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ON THE COVER:
A page from the newly discovered Tangut xylograph Essential Selection of Mixed Homonyms Often-Transmitted. Private collection.
Arakawa Shintaro

The Tangut Dictionary by E.I. Kychanov and the Study of the Shapes of the Tangut Script

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Abstract: The late Professor, Dr. Evgeny Ivanovich Kychanov not only created a solid academic foundation for the research on history, society, law, and religion of Xixia, but also made a significant contribution to the study of the Tangut language and script. One of them is the Tangut Dictionary (Kyoto University, 2006). The author, as a co-editor of the dictionary, typed Tangut characters in the special font, checked phonetic-reconstruction forms, and worked on the arrangement of the characters in the index. Although the dictionary's method to find the character index is unique, it is useful for the study of the shapes of the Tangut script from the viewpoint of current research. The author discusses some topics from the viewpoint of linguistics.

Key words: Tangut script, Tangut language, Tangut lexicography, Tangut dictionary, E.I. Kychanov

1. Tangut language and script

1.1 Tangut language

The Xixia (Tangut) dynasty occupied a dominant position in the northwestern part of China (1038–1227). Many Tangut documents written in the Tangut script are Buddhist documents. After the extinction of the dynasty, however, the Tangut language and script were in use until the 16th c. Tangut belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family and is the most northwestern of the Tibeto-Burman languages. Although Tangut seems

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1 See Kychanov 1968 and so on for the general history of Xixia.
2 See Kychanov 1982 and so on for the Buddhism of Xixia.
3 See Nishida 1989 and Gong 2003 for Tangut language, and see Nishida 2001 for Tangut script. See Nie 2021 for both of them.
to be close to Rgyalrongic, there is no confirmed language that is a direct
descendant of Tangut.
Continued research by scholars in Russia, China, Japan, and other
countries in the 20th c. revealed phonological and grammatical properties of
Tangut. Decoding the language with extremely high accuracy was made
possible by the existence of multilingual diacritical materials such as
Chinese, Tibetan, and Sanskrit, in addition to the discovery of many kinds of
rhyme dictionaries and syllabic tables based on “Tangut phonology”
modeled after Chinese phonology. Tangut has interesting grammatical
phenomena, directional prefixes, and pronominal suffixes that are not found
even in Old Tibetan and Burmese.

1.2. Tangut script

The Tangut script 西夏文字 was created to represent the Tangut
language and was promulgated in the name of Li Yuanhao 李元昊 in 1036.
At this time, various new “Sinoform scripts 疑似漢字” were invented in
northern and northwestern China, such as Khitan, Tangut, and Jurchen
scripts. These scripts, which were similar to yet different from the Chinese
writing system, played an important role in each culture.
Numerous Tangut documents of different kinds were unearthed from the
Khara-Khoto ruins 黑水城. During the Tangut rule, Buddhist sutras4 were
systematically translated and were circulated by means of a number of
printed books and not a few manuscripts.5 While the Chinese classics were
translated, a Tangut-Chinese bilingual glossary, original regal Tangut codes6,
collections of poems, rhyme dictionaries7 and so on were compiled at the
same time. It has been confirmed that approximately 6,000 Tangut characters
were produced. This script continued to be used for several hundred years
after the fall of the dynasty. The last written material has been confirmed to
bear the date of the 15th year of Hongwu 洪武 (1502) in the
Ming period. Later the Tangut script has become extinct.

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4 See KYCHANOV ed. 1999 for the catalogue of the Tangut Buddhist documents in Russia.
5 See GORBACHEVA & KYCHANOV 1963 for the catalogue of the Tangut non-Buddhist
documents in Russia. And see KYCHANOV 1988 and so on for the Tangut manuscripts.
6 See KYCHANOV 1987–89 for the Tangut famous codes, Tiansheng codex.
7 See KYCHANOV 1995 for the study on the Tangut rhyme dictionary, Wenhai baoyun 文
海寶韻.
2. The structure of Tangut script and indexes in previous studies

2.1. The structure of Tangut script

Although the Tangut script is influenced by Chinese characters, the glyph shapes are not congruent. However, the principle of glyph creation based on the concept of the main component might be considered an imitation of the “radical 部首” of a Chinese character.

Like Chinese characters, Tangut script characters can be divided into basic components such as the left part 偏 or the right part 旁, and their manner of composition is huiyi 会意 (compound ideographs) and xingsheng 形聲 (combining semantic and phonetic components). However, the composition huisheng 会声 (combining phonetic components) is also popular.

**Type of compounds**

- **huiyi 会意 (compound ideographs)**
  - 𰰍氠 yi 2.59 “sound” + 他 me: 1.36 “not to exist” = 𰰍Alright me: 1.36 “silence”

- **xingsheng 形聲 (combining semantic and phonetic components)**
  - 𰰎氧 qi 2.60 “to cover” + 𰱜 (radical of “water”) = 𰰎Alright qi 2.60 “to cry”

- **huisheng 会声 (combining phonetic components)**
  - 𰰎氧 bi: 2.10 + 𰱜 q 1.49 = 𰰎Alright bo 1.49

Tangut script differs from Chinese characters in many respects. For example, “it is extremely rare for the main component to become a single character” and “there is no pictographic nature even at the main component level.” Meanwhile, the disposition pattern of the main component matches with the pattern of radicals of Chinese characters such as the left part pian 偏 or the right part pang 旁.

