THE PHONOLOGICAL HYPOTHESIS OF THE
HSI HSIA (TANGUT) LANGUAGE

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Among the numerous languages of the Sinitic area, the dead language of the state of Hsi Hsia 西夏 (984-1227), located on the northwestern fringes of Sung China and centered in present-day Kansu province, presents one of the most baffling problems to the student of the area. Known to the Turkic world as Tangut and to the Chinese as Tanghsiang 黃渠，its inhabitants developed an extremely complex script, early in the eleventh century apparently using a Chinese model. This script, the organizing principles of which are still not well known, remained in active use until well into the Yüan dynasty [1260-1368] after which it fell into oblivion. In essence, the script remained unknown until the beginning of the present century. Its rediscovery and the beginning of Hsi Hsia linguistic studies cannot be entered into in this paper and has been discussed elsewhere.

The first scholar to attempt a phonetic reconstruction was G. Morisse who, in 1904, published the results of his analysis of the Hsi Hsia translation of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka. His comparison with its Chinese original permitted him to reconstruct a number of phonemes. The majority of the characters, however, remained mute. The paucity of Hsi Hsia material soon made it clear that any attempts at a phonetic

6 At the beginning of the twentieth century, in addition to a few coins there also existed two epigraphical texts, the inscription at the Chu-yung-kuan and in Liang-chou. G. Devéria, La Stèle Sihia de Leang-tchou, Journal Asiatique, pp. 53-74. Ed. Chavannes,
reconstruction were bound to fail. It was not until the discoveries by P.K. Kozlov in Qaraqoto\textsuperscript{7} in 1908 and 1909, that a large collection of Hsi Hsia materials became available. The vicissitudes of Russian history, however, virtually rendered the material inaccessible until well into the 1950's. It was not until the 1960's that studies based on this material, and a few facsimiles, were published in the U.S.S.R.\textsuperscript{8} Until then, scholars had to rely on the fragments published by Wang Chingju.\textsuperscript{9} Since that time, the phonological reconstruction has progressed well beyond the early attempts of G. Morisse to the point, where in certain academic circles, the problem is deemed to have been basically solved.\textsuperscript{10}

An analysis of the currently accepted reconstruction, however, requires a review of the earliest efforts to understand the language. A return to the pioneering days of Hsi Hsia studies is necessary as the hypothesis on which the current phonetic reconstruction rests was formulated in those days. This is all the more important as, in spite of the availability of new evidence and of advances in linguistics, this hypothesis has been accepted, at least without any published criticism. Furthermore, the same hypothesis has led, without any available explanation, to two different reconstructions; a Japanese one represented by Nishida Tatsuo and a Russian one represented by M.V. Sofronov. New data, in particular of a grammatical nature, suggests that the Hsi Hsia characters must have a more varied phonological structure than the two present reconstructions allow.\textsuperscript{11}

Among the materials sent to St. Petersburg by P.K. Kozlov was a very important bilingual document, the Fan-Han Ho-shih Chang-chung-chu 番漢合時掌中珠 (hereafter CCC).\textsuperscript{12} It is a Hsi Hsia—Chinese glossary of basic terms and phrases, apparently for use by Tanguts. In it, each Chinese character is translated into a Hsi Hsia character and both are provided with Tangut and Chinese phonetic glosses. Its presentation is

\begin{itemize}
  \item L. Kwanten, \textit{Qaraqoto: Gateway to the Silk Road}, in D. Klimberg-Salter, ed., \textit{The Silk Road and the Diamond Path: Esoteric Art and the Trade Routes of the Himalayan Region}, Berkeley (in press).
  \item This involved primarily the publication in 3 volumes of the Hsi Hsia version of the \textit{Suvannaprabhāsā.} Wang Ching-ju, \textit{Hsi Hsia yen-chiu}, 3 vols., Peiping, 1932-33.
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