Liaoye—a Chinese Ligature in Uighur Manuscripts from the 13th and 14th Centuries

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The Chinese letter 塔 means “it is finished”. Confining myself here mainly to Uighur Buddhist texts, among which several use Chinese characters as logographs, I would like to point out that this expression often occurs at the end of chapters, books or other text units of a given work. It was most frequently translated into Turkish as although; meaning “it is finished”. In one case, we also find a phonetic transcription of the Chinese: lyw y. (Fig. 1). This transcription corresponds well to the expected pronunciation ləw lyw. The pronunciation of the first character as ləw [lyw] is also preserved in a different context in a fragment of the St. Petersbursk Collection edited by M. Shigačov.2

In Chinese, these two characters are written one after the other as is also the case in several Uighur manuscripts using Chinese characters in a mixed system. One example is a manuscript which contains a passage about auspicious and inauspicious days ending in 塔 (Fig. 2). At the end of the fragment CHU 7475, we find ləw y written horizontally according to the Chinese order (from right to left) (Fig. 3). 3

However, in some Uighur manuscripts, all of which belong to the late period of Uighur Buddhist culture, i.e. the Yuan or more roughly the Mongol period (in the 13th and 14th centuries), we find instead of these two characters a special form which looks like a combination of both in one character. One may regard it as a ligature of both. This character could only have come into existence if the Uighur direction of writing is followed, i.e. from left to right. Recently, M. Shigačov has edited some examples of Chinese texts which also show this ‘Uighur feature.’

The first scholar to explain this special character was Tōru Haneda (羽田博士), when he studied the London manuscript of the Abhidhamma-kalasāhasāyikā Taivānāthā written in Uighur script and mixed with Chinese characters used as logographs for Uighur words. On folio 86a of the manuscript Or. 8212/754, we find both modes: in line 10 (右边) the special sign is used (Fig. 4). It is followed in line 11 (左边) by the two characters written separately (the first is doubled) (Fig. 5). T. Haneda explained the character under discussion as a ligature of liaoye. Later, when M. Shigačov studied this manuscript, he adopted Haneda’s statement. On the other hand, G. Karta and P. Zieme referred to the same solution without having received knowledge of Haneda’s and Shigačov’s results. In the so-called Zölbasho, liaoye is written separately on two occasions (Fig. 6), but once as a ligature (Fig. 7).

Recently, Geng Shimin published parts of a newly found manuscript of the Abhidharmakosahāsha yikā Taivānāthā from Lanzhou in which the ligature also appears. But he concluded:

Here, as to the special sign 塔. I don’t think it is a ligature consisting of two Chinese characters 塔 (as Prof. Haneda and Shigačov did it). It would be a sign of ‘goodness’ put at the end of a chapter or a book. It seems to me that it is a deformed svasitakai...put at the end of a book (like the Mongolian Buddhist scriptures). It would have the same meaning like the Chinese "善善, 善善 (good)" and the Sanskrit sva-stāsī (good) after it. In addition, in LM, after this special sign two Chinese characters 塔 塔 (liaoye ‘finished’) are added. This point also proves that it is only a sign denoting the ‘auspiciousness’ at the end of a book or a chapter.4

This example shows that both forms were used, firstly the ligature, secondly the normal form.

It is also found in another Uighur manuscript edited by Semih Tezcan in 1973.5 After my 2006 article on some quotations in the Insani-sūtra appeared,6 I discussed one passage with Masahiko Shigačov during his stay in Berlin. Following the suggestion presented by Geng Shimin in 2002 I concluded that in the Insani manuscript, too, the character in question can be interpreted as a form of the svasitakai. I read the character as 塔 wan ‘ten-thousand’. M. Shigačov rejected this reading, and I looked into my previous study of 1991, where I had already given the correct reading and interpretation of the sentence.7 Thus the sentence has to be read as follows 我了許語 了了質 (Fig. 8) wo Zhengzui songxue liangyue ‘I, Zhengzui (~ Old Uighur Cisim), have recited and learned it. It is finished.’

The recto side of the Chinese Buddhist scroll CHU 6845 contains some Uighur attempts at copying Chinese characters taken from the original text. To the right of the character on the upper margin, the scribe used the special character (Fig. 9). In the composite booklet UL 5335, which contains a selection of poetical Chinese texts written only in Uighur script, Chinese characters are rarely used. One of these cases is liang which appears seven times34, while only two times in a transcriptional form: lyw different from the one cited above (lyw). The Chinese character liang could be used in the same way as liaoye.

As the ligature, i.e. the combination of two single characters 塔 is not known from Chinese or other traditions using the Chinese script, one has to conclude that it was introduced by the Uighurs, possibly induced by other words written in this way such as ymjter ‘one also says’ known from the mixed Chinese/Uighur Agama and Abhidharma texts (Fig. 10). Not only were these words written as one word, they were also combined in a kind of ligature written side by side (from left to right) (Fig. 11).

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3 You are missing a number here. It might be 12.
4 You are missing a number here. It might be 12.
5 You are missing a number here. It might be 12.
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1. Introduction

It is regularly lamented that too few Sanskrit texts have been critically edited. This is true, and I agree wholeheartedly that good critical editions by editors with learning and sound judgement are sorely needed, and that the production of such editions is one of the most important ways to advance the field. It should always be remembered, however, that a critical edition is, properly considered, a hypothesis (about some particular state of a text, not necessarily, as is often assumed, its original form, though that is no doubt the most usual case). This does not mean that it is "not scientific" or "historical," on the contrary, the forming and the refining of hypotheses is arguably the most important task of science and scholarship, be it in the natural sciences or in the humanities, including history and philology. But a "definitive critical edition," popular though that phrase seems to be, is almost a contradiction in terms; and the production of even an excellent critical edition, by the most learned and discriminating of scholars, cannot mean that other scholars and students of a text will cease to consider the primary evidence of the manuscripts themselves, to test, critically, the editor's hypothesis, and to form their own conclusions and hypotheses.

It is, of course, a fundamental task of the editor to provide information concerning the evidence on which that hypothesis is based, or at least to report (in the critical apparatus) the principal documentary evidence that does not directly support it, i.e. variant manuscript readings. But this alone will not be (or should not be) quite sufficient for all. Just as, in other fields, a scholar or scientist will not rest content merely with a colleague's reporting of the evidence (data or observations) on which a proposed hypothesis rests, but will wish, sooner rather than later, to examine the evidence (or make the relevant observations and perhaps experiments) for himself or herself, so other scholars engaged in studying the same work will wish to examine for themselves the documentary (i.e. manuscript) evidence on which the hypothesis that the critical edition is based.

To these general considerations, which I would hold to be relevant not to Indologists alone, I shall now try to give some support and specificity by the examination of a recent publication. In the latter half of 2007 a book appeared which for multiple reasons should be, and has been, received with special rejoicing, in particular by Sanskritists and all those interested in Buddhist thought. It is the first edition to be published of the Sanskrit original of the first two chapters of the extensive literature on its theory and methods, and a narrow conception of science/scholarship, in which no place seems to be left for hypotheses. For a more balanced view see e.g. Tammela 1965, pp. 9-32.
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