Christophe Vielle – GCBS/KANTL, Gent, 21-3-2017

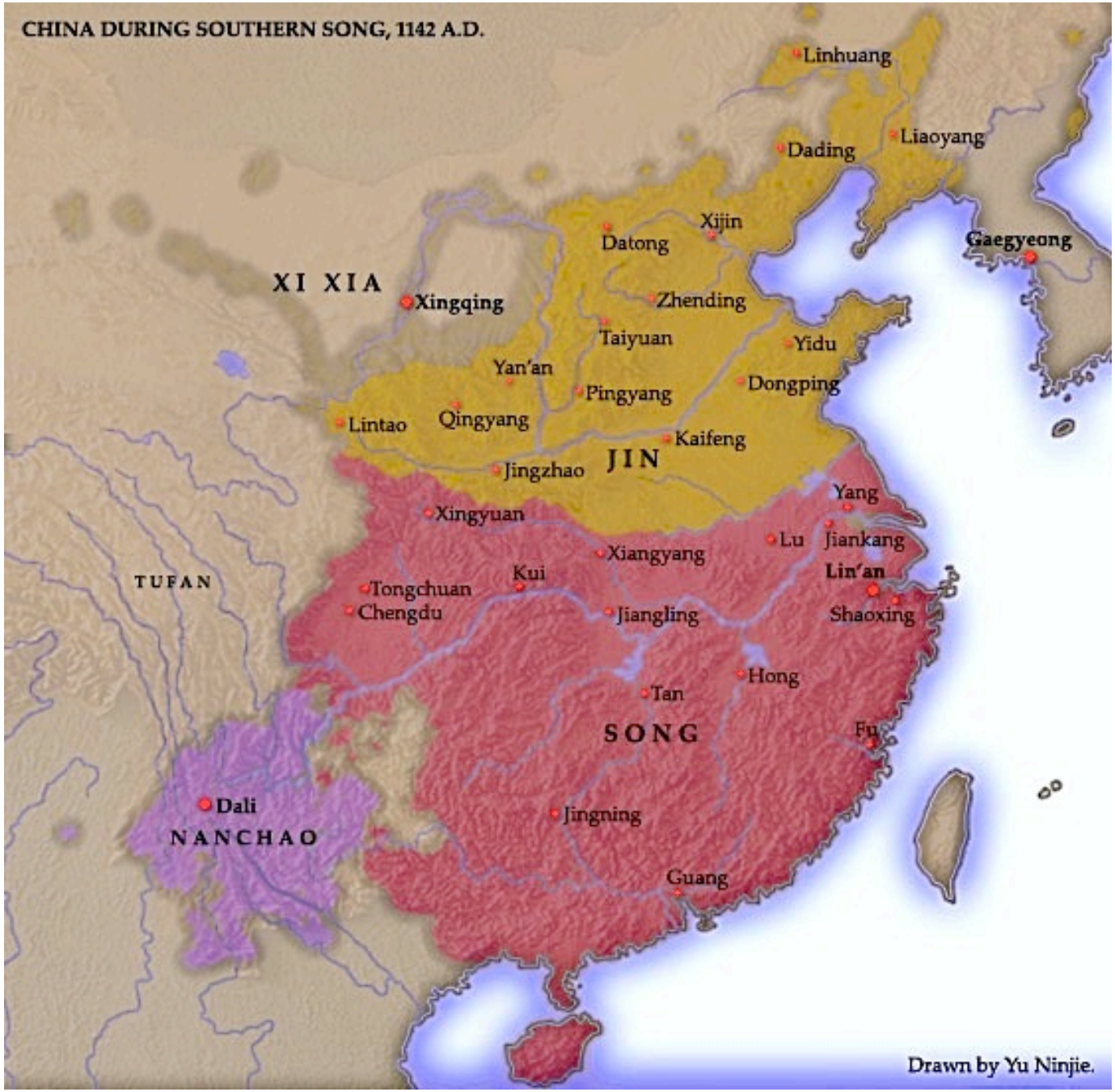
The Pairi Daiza Collection of Sanskrit Steles:

Buddhism in the medieval Kingdom of Dali (Yunnan)

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ABSTRACT

The Pairi Daiza Park (in Brugelette, Belgium) exhibits an exceptional collection of more than 150 ancient stone steles engraved with inscriptions, coming from the Chinese province of Yunnan. Written in a variant of the Indian *nāgarī* script known as *siddham*, all these inscriptions display, in full or in part, a specific version of the Sanskrit text called *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī*, viz. the 'Incantation of the Most Victorious Diadem [of Buddha]', together with, for most of them, one or two human figure(s), three animal figures of the Chinese zodiac (representing one of the four cardinals), optional Chinese or Sanskrit (*bīja*) symbolic characters, and, in a few cases, a figure of some Buddhist deity. This collection, quite unique, is an extremely valuable resource for the study of the peculiar religious and funerary practices and beliefs in the medieval kingdom of Dali (10th-13th centuries), the population of which was ethnically not Chinese. It sheds new light on a nearly unknown episode in the history of Far-Eastern Buddhism, and also contributes to trace more precisely the spreading of the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* throughout Buddhist Asia where it became very popular from the 7th century onwards.

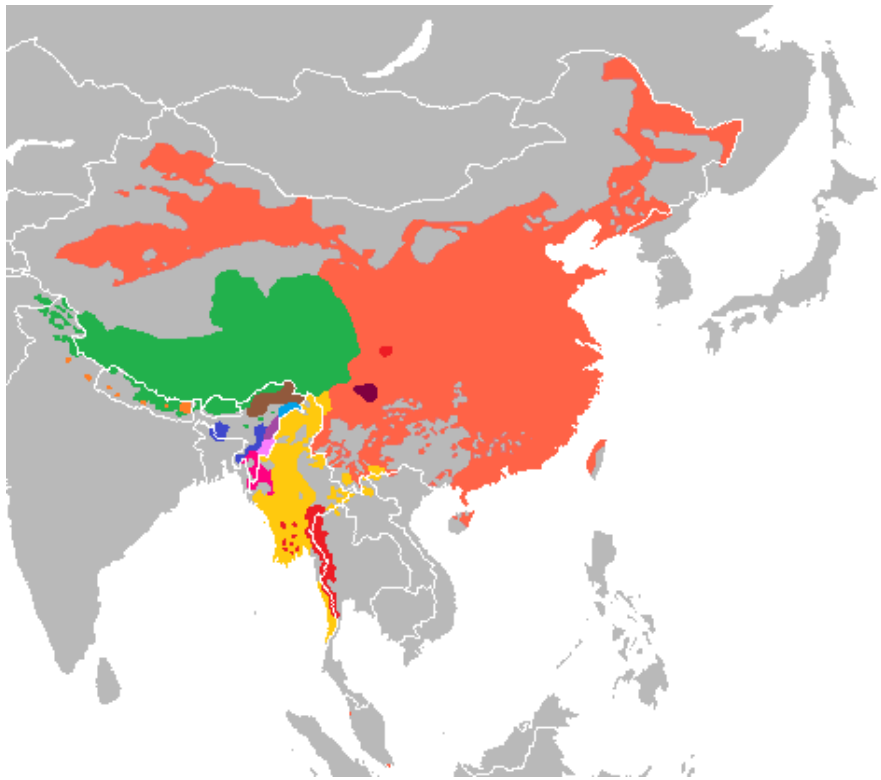

CHINA DURING SOUTHERN SONG, 1142 A.D.
Linhuang
Dading
Liaoyang
Xijin
Datong
Gaegyeong
XI XIA
Xingqing
Zhending
Taiyuan
Yidu
Yan'an
Dongping
Pingyang
Lintao
Qingyang
Kaifeng
JIN
Jingzhao
Yang
Xingyuan
Lu
Jiankang
Xiangyang
Lin'an
Kui
TUFAN
Tongchuan
Chengdu
Jiangling
Shaoxing
Hong
Tan
SONG
Fu
Dali
NANCHAO
Jingning
Guang
Drawn by Yu Ninjie.

(From Wikipedia : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dali_Kingdom)
The Dali Kingdom, known in Chinese as the Dali State (simplified Chinese: =大理国; traditional Chinese: 大理國; pinyin: Dàlǐ Guó; Bai language: Dablit Guaif), was a medieval kingdom centered in what is now Yunnan province, China, with Dali, in the valley boarding the Lake Erhai, and Kunming, the present capital of the province (on the shore of the Lake Dian), as its main cities. King Duan Siping established its capital at Dali in 937 and 22 kings of his dynasty ruled it until 1253, when it was conquered during the Mongol invasion of the area. The invaders received help from the dynasty itself, which continued to rule the area afterwards as Mongol vassals. (…)
The Dali Kingdom was preceded by the Nanzhao dynasty, which was overthrown in 902. (…) The monk Li Xian Maishun came from India (821-824) to Dali where he built the Chongsheng Temple; he is considered as the first patriarch of the Azhali (阿吒力, from Sanskrit *ācārya*) religion, which became the particular form of esoteric Buddhism prevalent in the region. In 825 the monk Pulituoke came from India calling himself the holy Acuoye Guanyin from the western Lotus land. The monk Zantuojueduo/Shilidaduo (Candragupta) came in ca. 828 (or 839/840) from Mojiatao (Magadha) to Heqing (about 100 km north of Dali), where he built a temple and began proselytizing; his activity was incorporated into later Bai legends where he is described as having come from Tibet. Meng Longshun (877-897), the 11th king of Nanzhao, established Buddhism as the state religion. Ten of the 22 kings of Dali gave up the throne and became monks. (…)
In 1274 the Province of Yunnan was created by the Mongol Empire at the beginning of the Yuan dynasty. (…) King Duan Xingzhi of Dali was then enfeoffed as Maharaja (摩诃罗嵯) by the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan, and the Dali Kingdom Duan royal family continued to hold the title of Maharaja in Yunnan as vassals to the Mongols under the supervision of Mongolian imperial princes and Muslim governors (…). After the Ming dynasty conquered Yunnan from the Yuan, the Duan royals were shipped off to the Ming capital of Nanjing by the Hongwu Emperor.



