On the Dunhuang Manuscript p.4071: A Case Study on the Sinicization of Western Horoscope in Late 10th Century China

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Background: Western Astrology in China

Indian astrology was introduced into China as early as in the third century AD with a translation of the Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna, however it was not until the eighth and ninth centuries, i.e. in the middle and late Tang dynasty, that western astrology produced a real impact on Chinese daily life, following the introduction into China of a kind of Indian modified Hellenistic astrology along with the translation of Tantric Buddhist Sutras. As a basic idea of Hellenistic astrology, the 12 signs of the zodiac were firstly introduced in the Candra-garbha translated into Chinese by Narendrayasas in the Gao-Qi dynasty (550–577). In the middle of the Tang dynasty (618–907), a large quantity of Tantric

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1 Two translations of the Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna are included in the Taisho Tripitaka, which was compiled by Japanese scholars in 1924–1934 in Tokyo. One was numbered 1300, entitled Modengjia Jing, translated by an Indian Sramana Zulüyan (竺律炎) and a Chinese of Tokharian descent Ziqian (支謙) in 230 AD. This authorship was established by Zhisheng (智昇) in his Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures in Kaiyuan Reign (開元釋教錄) in 730 AD, and was followed by the editors of the Taisho Tripitaka and some scholars such as Yabuuti (1969: 177) and Yano (1986: 21). However it was also argued by Zinkgräf (1940) that Modengjia Jing was probably translated later by someone else. Zinkgräf’s point was followed by Liquen Zhou in her doctoral dissertation (The Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna and The Early Indian Astrology Coming to China, A Philological Study Based on Central Asian Sanskrit Manuscripts and Other Versions in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan, Beijing University, 2013). Another translation of the Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna in the Taisho Tripitaka was numbered 1301, entitled Shetou Jian Taizi Ershibaxiu Jing, translated into Chinese in 308 AD by Dharmaraksa.

2 That the introduction of Indian modified Hellenistic astrology could have been occurred along with the translation of Tantric Buddhist Sūtras into Chinese, was because Buddhism had begun to absorb heretic ideas including once forbidden knowledge such as astrology, from Hinduism for example, in its late stage of Tantric Buddhism.

3 The Candra-garbha was compiled as the 46th to 56th fascicles of the Daji Jing (Mahāsamni-
Buddhist Sūtras containing Hellenistic astrology were translated into Chinese. The most famous of these was the Xiuyao Jing (Sūtras on Nakshatras and Grahas), the full title of which was Wenshushili Pusha Ji Zhuxian Suoshuo Jixiong Shiri Shan’e Xiuxiao Jing (Sūtras preached by Manjusri Bodhisattva and the sages on auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of days and times, and goodness or evilness of Nakshatras and Grahas), translated by Amoghavajra and commented on by Yang Jingfeng in 759–764. The Qiyao Ranzaijue (Warding off Calamities with the Seven Luminaries, No. 1308 of Taisho Tripitaka), compiled by a Western Indian Brahmin Jin Jucha in China in the 9th century, was another important Tantric sūtra containing a description of the elements of a horoscope, and ephemerides of Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury, Rāhu (lunar ascending node) and Ketu (lunar apogee, instead of lunar node, details see page 540 in this chapter), which could be used as handbook for diviners to determine the positions of celestial bodies at the time of birth. This kind of Indianized Hellenistic astrology was introduced originally as a part of the Buddhist sūtras, and triggered a strong interest in this subject in China, where genethlialogical astrology was quite new thing for ordinary people. Some scholars have pointed out that Hellenistic astrology could also have found its way to China via Persia at the same period.

The result of these transmissions was that a kind of foreign originated planetary fortune-telling system was introduced, accepted and applied widely in China between the late Tang (618–907) and early Song (960–1279) dynasties. This system's main feature was to tell one's fortunes based on the relative positions of the planets (Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury, Rāhu and Ketu) and stars (27 or 28 Xiū “lodges” and 12 signs of the zodiac). Evidence of the popularity of this practice may be found in some works written by famous

5 These discussions have mainly centered on the origin version of an imported foreign astrological text titled Yusi Jing (or Duli Yusi Jing, Duli Jing), which provided an outline of western horoscopic astrology according to its later version compiled in Ming dynasty by Wang Mingyong (1521–1603). Yabuuti (1969, pp. 186–189) concluded that Yusi Jing was a translation of Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos. Yano (1990) noted furtherly that 'Duli Yusi' might be an approximate transliteration of Ptolemy's name in Pahlavi. Mak (2014) has recently argued that Yusi Jing was based instead on Dorotheus' Carmen Astrologicum. No matter whether the Yusi Jing was based upon Ptolemy or Dorotheus, it is thought that the Yusi Jing was brought into China by the East-Syrian Christians, which means directly from Persia to China. This path was also suggested by Ho (2003: 71).