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**About an Early Attempt to Translate the Tengyur
from Tibetan to Mongolian**

Abstract

The existing Mongolian Tengyur was translated and printed in Beijing in 1742–1749 at the initiative of the Qianlong emperor. However, St. Petersburg University Library possesses several unique manuscripts which prove that an earlier attempt to translate the Tengyur into Mongolian was undertaken at least ten years earlier. It is highly likely that only a few volumes of the 225-volume set of the Tibetan Tengyur had been translated at that time. For this reason, when in the 1740s, it was again proposed to translate the whole Tengyur into Mongolian, it was decided by the new translation commission to start the whole translation anew and the earlier translations were laid aside.

Keywords: Buddhism, Mongolian language, manuscripts, translation, Beijing, Buddhist Canon

The Mongolian Tengyur (*bsTan-'gyur*, Mong. *Danjuur*) has long been a hidden treasure unavailable to scholars. Its existence was first reported by a Russian scholar Vassili P. Vasiliev who stayed in Beijing in 1840–1850:

De mon temps le Tou-chou-tsi-tchen 圖書集成 se vendait 700 r[oubles] a[rgeant], prix que l'on demandait également pour le Gandjour et le Dandjour en tibétain, é[dition] impériale. L'édition mongole de ces deux ouvrages n'était pour lors à vendre, mais j'eus l'occasion de la voir dans la pagode Young-ho-koung 雍和宮, ainsi que celle du Gandjour en langue mandchoue.¹

However, the existence of the Mongolian Tengyur was doubted even in the twentieth century. As Berthold Laufer wrote in 1907: “Hier ist von einer grossen Druckauflage die

¹ Wassiliev 1856 : 564–565, n. 2.

Rede, und in diesem Falle hätte sich im Laufe der Zeit das eine oder andere Exemplar auffinden lassen, bisher ist keines aufgetrieben worden”.²

The newly created Learned Committee (*Sudur bičig-ün küriyeleng*) of Mongolia made a priority task getting a set of the Mongolian Tengyur since none of its copies was available in Outer Mongolia. In 1925 a printed Tengyur was kindly presented by Nayantu, a powerful Mongolian aristocrat residing in Beijing, and brought to Ulan Bator. A short article about this event by B.Ya. Vladimirtsov was the first scholarly report on the Mongolian Tengyur.³

The Mongolian Tengyur was translated and printed in Beijing in 1742–1749 at the initiative of the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor. It was translated from and modelled after the earlier Beijing edition of the Tibetan Tengyur. A history of this Tibetan edition was composed by Thu’u-bkwan Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho (1680–1735) who was the chief administrative lama of Beijing in 1715–1735.⁴ According to his story, a complete set of the Tengyur was brought together by the regent Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho (1653–1705) for the sake of longevity of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The latter compiled a catalogue of this Tengyur which was based on the catalogue by Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364). This became known to the rJe-btsun dam-pa qutuytu of Khalkha Mongolia (= Öndür Gegen; 1635–1723) who asked the Kangxi 康熙 emperor to “invite” this Tengyur to Beijing and to make it printed. The emperor fulfilled the Qutuytu’s request, the manuscript was brought to Beijing and in 1721 the engraving work started. It seems much probable that the emperor wanted to see the complete set of the Tibetan Tengyur printed for his seventieth jubilee in 1723. However he did not live to see this unprecedented printing project finished and it was completed during the first year of his successor, the emperor Yongzheng’s 雍正 reign. The new emperor ordered to supplement this edition with the Collected Works (*gsung-’bum*) in seven volumes by ICang-skyia Ngag-dbang blo-bzang chos-ldan (1642–1714), his teacher of Buddhism. Also, a Khalkha Mongolian lama Biligtü nom-un qan asked the emperor to permit him to supplement this edition with the Collected Works in twenty volumes by Tsongkhapa from his personal funds. This was allowed and the huge 225-volume Tengyur was thus supplemented with more twenty-seven volumes. The Yongzheng emperor wrote a preface to this edition at the request of a group of high functionaries headed by Longkuodo, who was officially called his “uncle.”⁵

Translation of this huge collection of texts into Mongolian was a very difficult task which besides scholarly effort required much finance. The history of the translation the Tengyur into Mongolian and its printing has been described in Tibetan and Mongolian sources. For example, in a Biography of ICang-skyia Rol-pa’i rdo-rje (1717–1786) it is said that in 1741 while performing ancestral rites at the Cininggong 慈寧宮 Palace the Qianlong emperor noticed a beautiful copy of the Mongolian Kangyur (*bKa’-’gyur*) which was read during the rite. Having inquired about it from a Mongol beyile Cenggünjab

² Laufer 1907: 220.

³ Vladimirtsov 1926.

⁴ *bsTan ’gyur rin po che’i dkar chags blo gsal mgul rgyan tsinta ma ni’i ’phreng mdzes.*

⁵ Haenisch 1962.