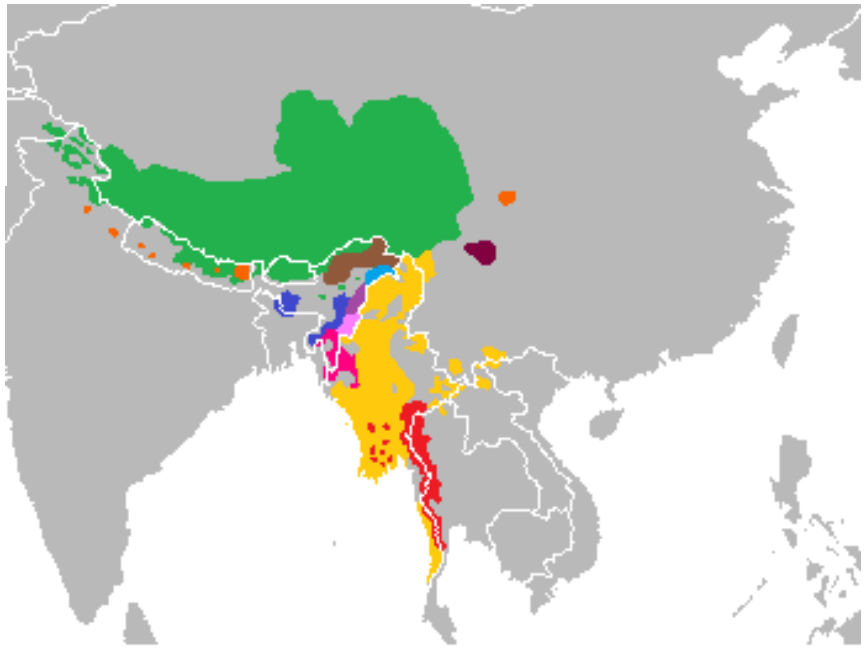
Map of Yunnan province with districts

(From Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nanzhao)
Nanzhao, alternate spellings Nanchao and Nan Chao (traditional Chinese: 南詔; simplified Chinese: 南诏; pinyin: Nánzhào; standard Tibetan: Jang) was a polity that flourished in what is now southern China and Southeast Asia during the 8th and 9th centuries. It was centered on present-day Yunnan in China. (…)
Nanzhao comprised many ethnic and linguistic groups. Some historians believe that the majority of the population were of the Bai people, but that the elite spoke a variant of Nuosu (also called *Yi*), a Tibeto-Burman language closely related to Burmese. (…)
The area had a strong connection with Vajrayana Tantric Buddhism which has survived to this day at Jianchuan and neighboring areas. The worship of Guanyin and Mahākāla is very different from other forms of Chinese Buddhism. Nanzhao likely had strong religious connections with the Pagan Kingdom in what is today Myanmar, as well as Tibet and Bengal (see Pala Empire).
(…)
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bai_people)
The Bai (…) are one of 56 ethnic groups officially recognized by the People's Republic of China. They numbered 1,858,063 as of 2000. (…) An estimated 1,240,000 (as of 2003) of the Bai speak the Bai language in all its varieties. The tongue is either a member of the Sinitic branch or the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family or possibly part of an independent branch of this family.



Sino-Tibetan Language Family

Tibeto-Burman sub-Family



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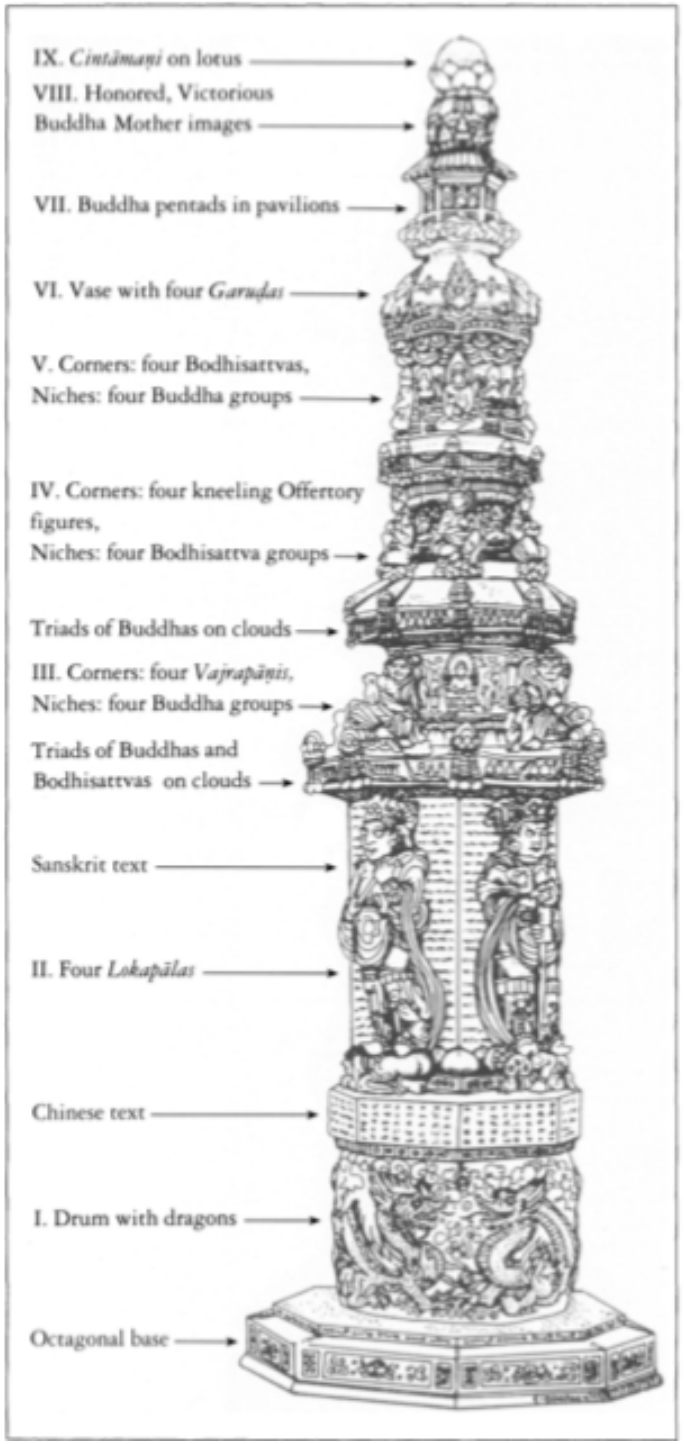
The Three Pagodas are an ensemble of three independent pagodas arranged on the corners of a equilateral triangle, near the town of Dali, dating from the time of the Nanzhao kingdom and Kingdom of Dali.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Pagodas_of_Chongsheng_Temple_(Dali)



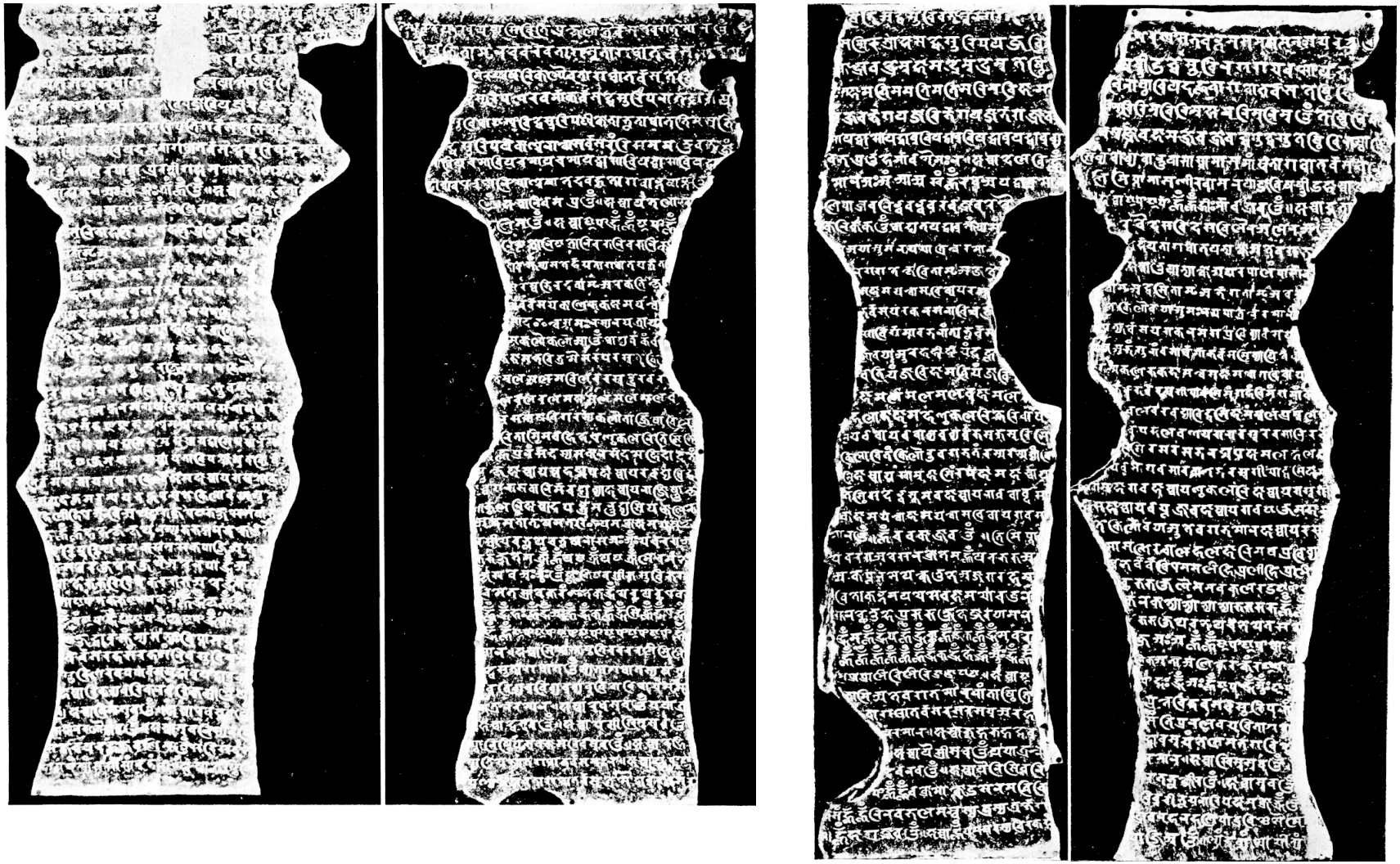
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The *Dhāraṇī* pillar of Kunming dated 1103-1252 CE