Chinese characters have “names of parts according to their position” such as the left part pian 偏, the right part pang 旁, the upper part guan 冠, and so on. Although the shapes of the Tangut script are different from those of Chinese characters, this “part by position” can be used to analyze the shapes.

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8 In this paper, the reconstruction form follows ARAKAWA 2014 (+ rhyme number in Tangut phonology) and meanings of words are given by the author, although the dictionary originally used Sofronov’s system (based on SOFRONOV 1968) and word meanings by Kychanov.
Type of disposition patterns

A1. the left part 偏 and other
 彂 “language”, 彂 “gatha (poetic verse of a scripture)”, 彂 “to make a statement”

A2. the right part 旁 and other
 彷 “not to exist”, 彷 “poor”

B. the upper part 冠 and other
 彠 “tree”, 彤 “language”, 彤 “a person who does something”, 彤 “to see”

C. the upper and left part 垂 and other
 彶 “all”, 彿 “king”, 彿 “to seat”

D. the left and bottom part 繞 and other
 彸 “to live”, 彷 “you (pronominal suffix)”

E. the encircling part 構 and other
 彗 “silk”, 彚 “twill”

F. the bottom part 腳 and other
 飑 “leaf”, 飑 “to expose”

(ARAKAWA 2022a: 96)

2.2. Indexes in previous studies

Rhyme dictionaries of the time separated and arranged Tangut characters by phonetic properties. Although it is certain that Tangut radicals were recognized at that time, no material has been found that arranged characters by their radicals. On the other hand, for modern people who find it difficult to search for Tangut characters by pronunciation, an index to search for them by glyph shape is essential. In modern dictionaries, a “glyph index” is added based on a researcher’s analysis. The most common is a system in which Tangut characters are categorized by “radical” and “other” and then further arranged according to the number of strokes.

Analysis of the main part and other

箚 ⇒ 篾 (4 strokes radical) + 榖 (15 strokes)
The shape and number of strokes of the “radical” do not match among researchers.

箚 ⇒ 篾 (1 stroke radical) + 榑 (9 strokes) in HAN 2021, vol. 9: 11.
3. The Tangut Dictionary by E.I. Kychanov and the index

3.1. The history of the dictionary’s publication

The late Professor, Dr. Evgeny Ivanovich Kychanov not only created an important research foundation in the historical, social, legal, and religious studies of Xixia, but also made a great contribution to the study of the Tangut language and script. Prominent among them is his Tangut Dictionary (Kyoto University, 2006). Here, we look again at this dictionary, an important achievement of Kychanov. The author will show that elements of its organization, especially the index, make it useful in current research.

Here is a brief history of the publication of the Tangut dictionary. In the 1990s, Kychanov and the late Professor Dr. Nishida Tatsuo came up with a plan to edit and publish the Catalogue of Tangut Buddhist documents in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. At the time, the author participated in the project as an “academic reviewer” (‘‘издание подготовлено’’, i.e. “подготовка издания”, lit. “preparation of the publication”). Actually, the author was in charge of assisting in the input of handwritten glyphs by Kychanov, checking Russian reconstructed forms of Tangut, and writing fair Tangut characters. At that time, there was no practical Tangut font in Japan, so writing by hand was the only option.

In 1999 and 2000, the author stayed in Saint Petersburg to research the Tangut versions of the Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra and wrote his doctoral dissertation. After that, the author entered the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and began research career in Tokyo. At that time, a joint research project was launched again between Russia and Japan. This is Kychanov’s Tangut Dictionary.

Just like in cataloging, he asked the author to input text in his manuscript, check the reconstructed forms, and “write all Tangut characters by hand.” However, the handwritten version was expected to be very difficult, so the author instead used the Japanese-made “Konjaku Mojikyo” Tangut font. This dictionary was highly appreciated in Japan and received the 2nd Ritsumeikan University “East Asian Characters and Culture” Award in memory of the late Professor Shirakawa Shizuka (September 2007).
3.2. Index of the dictionary

In this dictionary, the index and method for arranging Tangut characters are very unique. In short, the characters are arrayed “from the last element of a character back to the first element.” Tangut characters can be analyzed by elements, as in these examples. For example, in his index, the elements in boxes become heads.

This dictionary consists of a preface, a description of the dictionary entries, a list of abbreviations, indexes, and the main part. The index consists of a “parts index” and an “index of all characters.” The former index divides all character parts into four parts: A the bottom part, B the right part, C the left and bottom part and D the encircling part.

Within each section, parts are roughly arranged from simple to structurally complex glyphs. Each part is assigned a three-digit classification number.