(Tib. Tshe mgon skyabs, d. 1771) he was told that there existed a printed Mongolian Kangyur (Mong. *Ganjuur*) while the Mongolian Tengyur did not exist. Immediately the emperor ordered to start the translation work which began in 1742.⁶

The translation work was preceded by compiling of the famous dictionary of Buddhist terminology called *mKhas pa'i 'byung gnas / Merged yarqu-yin oron* by ICang-skya Rolpa'i rdo-rje and his preceptor dGa'-ldan khri-pa Blo-bzang bstan-pa'i nyi-ma (1689–1762). This dictionary was translated into Mongolian by a large group of learned lamas and served a terminological basis for the translation. The Mongolian Tengyur also included the Collected works by Tsongkhapa and ICang-skya Ngag-dbang blo bzang chos-ldan which had been translated earlier in the 1730s. The printing was completed in 1749 and the emperor wrote his postscript. Complete sets of the Tengyur were distributed throughout the largest monasteries of Beijing and Inner Mongolia.⁷

However, St. Petersburg University Library possesses several unique manuscripts which prove that an earlier attempt to translate the Tengyur into Mongolian was undertaken at least ten years earlier. During his stay in Beijing in 1840–1850 the already mentioned Russian scholar V. Vasiliev acquired a great collection of rare and unique Mongolian books. His aim was to find the books which his teacher and predecessor J. Kowalewski was unable to get in Beijing. He managed to purchase a big portion of the private library of Mongolian books which belonged to Prince Yunli 允禮 (1697–1738), the seventeenth son of the Kangxi emperor. V. Vasiliev wrote about parts of the Mongolian Kangyur and the Tengyur in the St. Petersburg University Library: “M. Kovalevski n’a rapporté de Péking qu’une partie du Gandjour, les Pâramitâs; j’ai acquis de mon côté quelques volumes du Dandjour: c’est tout ce que nous possédons de ces deux recueils.”⁸ These volumes of Tengyur acquired by V. Vasiliev also belonged to Prince Yunli, some of them bear his personal seal. [See Fig. 1]

These are volumes 28, 29, 30 and 61 of the section “Commentary to the Sutras” (*mdo-'grel / sudur-un tayilburi*).⁹ They all are numbered with Tibetan letters which attests to the fact that each of these volumes was regarded as a corresponding volume of the Tengyur and not a separate manuscript.

The collation of two versions of the opening text of the thirtieth volume, the *Bhāvanākrama* – one found in the printed Mongolian Tengyur, the other contained within the manuscript volumes, demonstrated that these are two entirely different translations.¹⁰

⁶ *Včir-dhar-a ljang-sgi-a lalita baĵar-a jña-a šasin-a dibi šrii-badr-a-yin čadig süsüg-ün linqu-a-yin teyin büged negeĉi naran-u gerel kemeġdekü orosiba*. Ff. 59a:3–59b:28.

⁷ Heissig 1954: 83–87, 96–99; Ünenči-yin Tuyag-a 2008: 293–297.

⁸ Wassiliev 1856: 570.

⁹ Uspensky 2001: 37–44, Nos. 080–083.

¹⁰ Uspensky 1998.



Fig. 1. Mongolian manuscript of the volume 30 of the section “Commentary to Sutras” with the personal Tibetan seal of Yunli who is named by his official Manchu title Kengse-qinwang. (A fragment of the cover page)

Another manuscript relating to this translation project is a Sanskrit-Tibetan-Mongolian-Chinese version of the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, a terminological dictionary which is a part of the Tengyur. This is a draft manuscript with many corrections in all four languages.¹¹ Collation of this manuscript with the version of this dictionary which is contained within the printed version of the Mongolian Tengyur demonstrates that these are completely different translations.¹² It is possible that this dictionary was intended to serve as a terminological basis for the translation of the Tengyur into Mongolian.

Within the Mongolian books which seems to have belonged to Yunli was also a volume of the catalogue of the Tibetan Tengyur printed in 1721–1724.¹³ This is a printed Mongolian part of the reference volume bound into three Chinese-style books in yellow (“imperial colour”) silk covers. [See Fig. 2] It also contains a few hand-written marks and attached slips of paper with questions concerning the contents of the corresponding volumes.

¹¹ Uspensky 2001: 47, No. 097.

¹² Ishihama Yumiko and Fukuda Yoichi: 1989.

¹³ Uspensky 2001: 285–286, No. 262.