IX. Cintāmaṇi on lotus
VIII. Honored, Victorious Buddha Mother images
VII. Buddha pentads in pavilions
VI. Vase with four Garuḍas
V. Corners: four Bodhisattvas, Niches: four Buddha groups
IV. Corners: four kneeling Offertory figures, Niches: four Bodhisattva groups
Triads of Buddhas on clouds
III. Corners: four Vajrapāṇis, Niches: four Buddha groups
Triads of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on clouds
Sanskrit text
II. Four Lokapālas
Chinese text
I. Drum with dragons
Octagonal base


E
N
S
W
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
Sanskrit text
Chinese text
I
Base



The four faces of the Sanskrit inscription on the Kunming Pillar (Finot & Goloubew 1925) displaying the text of the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-*, *Halahala-* and *Vasundharā-dhāraṇī*.

The Yunnanese version of the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* (crit. ed. Mak 2016)

§1 @ namo bhagavate sarva-trailokya-prativiśiṣṭāya buddhāya te namaḥ / tadyathā / oṁ́ śodhaya śodhaya viśudhaya viśudhaya mocaya mocaya vimocaya vimocaya asama-sama-samantâvabhāsa-spharaṇa-gati-gagana-svabhāva-
viśuddhe / abhiṣiñcatu māṃ sarva-tathāgata-sugata-vara-vacanâmṛtâbhiṣekair mahā-mudra-mantra-padaiḥ / āhara āhara āyuḥ-saṃdhāraṇi śodhaya śodhaya gagana-viśuddhe uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-pariśuddhe sahasra-raśmi-saṃ codite sarva-tathāgatâvalokani ṣaṭ-pāramitā-paripūraṇi sarva-tathāgata-māte daśa-bhūmi-pratiṣṭhite sarva-tathāgata-hṛdayâdhiṣṭhānâdhiṣṭhite /
§2 mudre mudre mahā-mudre vajra-kāya-saṃghātana-pariśuddhe sarva-karmâvaraṇa-pari śuddhe pratinivartaya āyur-viśuddhe sarva-tathāgata-samayâ dhiṣṭhite /
§3 muni muni mahā-muni vimuni vimuni mahā-vimuni mati mati mamati mahā-mamati sumati tathā tā-bhūta-koṭi-pariśuddhe visphuṭa-bodhi-śuddhe / he he jaya jaya vijaya vijaya smara smara sphara sphara-sarva-buddhâdhiṣṭhānâdhiṣṭhite śuddhe śuddhe vajre vajre mahā-vajre suvajre vajra-garbhe jaya-garbhe vijaya-garbhe vajre / vajraṃ bhavatu mama śarīraṃ / sarva-sattvānāṃ ca kāya-pariśuddhe bhavatu/
me sadā sarva-gati-pariśuddhiś ca / sarva-sattva-samāśvāsâ dhiṣṭhite sarva-tathāgatāś ca māṃ samāśvā sayantu /
§4 buddhya buddhya siddhya siddhya buddhāya buddhāya vibuddhāya vibuddhāya śodha ya śodhaya viśodhaya viśodhaya mocaya mocaya vimocaya vimocaya samanta-pa riśuddhe sarva-tathāgata-hṛdayâdhiṣṭhānâdhiṣṭhite mahā-mudre svāhā //
§5 uṣṇīṣa-vijayā nāma dhāraṇī samāptam iti//

The ‘Incantation of the Most Victorious Diadem [of Buddha]’ (transl. Mak 2016)

§1. Homage to the blessed one. Homage to you, the Buddha most excellent in all three worlds. Thus it is said: Oṃ! Purify, purify! Completely purify, completely purify! Liberate, liberate! Completely liberate, completely liberate! You, incomparable (*asamasama-*), completely pure one, having the pervasive (*spharaṇa-*) nature of light ubiquitous in the [six] modes of existences of living beings (*gati-*) and the sky, consecrate me with the teaching of the great seal (*mahāmudra-*) and the mantra, the consecration with the nectar (*amṛta-*) of the best teachings of all Tathāgatas and Sugatas. Take away, take away [calamities], you, the one who holds life together (*āyuḥ-saṃdhāraṇi*)! Purify, purify! You, pure as the sky, completely purified by the Victorious Diadem. You, who are infused with thousand rays, who has the downward looking power (*-avalokani*) of all Tathāgatas, who has completely fulfilled the Six Pāramitās, the mother (*-*māte*) of all Tathāgatas, who are established in the Ten Bhūmis and empowered by the empowerment (*-adhiṣṭhānâdhiṣṭhite*) of the hearts of all Tathāgatas!

§2. You, seal, seal, the great seal, perfectly pure like the union of the adamantine body (*vajra- kāya-saṃghātana-*), completely purified from all impediments of [past] karma, turn back [my life against undesirable rebirth], you who are the complete purity of life, you who are empowered by the oaths (*samaya-*) of all the Tathāgatas.

§3. Sage, sage, great sage, perfect sage, perfect sage, great perfect sage; wisdom, wisdom, wisdom of Ma[ñjuśrī] (*mamati*?), great wisdom, excellent wisdom; you who are pure like the absolute reality (*tathatā-bhūta-koṭi-*) and purified by penetrative wisdom (*visphuṭa-bodhi-*), *he*, *he*, be victorious, victorious! Be the most victorious, be the most victorious! Remember, remember! Penetrate, penetrate (*sphara*)! You, who are empowered by the empowerment of all Buddhas! Pure one, pure one! You, diamond, diamond, the great diamond, the excellent diamond, the womb of diamond (*vajra- garbhe*), the womb of victory, the womb of the greatest victory! May my body [name of person] become like a diamond. And let there be complete purification of the bodies of all living beings! And let there be complete purification for me at all times and in all modes of existence! You, who are empowered for the relief (*-samāśvāsa-*) of all beings! And may all Tathāgatas relieve me [from suffering]!

§4. Awaken, awaken! Accomplish, accomplish (*siddhya*)! Cause [others] to awaken, cause [others] to awaken! Cause [others] to completely awaken, cause [others] to completely awaken! Purify, purify! Completely purify, completely purify! Liberate, liberate! Completely liberate, completely liberate! You, who are completely purified by the universal [rays], who are empowered by the empowerment of the hearts of all Tathāgatas! You, great seal, svāhā!

§5. Here ends the dhāraṇī called the Most Victorious Diadem.

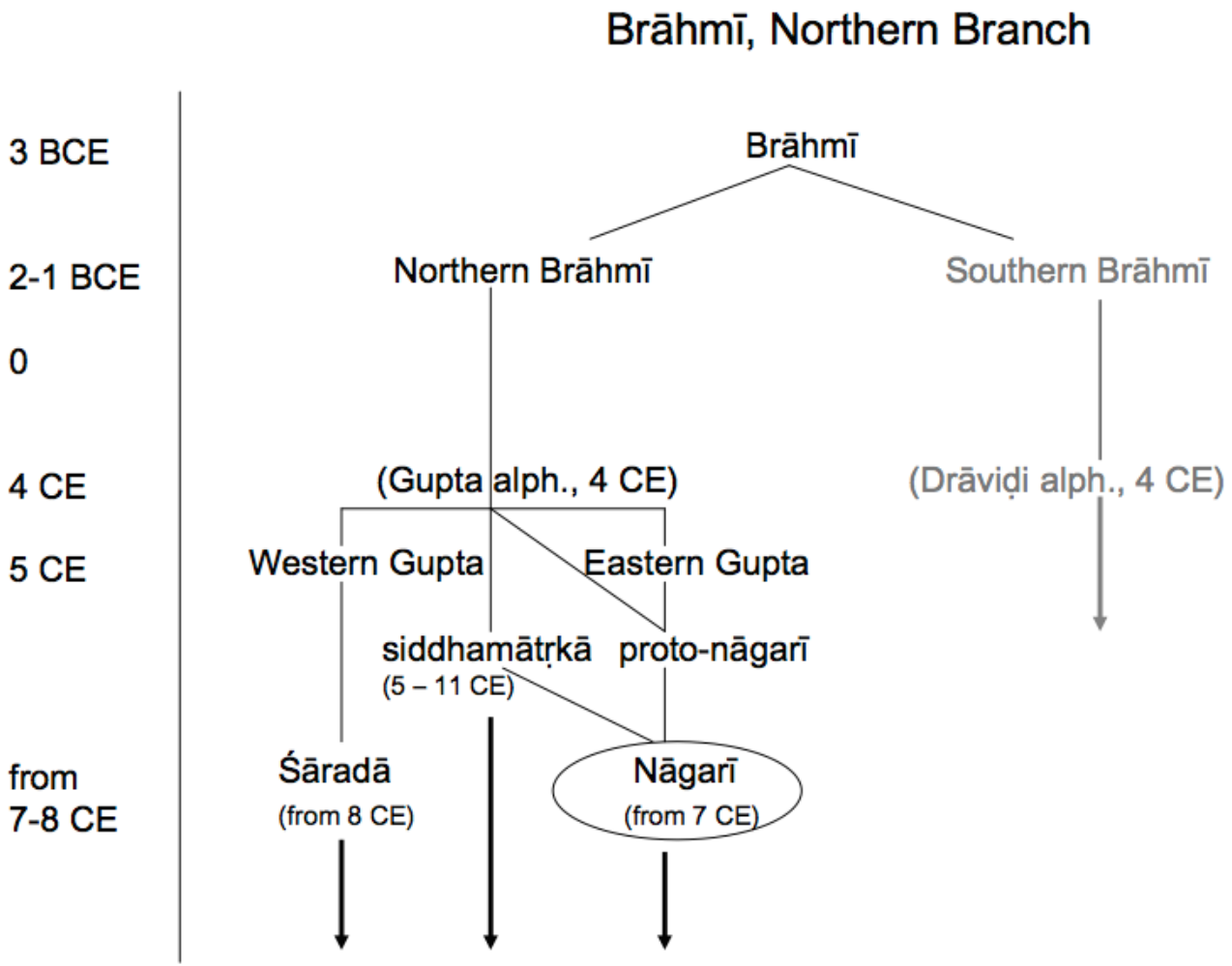
On the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī in East-Asia* (from Mak 2016)

