddhist textual corpus, astrology and cosmology in Buddhist art offer a concentrated statement on how much we have left to learn about premodern cultural interaction. Not only is the circulation of certain astral forms, concepts, and symbols possible to track historically, the manner in which they did so can teach us much about the visual cultures more generally in which they appear. In astral visual culture we can discern, for example, histories of perceptual recursion and stylistic succession in visual cultures that have sometimes been slotted into misleadingly stable sounding categories like iconography or composition.406 My discussion of the solar and lunar disks in chapter two was one attempt to reexamine along these lines a paired form so common in Chinese Buddhist art that their considerable semiotic and perceptual interest has often been overlooked. There is more research and analysis to be done and many seemingly closed cases to be reopened.

The transregional approach I have taken in this dissertation was suggested in part by the wide distribution but relatively small number of surviving Tejaprabhā materials. This, in turn, prompted consideration not just of individual cases like the sun and moon emblems or each planet god but an analysis of how whole symbolic systems coalesced. The range of approaches becomes clearest in what I have termed schemas, that is, fixed sets of spatial or sequential relations that carry, in this context, cosmological or astrological meaning. Though typically latent, these schemas constitute a distinct pictorial object that may be compared across media, culture, period, and geographic distance. Thematizing the schema has made it possible to consider a range of concepts, perspectives, patterns of thought, and problem-solving strategies that played decisive roles in the constitution of visual cultures but were seldom explicitly denoted. Moreover, this approach has offered criteria for judging expertise and creativity based not primarily on questions of craft or self-expression but also, for example, degree of correlative or classificatory ambition.

Not all depictions of astral subjects were equally invested in schematicity as such. For example, I have not identified a strong role for the schema in the stone-carved Tejaprabhā tableaus at Dàzú, even though they are all thoughtfully planned and executed in compositional terms (to be sure, this may well be in part because their damage or decay often prevent fine-

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406 On recursion and succession in the constitution of visual cultures, see Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture*. 
grained analysis). The Tangut case emerged as the most dynamic, and the clearest indication of how the dialectic interaction between figure and schema can actively generate knowledge. In chapter three of this dissertation I applied figure-schema analysis to reconstruct first the overall program of a specific work of art, and then as a problem by which to address the historical motivations for painting it.

This mode of analysis could be applied beyond the realm of explicitly astral subjects. One such example is color, a difficult topic to study in Chinese and Inner Asian art for this period on the basis of traditional methods given how little it is explicitly discussed in writing on art. For example, one term for polychromy in Chinese painting is the “five colors,” or wǔcǎi 五彩. It is so ubiquitous a term that it is often treated as connoting general colorfulness rather than the five discrete traditional hues of black, white, red, yellow, and blue-green. However, in depictions of the planets these five colors are more meaningful when understood as specific and discrete, given that each planet was correlated in Sinitic cultures with one of them. As Edward Schafer noted, this was not necessarily purely abstract correlation.407 It also may have linked each planet with physical substances that embody each color—Mars with cinnabar, Jupiter with azurite, and so on. This suggests a way of understanding color as both numerological symbol and pigment,408 at once abstract and material.

One application for these observations is the famous Southern Sòng painting Eighteen Songs on a Nomad Flute 胡笳十八拍. It has long been understood as an elegy on the loss of the Northern Sòng to the Jurchen Jin voiced through the poetic laments of a second-century woman named Cài Wénjī 蔡文姬 who was abducted by the Xiōngnú 匈奴.409 Surviving versions of the painting depict her life as the captive wife of a nomad in scenes of their successive travels through the northern frontier landscape and eventual return to Han country.

In at least two versions, a fragmentary album thought to be original to the twelfth century and a fourteenth-century handscroll copy (figs. 195, 196, 198), Wénjī and her escorts travel with five banners painted in each of the five-phases colors. Throughout the painting, the banners are shown in various states of use—leaned against a city wall as the group prepares to depart, carried by riders, or rolled and bundled in scenes of encampment (fig. 196). Their degree of prominence and formality changes from scene to scene, as do their relational positions. In some scenes of active procession, however, the yellow banner assumes its standard central position, unmistakably recalling the cosmological quincunx of the Honor Guard scroll (see chapter three) (fig. 198). Here, the role of this quintessential Hàn cultural signature, here adopted by a Liáo

407 Schafer, Pacing the Void, p. 40.

408 See, for example, the linking of color and symbolic numerology in the so-called “zǐbái 紫白” (purple-white) variation of jiǔgōng 九宮 (nine-palace) divination methods. See Ho, Chinese Mathematical Astrology, pp. 25-30.

ruler, is transformed from a device of imperial cosmogenesis to an affective one. The five-phases schema seems to become at once souvenir and statement of continued loyalty, and perhaps also an implicit statement on the civilizing influence Hàn culture was perceived to have. These sentiments are especially poignant in one of the handscroll’s star-gazing scenes (fig. 199), in which Wênjī and others gather some distance beyond the rolled up five-phases banners to look up to the sky. Expressing her sense of disorientation, she says: “Who knows if heaven and earth have not been turned upside down? Here I now see the Northern Dipper due south.”  

410 (fig. 199) As in the Honor Guard painting, it should be possible to discern how this five-phases schema, now approaching an explicit pictorial subject, reverberates throughout the entire world contained in this painting. About such dynamics in this and many other works of art there will be much to learn.

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410 Poetry by Liú Shāng 劉商, ca. 773, translation based on Rorex and Fong, ibid., with changes.
Works Cited

Abbreviations

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<td>Ch.</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>DZ</td>
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