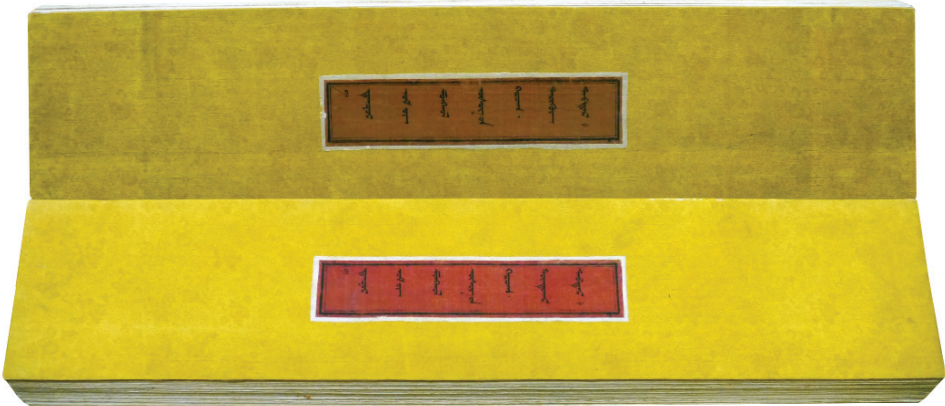


Fig. 2. A Mongolian Catalogue of the Tibetan Tengyur printed in Beijing in 1721–1724 which seems to have been a personal copy of Prince Yunli

One of these slips is related to the volume A (“thirty”) [See Fig. 3], the other – to the volume *ki* (“thirty one”). Since volume 30 is in the possession of the St. Petersburg University Library and bears the stamp of Yunli, the interrelation between this bookmark with the two books is obvious.

The text on the slip of paper attached to the page with the contents of the volume 30 is as follows:

“Ašuva-ghô-ša-yin Badm-a čöylaşan: Erdeni-yin ĵula: ene qoyar bolbau:”
– “Are these two [works] the ‘Heap of Lotuses’ and the ‘Precious Lamp’ by Ašvaghôṣa?”

The reason for this question is as follows. In the catalogue of the Tengyur only abridged titles of works are given while some parts of the titles were omitted. The full Tibetan titles of these two works are:

Kun rdzob byang chub kyi sems bsgom pa'i yi ge Padma spungs pa zhes bya ba (Peking Edition, No. 5307);
Don dam pa byang chub kyi sems bsgom pa'i yi ge Rin po che'i sgron ma zhes bya ba (Peking Edition, No. 5307).

The full Mongolian titles of these two works as given in the printed edition of the Mongolian Tengyur are:

*Inaŋungi bôdhi sedkil-i bisilyaqu bičig Lingqu-a čöylaşan kemekü;*¹⁴
*Ünemleküi bôdhi sedkil-i bisilyaqu bičig Erdeni-yin ĵula kemekü.*¹⁵

¹⁴ Catalogue of Mongolian Ganjuur and Danjuur: 673, No. 4366

¹⁵ Catalogue of Mongolian Ganjuur and Danjuur: 673, No. 4367.

The text on the slip of paper attached to the page with the contents of the volume 31 is as follows:

“Quturytu Bayatur-un ĵokiyayṣan Baramid-un quriyangyui udq-a: ene bolbau:” – “Is this [work] ‘An Abridged Meaning of the Pāramitās’ composed by Āryaśūra?”¹⁶

It is thus possible to suggest that the volume 31 was also translated into Mongolian at that time.



Fig. 3. A page in the Tengyur catalogue with a mark on the page with the contents of the volume 30

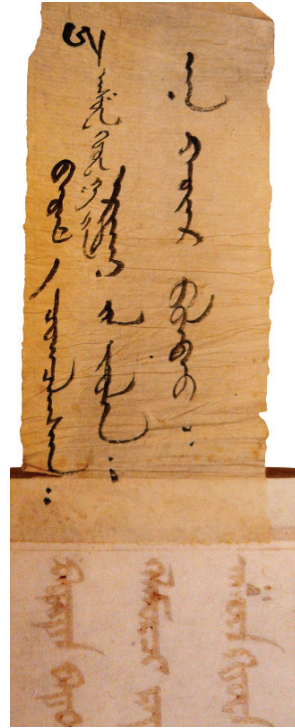


Fig. 4. A slip of paper attached to the page with the contents of the volume 30

Altogether the St. Petersburg University Library possesses the following manuscripts relating to the Mongolian translation of the Tengyur dating back to the days of Prince Yunli, i.e. prior to the project initiated by the Qianlong emperor: a Mongolian translation of the catalogue of the 1721–1724 edition of the Tibetan Tengyur; a terminological dictionary *Mahāvīyutpatti*; four volumes from the Tengyur in Mongolian translation. These manuscripts demonstrate the possibility that Mongolian translation of the Beijing edition

¹⁶ Catalogue of Mongolian Ganjuur and Danjuur: 678, No. 4399.

of the Tibetan Tengyur was undertaken during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor, under the direction of his brother Prince Yunli. However this ambitious project ceased with the deaths of the Yongzheng emperor in 1735 and of Prince Yunli in 1738. It is highly likely that not many volumes of the 225-volume set of the Tibetan Tengyur had been translated. For this reason when, in the 1740s, it was again proposed to translate the whole Tengyur into Mongolian, it was decided by the new translation commission to start the whole translation anew and the earlier translations were laid aside.

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