The *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* is transmitted as an independent text, as well as in expanded versions with accompanying narratives and rituals. A common motif around them is to avert evil rebirth, expiate sins, or bring about health and longevity. The *dhāraṇī* is believed to be one of the most, if not the most popular *dhāraṇī*, in China as well as other parts of Asia since the seventh century. Since the first Chinese translation *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼 was made by the Kashmiri monk Buddhapāli in 682 CE, the text was retranslated, with the *dhāraṇī* "re-transliterated", in Chinese in no less than twenty times, including the version by Amoghavajra (T972), which was widely inscribed on Buddhist pillars across China, sometimes in combination with other *dhāraṇī*-s. In 776 CE, Emperor Daizong 代宗 issued a decree that all Buddhist monks and nuns must recent the *dhāraṇī* twenty-one times daily.(…)

The variants in the Yunnanese specimens are distinct from both the earlier Chinese materials, as well the later Tibetan materials, dismantling thus the hypotheses that Yunnanese materials were simply imports from Tang China or Tibet. If there is some historical truth in the biography of Indian monk Candragupta, the legendary founder of the Azhali religion, who travelled through Tibet before reaching the kingdom of Nanzhao, it is possible that these changes in the *dhāraṇī* were first brought about by the esoteric Buddhists in the Pala Kingdom before they were disseminated.(…)

What is striking about the Yunnanese materials is the quantity and variety of funerary objects associated with the *dhāraṇī*, which suggest the pervasiveness of the religious phenomenon within the kingdoms of Nanzhao and Dali, up to as late as the fifteenth century when the activities of the Azhali monk could still be traced.

Table I: from Brāhmī to Nāgarī and its sister scripts



(Rath 2011; Siddhamātṛkā = ± Siddham script)

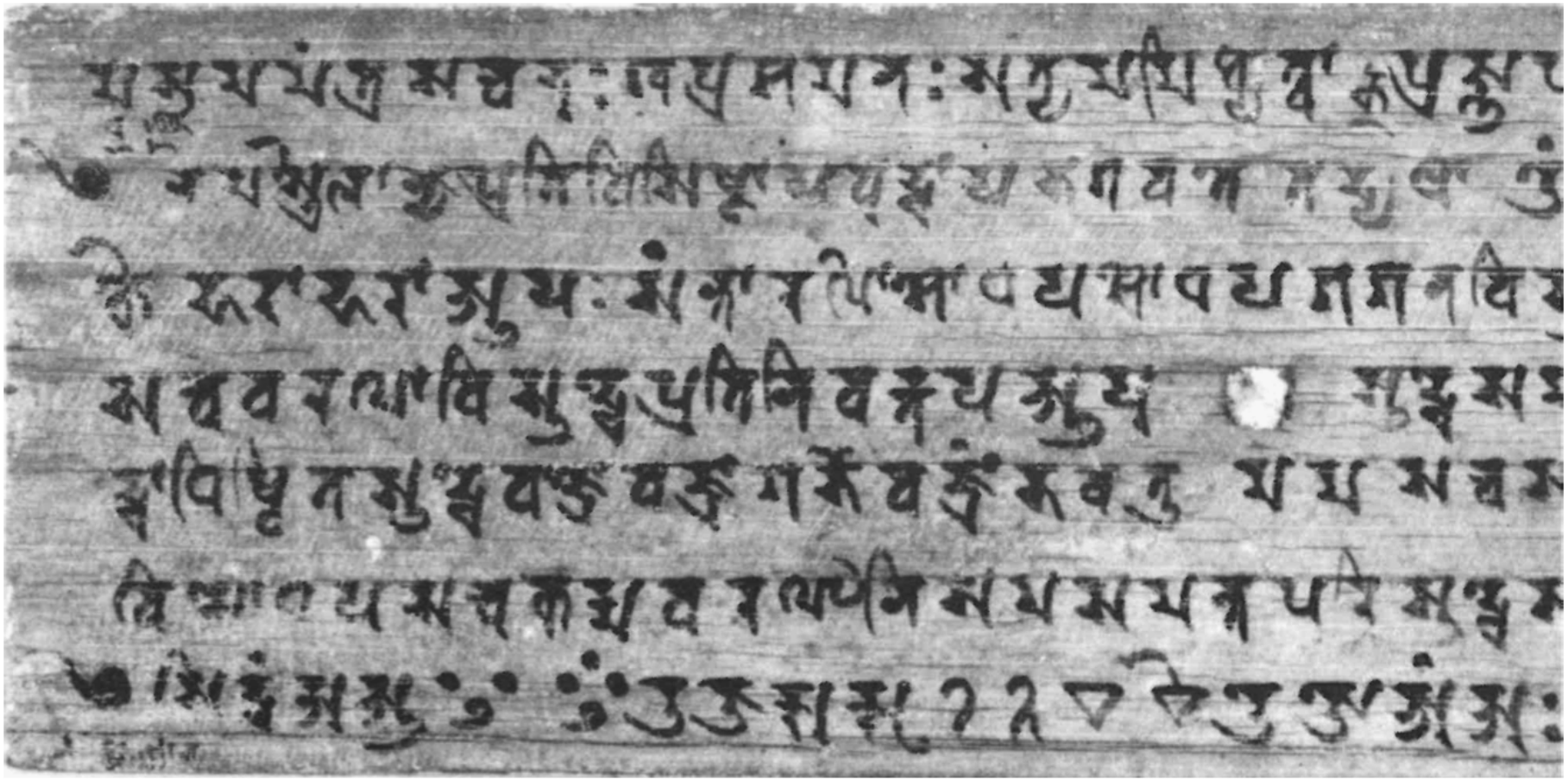
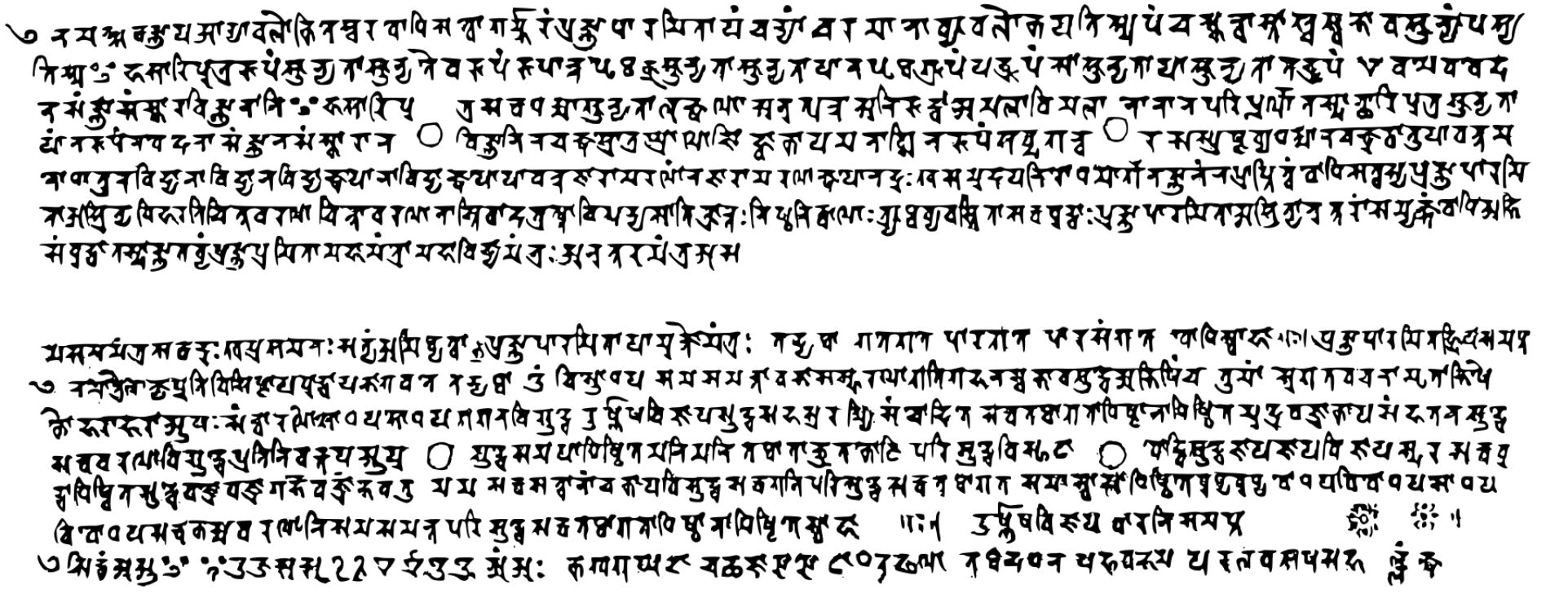
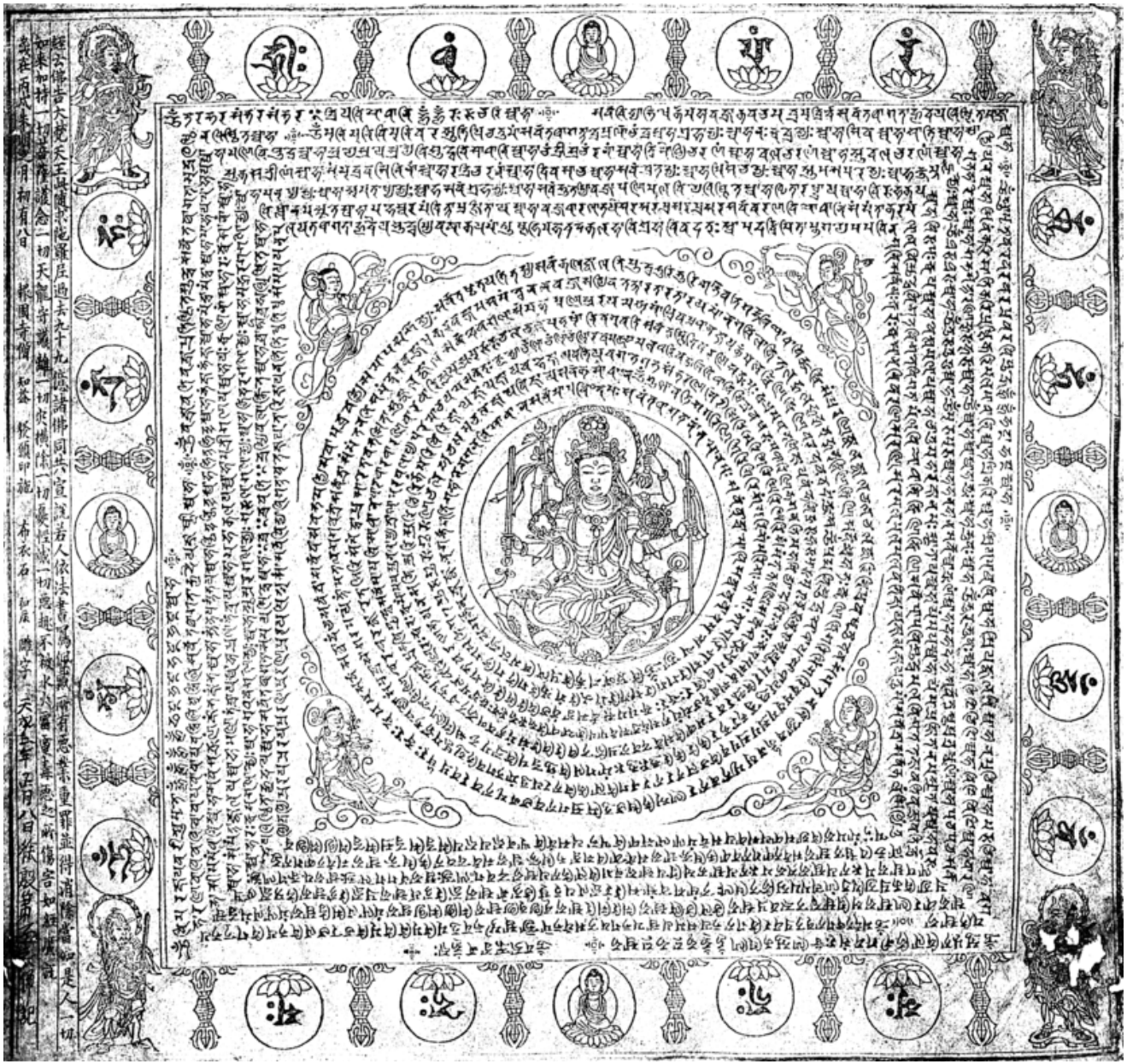