In B series,

B001 〄, B002 ▤, B003 ▩…

B001: 〄, 〄, 〄, 〄…
B002: 〄, 〄, 〄, 〄…
B003: 〄, 〄, 〄, 〄…

9 It is a rare index for searching Tangut characters in which C type is a stand-alone headline (ARAKAWA 2022b: 24).
4. Study of the Tangut script shapes using Kychanov’s index

4.1. Derivations of the Tangut characters

New forms of Tangut characters are derived from “parent forms” with different elements.

Structure of the Tangut characters

As far as the author can see, there still seems to be a little figurative study of the derivation of the Tangut characters.

In Tangut, different syllables are usually written in different characters, even though the syllables are derived from the same word.

Phonetic symbols:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Level tone</th>
<th>Raising tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.Ordinal</td>
<td>1ri:r 1.79</td>
<td>2ri:r 2.72</td>
<td>1ryor 1.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NISHIDA 2012: 422 etc.)
We distinguish two types of derivative elements:

Type A: What were originally “semantic components” of something were diverted for derivation.

Type B: They were created specifically for derivation, neither “semantic” nor “phonetic” components.

Some representative examples are,


A1: originally a radical of “plant”

A1: originally a radical of “plant”

Sometimes it functions as a derivative part without the meaning “plants”

B1 functions as just a derivative element

This is the most productive of the elements considered derivative-only.

a. Word derivation type: Lax-tense alternation

b. Word derivation type: Tone alternation

B2 also makes many derivative characters.

However, there are few examples of phonological relationships between basic characters and derived characters.
4.2. Study of the shapes of the Tangut script using Kychanov’s index

When conducting research on derived forms, it is actually useful to be able to search by the parent form rather than by the element for derivation.

A great dictionary published recently by the Chinese scholar, Han Xiaoman, has several different indexes. In one of them, Tangut characters are classified by the part on the “right” and arranged in stroke order. First, the rightmost part becomes a head, and the characters are arranged in the order of the number of strokes including it.

(HAN 2021, vol. 9: 185)

In fact, the rightmost element may not correspond to a radical, but may be an element of a radical. For example, in the following characters, although the part is a radical, the part is the headline.

For more complex glyphs, parent forms are less likely to be the headline. For example, the following characters which are all glyphically correlated, are arranged in completely different places because the total number of strokes is different in Han’s dictionary.

thin → thorn → pierce
→ needle
→ pointed

10 HAN 2021 is a great book in nine volumes and the last volume is an index of several different kinds. See the review on the volume: ARAKAWA 2022c.

11 For example, (12) means “12 strokes including the radical”.

In Kychanov’s index, on the other hand, these characters are placed consecutively.

There are many other examples like this in Kychanov’s index.
to collect, gather → ᳢ ᳢ to collect, gather
→ ᳢ ᳢ scattered
→ ᳢ ᳢ volume
→ ᳢ ᳢ to extract butter

(11) ṃǐ 1.67 sjii lastName821 ṁǐ 1.67 sjii 6213
(11) ṃǐ 1.67 sjii lastName0100 2.41 9eww 7473
(11) ṃǐ 1.67 sjii lastName0100 2.41 9eww 7559
(12) V10.2.33 sjii 2583
(12) V13 2.51 ku 8147
(12) V16 2.10 sjii 1519
(16) ṃǐ 1.35 sjii 6561

(09) ṃǐ 1.56 tajow 182
(09) ṃǐ 1.75 sjur 8450
(09) ṃǐ 2.38 lhw 1422
(09) ṃǐ 1.69 sjii 340

(11) ṃǐ 1.35 sjii 1224
(11) V37 1.19 sjii 2236
(12) ṃǐ 2.40 lijw 371
(12) ṃǐ 1.82 sjii 315
(12) ṃǐ 1.35 sjii 317

(11) ṃǐ 1.55 sjii 2277
(12) ṃǐ 2.76 tajw 2584
(12) ṃǐ 2.30 wej 518
(13) ṃǐ 14.2.14 ḡa 4395
(13) ṃǐ 2.20 ḡa 3134
(13) ṃǐ 1.83 ḡa 8189
(14) ṃǐ 2.52 ḡa 26
(15) ṃǐ 2.12 ḡa 129
(15) ṃǐ 1.56 ḡa 4508
(16) ṃǐ 2.33 sjii 447
(16) ṃǐ 1.18 lijw 516

(HAN 2021, vol. 9: 102)
The dictionary is useful not only due to the index showing correlations of components, but also due to the explanation of the characters whether the correlation is by “meaning” or “pronunciation.” We can immediately see the derivation by meaning and the derivation by pronunciation. Just by looking at the same page and knowing the pronunciation and meaning, we can understand the derivation of characters as follows:

(KYCHANOV 2006: 12)

(KYCHANOV 2006: 99)
The dictionary is useful for investigating the function of the derivation-only elements shown earlier.

In conclusion, the index is still useful for investigating and studying derivation relationships for Tangut characters.

Unfortunately, this dictionary has been neither put into an electronic platform nor revised as the second edition. However, ideas such as the arrangement of Tangut script components will continue to be useful. In the future, research focusing on the derivation of Tangut characters and the index for searching characters are expected.

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