Figure 14.4. Earliest record of "Siddham letters" from Hōryūji manuscript (sixth century?). From the bottom row: siddhaṃ *a ā i ī u ū ṛ ṝ ḷ ḹ e ai o au aṃ aḥ*. The line continues with the consonant syllables *ka kha ga gha ṅa . . . śa ṣa sa ha llaṃ (kṣa)*. Source: Tokyo National Museum Collection (Bonji I:2).

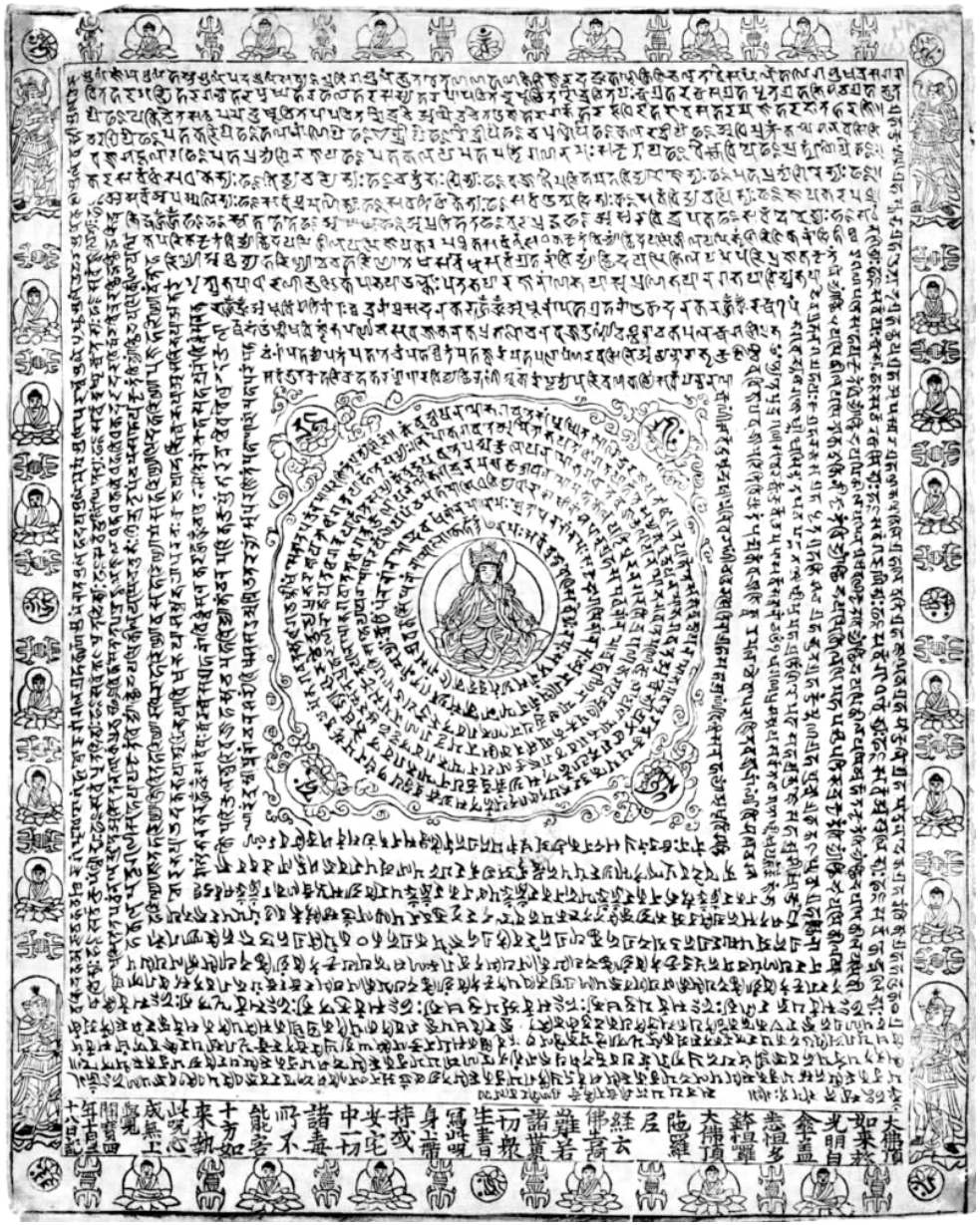
(Mak 2013)



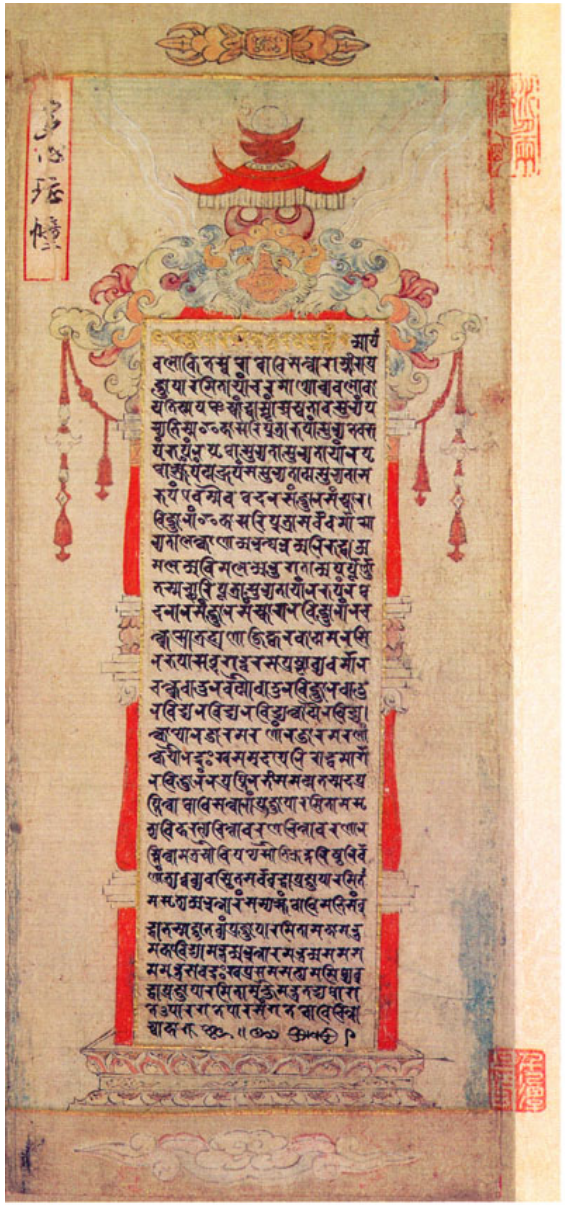
The so-called "Horiuzi Palm-leaf MSS" preserved in Hōryū-ji (now Tokyo National Museum), Japan; this early Siddham manuscript, traditionally dated to the first half of the 6th century (now rather to the 8th century), contains the Heart Sūtra (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*) and the (*Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-/Buddha-*)*Uṣṇīṣa-Vijaya-Dhāraṇī*(*-Sūtra*) (cf. ed. Müller & Nanjio 1884).

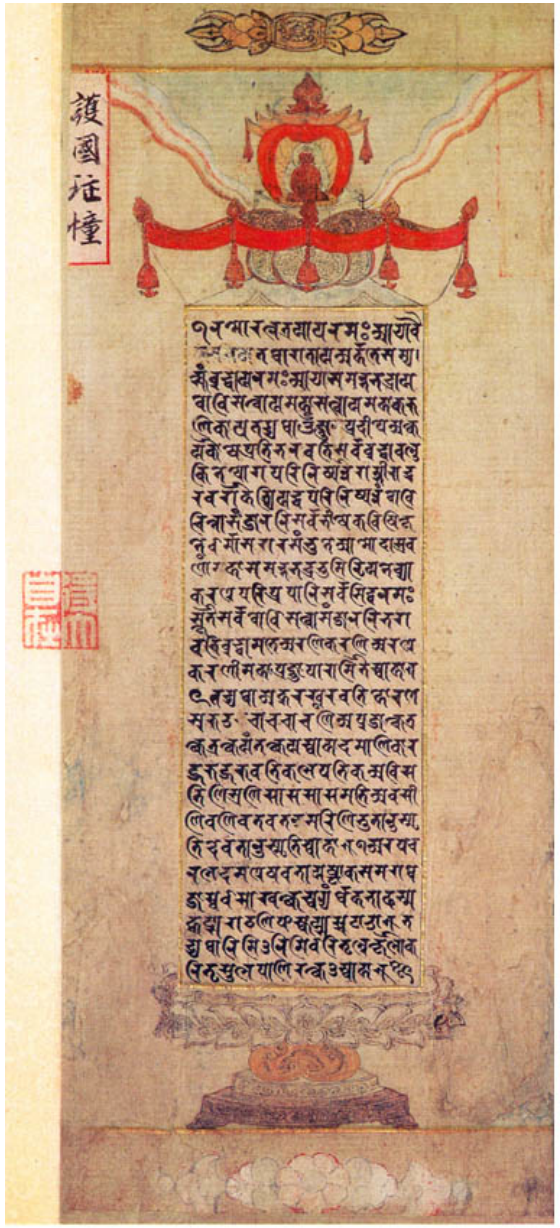


Chinese use of the Siddhaṃ script for a Sanskrit dhāraṇī. Later Tang, 927 CE.



Chinese use of the Siddhaṃ script for the Mahāpratyaṅgirā mantra. 971 CE.





Painted scroll by Chang Sheng-wen (Dali, ca. 1160-1190 CE), fol. 129-130 - National Palace Museum, Taipei
The scroll contains two Sanskrit inscriptions: a) the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra* similar to that of the Hōryūji ms.; b) A combination of four *dhāraṇī*-s including: i) the *Vairocana-prajñāpāramitā-dhāraṇī and* iv) *Cintāmaṇidhāraṇī.*

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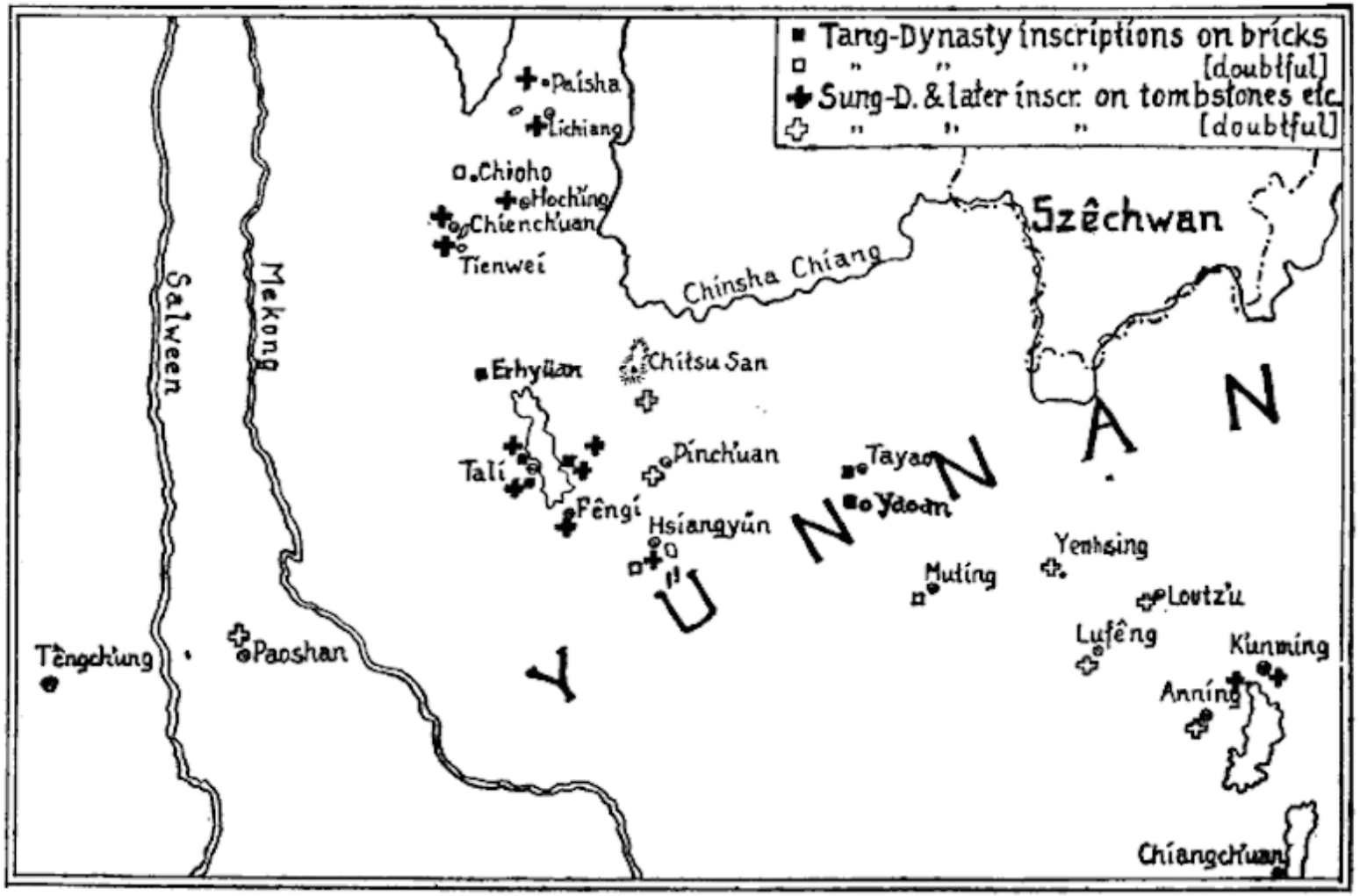
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Pairi Daiza:
« La Cité des Immortels »

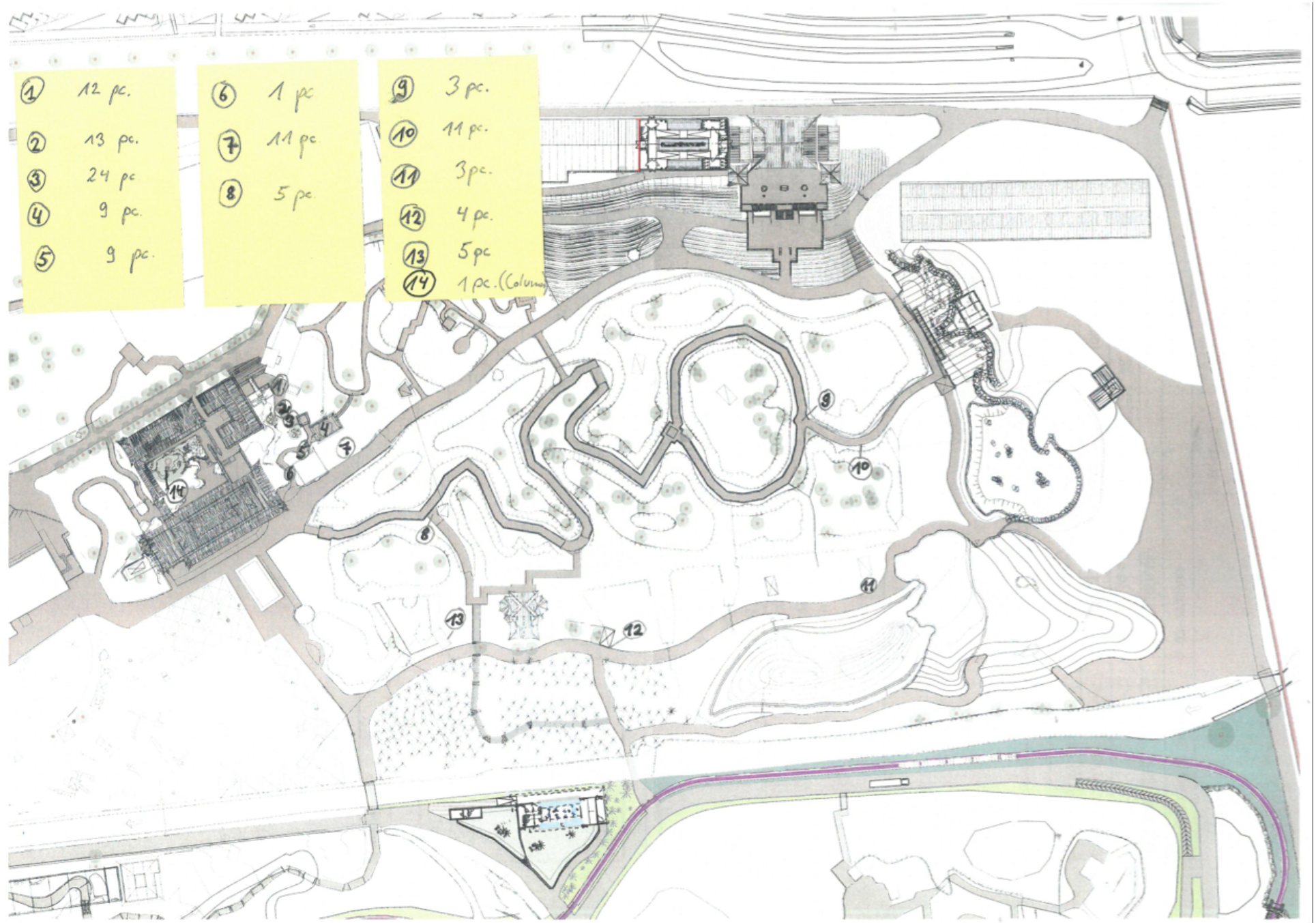
- LA COUR DU MARCHAND DE THÉ
- LE JARDIN CHINOIS
- LA MAISON DE THÉ
- LE CHEMIN DE LA GUÉRISON

« Voyez comme la cascade baigne de curieuses pierres recouvertes d'inscriptions en sanskrit. Celles-ci, qu'on n'a pas encore réussi à déchiffrer, proviennent des trésors découverts par un agriculteur du Yunnan; il avait eu la bonne idée de les garder… pour en garnir un conduit d'évacuation de son étable. Un antiquaire de Hong Kong les a déterrées et sauvées. » https://www.pairidaiza.eu/fr/activites/la-cour-du-marchand-de-the



Sketch map showing the distribution of Sanskrit inscriptions in Yünnan

(Liebenthal 1947) – The Pairi Daiza stones come from Kunming and Lijiang areas


① 12 pc.
② 13 pc.
③ 24 pc
④ 9 pc.
⑤ 9 pc.
⑥ 1 pc
⑦ 11 pc.
⑧ 5 pc.
⑨ 3 pc.
⑩ 11 pc.
⑪ 3 pc.
⑫ 4 pc.
⑬ 5 pc
⑭ 1 pc. (Column





The crowned stele “O” with the complete text of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī*.





The same, front and back, in 2010

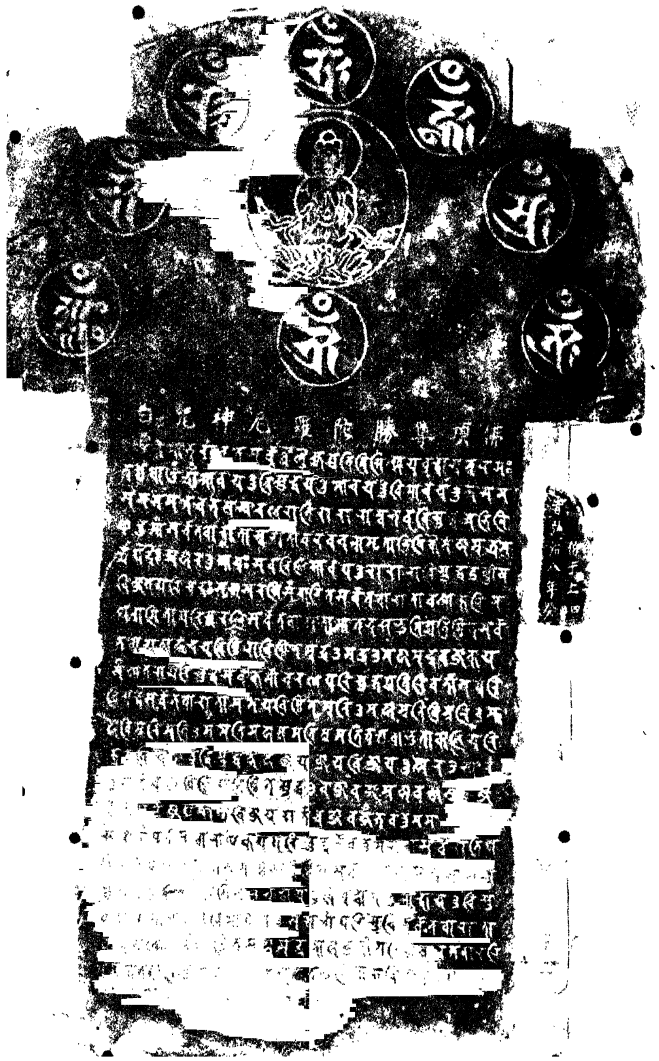




Plate 1: Inscription no. 1 Dali, Yünnan. Presumably 1431 AD, since it comes from the same tomb as Inscription no. 2. Rubbing of a tomb inscription. Photo by Hans Penth, 1985.

Liebenthal 1955

Von Hinüber 1989

Ink-rubbings of similar tomb-stones in Yunnan



On the front top, nine encircled Sanskrit *bīja* characters; the central one reads *bhrūṃ*, which represents the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya* (the *dhāraṇī*) or *Uṣṇīṣavijayā* (the female deity), who herself is represented in the centre as a four-armed cross-legged figure on a lotus seat with both sets of arms in an *añjali* position, between, on each side of her pedestal, two phoenix figures in downward motion over a cloud.



The funeral tablets (more than 100) “C-E”: each one has to be viewed as a part of a six-sided stone receptacle (four rectangular tablets with top and bottom slabs) which contained the cremated remains of the deceased.





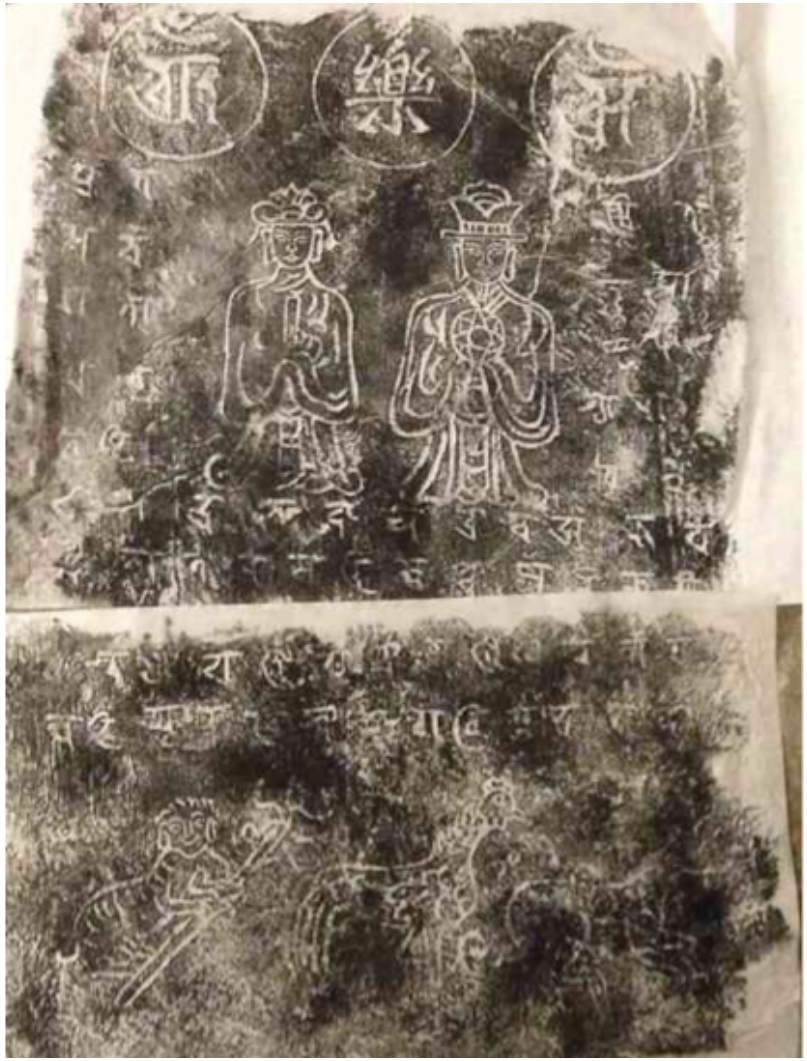






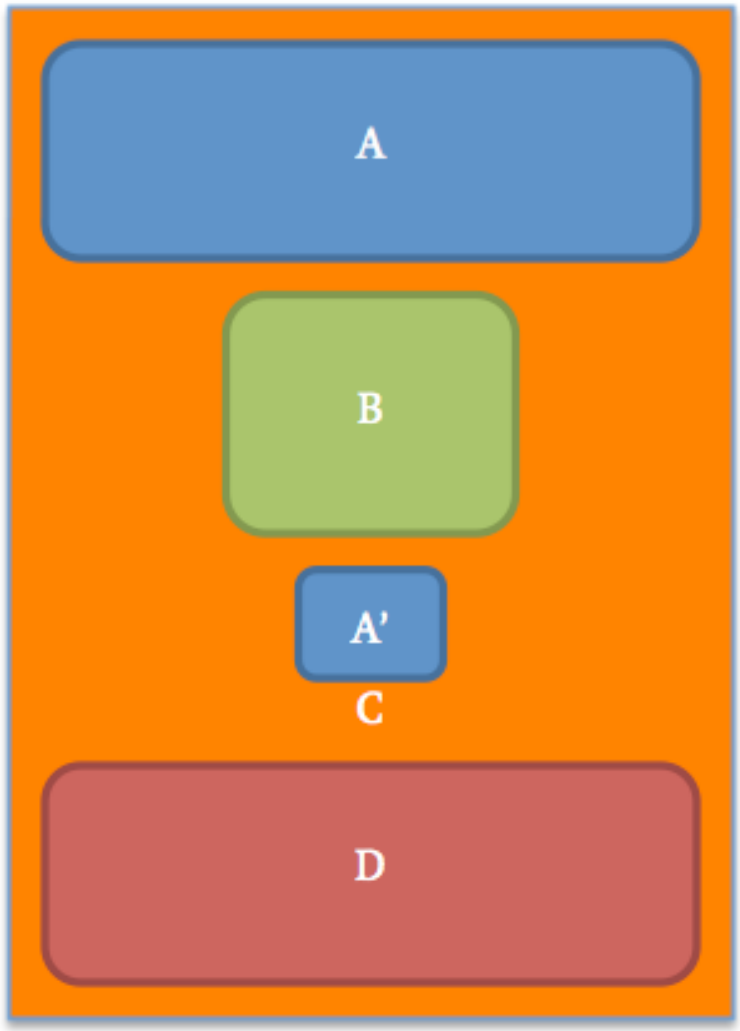






Description

The specimen X1, roughly 200mm W 400mm L 70mm D, 20kg, is one of the (100?) similar tablets in the collection (C/D). All the specimens have a uniform design, consisting of four parts:



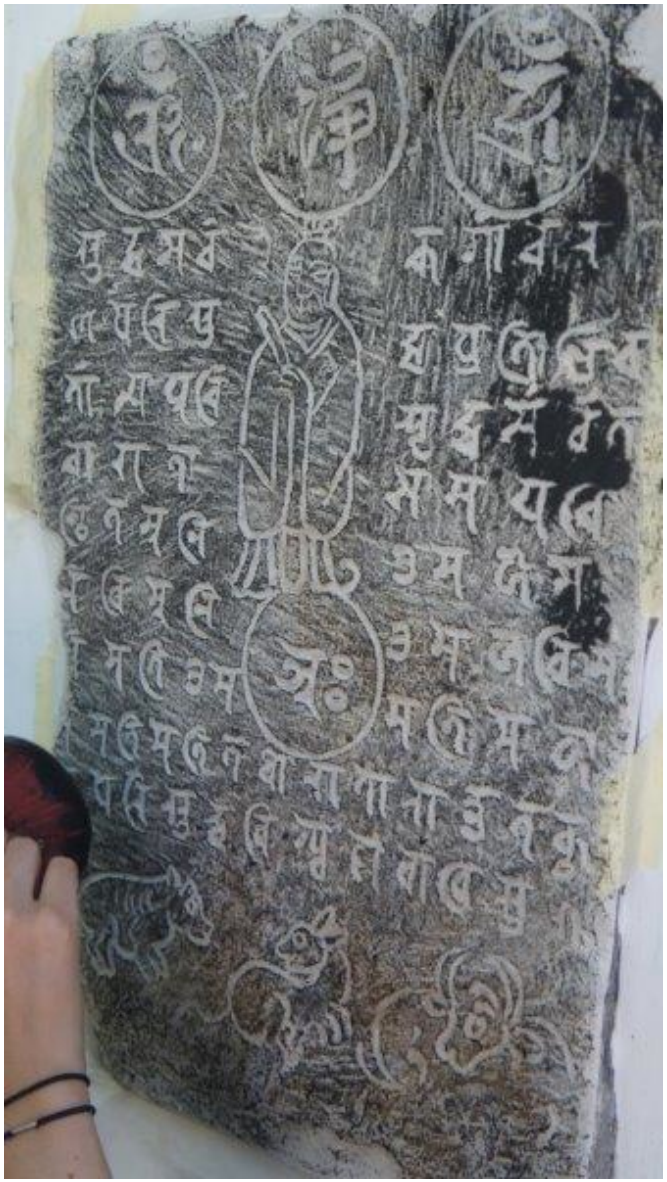
A: Three or more characters, sometimes encircled. Invariably, a Chinese character in found in the middle (one of the *chang*常, *le* 樂, *wo*我, *jing*淨). On the two sides are Sanskrit *bīja* characters in nāgarī script, similar to that of O1.

A': Some specimens contain an additional third *bīja* character.

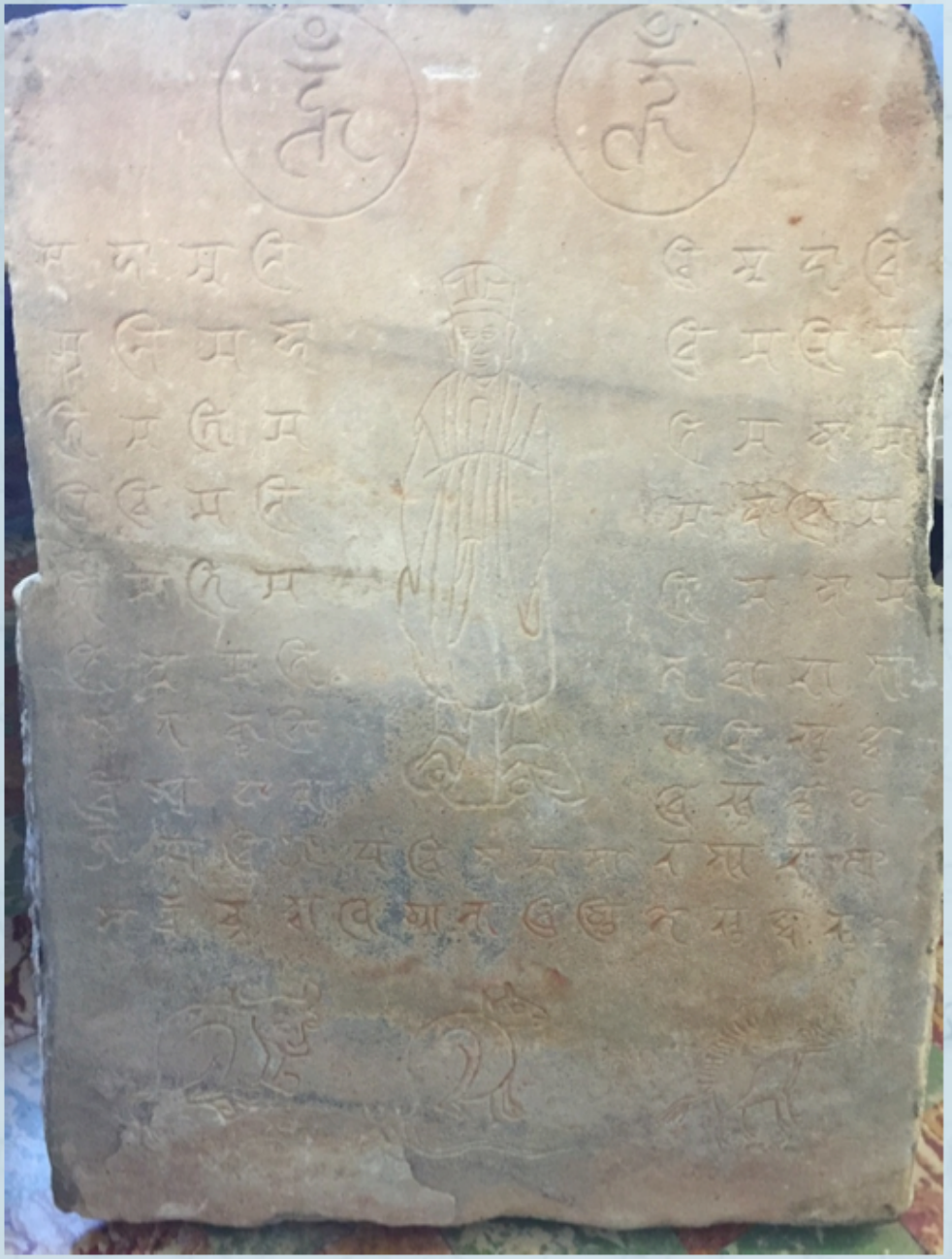
B: One or two human, male or female figures dressed in Chinese costume, with varying headdress and objects held in hands. The objects presumably identify the figures.

C: A portion (quarter) of the *buddhoṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī* nearly identifical to O1.

D: Three zodiacal animals representing one of the four cardinal positions. In the case of X1, "monkey", "rooster" and "dog" represent the direction west.[1]







Quarter-piece of
Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī

<bīja letters in circles> hūṃ srūṃ

1 mahāmuni vimuhā vi\

2 muni mahāvimani ma\

3 ti mati mati mahāma\

4 ni vimati mahābhisa\

5 ktamati mati mahāma\

6 ti damati tathāgatā\

7 bhutakuṭi-parisuddhe\

8 visphuṭa hā visuddhe he\

9 jaya vijaya vijaya smara smara spha\

10 sarvabuddhādhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhite suddhasuddhe

<figures of ox mouse pig>



The same figures are systematically associated with the same directions:
- West (centred on the rooster + monkey and dog) : the couple female-male;
- North (centred on the rat + pig and ox) : a man sometimes with a stick in hands;
- East (centred on the hare + dragon and tiger) : another man;
- South (centred on the horse + sheep and snake) : another man (with special hat).

These figures seem to represent surnatural beings, but they do not correspond to the usual Indian lokapâlas or Chinese "Four Heavenly Kings".















The “D” stones (±10 exemplars, some of them used as floor tile): lotus-shaped maṇḍala with Sanskrit *bīja* characters; they could form the top or bottom slabs of the funerary six-sided stone receptacles.





The Round stone boulders “A-B” (± 45 exemplars): a few ones are inscribed with the *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī* all around and *bīja* characters on the top, and adorned with a four-armed figure in *añjali* (the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā*?) or some other Buddhist deity.







