
The Dàlǐ Kingdom ‘*Ten Kings Sutra*’

An Annotated Translation of the 《十王经》 Scroll Held at the Freer Gallery

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The Yúnnán Papers

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1 Introduction

The paper scroll held by the Freer Gallery in Washington DC, USA, titled ‘*The Buddha Addressing Yamaraja at Kusinagara*’⁽¹⁾ is a fragment of the ‘*Scripture of the Preparatory Performances for the Ten Kings Concerning the Sevens of Life*’ 《预修十王生七经》, or short ‘*Ten Kings Sutra*’ 《十王经》. It is illustrated with a frontispiece showing a Buddhist devotional assembly, followed by the first part of the sutra, with the later parts missing. A number of colophon pages were added later to the work.



Illustration 1:
Illuminated Frontispiece of the 《十王经》

In the catalogue to an exhibition in 1973, Thomas Lawton described the frontispiece, see illustration 1:

The handscroll depicts a Buddhist assembly on a raised platform defined by balustrades and a flight of steps. Sakyamuni, with hands in *abhaya* and *varamudra*, is seated on a lotus throne before a flaming halo. From behind the elaborate halo, bands of light radiate in all directions. Apsaras flank either side of the elaborate baldachin, their trailing scarves as well as the stylized clouds merging with the blossoms and foliage of four background trees. The Buddha is attended on the left by a young monk (Ananda?), and there appears to have been another monk (Kasyapa?) on the right, although that part of the painting is badly damaged. Kneeling in adoration before the small altar is the richly-clad figure of Yamaraja (Chinese: Yen-lo wang). Standing in attendance on the Buddha are a host of Bodhisattvas and the four Guardian Kings. A peacock strolls in the foreground, while two cranes fly in the distance beyond the balustrade. A range of

⁽¹⁾ A high-resolution copy of the work is available at https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg_F1926.1/ (accessed 31st May 2024).

mountains and a crescent moon are sketched in an indefinite space. In the foreground at opposite ends of the composition are pairs of figures, slightly smaller than the members of the Buddhist assembly. They are rendered in outline only, in contrast to the rich gold of the celestial figures. The man and woman at the beginning of the composition may represent the donors mentioned in the label at the right; the two attendants, each holding a longhanded fan and standing at the foot of the steps leading to the altar, may have been added merely to balance the composition. (Lawton (1973), p. 91)

The frontispiece is somewhat unusual as it does not depict the Ten Kings 十王 venerating Kṣitigarbha 地藏, of which many images exist,⁽²⁾ but illustrates the very beginning of the sutra where Śākyamuni 释加牟尼 addresses King Yama 阎魔王.

The Ten Kings 十王 the sutra refers to are the ten judges of the Buddhist underworld that a deceased has to face after death and before being reborn. Stephen F. Teiser writes:

The Scripture on the Ten Kings was probably written in China in the ninth century, based on notions that crystallized sometime in the seventh. [...] In theory purgatory is easily delimited in both time and space. It lasts from the moment of death until the spirit of the deceased is reborn in another bodily form, usually in third year after death. Just as important as the beginning and ending points are the gradations marking the passage of time. During the first forty-nine days after death the dead person passes a critical juncture every seven days. [...] On every seventh day the deceased, pictured as a prisoner, must undergo a trial administered by a judge. After the court clerks and jailers assemble the requisite paperwork and the mourning family dispatches accepted gifts, the magistrate issues a judgement and sends the inmate to the next court. To the first seven nodes are added three more, based not on Indian but on Chinese custom. They occur on the one hundredth day, during the first month after the the first full year, and during the third year after death. (Teiser (1994), p. 1)

The title 《预修十王生七经》 can thus explained as follows:

- the term *yùxiū* 预修 ‘refers to the benefits of preparatory performances done by the living for themselves.’⁽³⁾
- the term *shí wáng* 十王 refers to ten judges of the underworld.
- the term *shēngqī* 生七 is translated as ‘Sevens of Life’ by Stephen F. Teiser, who elucidates that these ‘are the feasts cultivated while one is still alive, usually semimonthly, which result in an easier journey through purgatory. Contrast *ch’i-ch’i*, “the seven sevens,” which descendants perform after one’s death.’⁽⁴⁾

The sutra itself has been credited to a monk called Cángchuān 藏川 from Dàshèngcí Temple 大圣慈寺 in Chéngdū 成都, who is mentioned at the beginning of the sutra. So little is known about him that Stephen F. Teiser noted,

⁽²⁾ see Wanatabe (1984).

⁽³⁾ Wanatabe (1984), p. 3

⁽⁴⁾ Teiser (1994), p. 197.

Tsang-ch'uan's consistent obscurity makes it quite possible that sometime between 756 and the early tenth century, a person by that name composed the hymns or the text of *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*. (Teiser (1994), p. 71)

Equally, Waley (1931), p. xxvii wrote, '[o]f this person nothing is known.'

1.1 The Connection to the Dàlǐ Kingdom

Although the work is uncredited and undated, it is thought to have been created in the Dàlǐ 大理 region during the Dàlǐ kingdom 大理国, 937–1253 CE, because of similarities to the 12th century '*Long Roll of Buddhist Images*' 《梵像卷》 and other evidence.

The first to link the work to Yúnnán was Helen B. Chapin, who in her 1938 work '*A Long Roll of Buddhist Images*' noted,

the writer believes that the small frontispiece to a Buddhist 'sūtra' in the Freer Gallery is another Sung painting which comes from Yünnan. (Chapin (1938), pp. 53–54)⁽⁵⁾

Thomas Lawton agreed with this assessment, writing,

[a]lthough the painting is not signed, the possibility was raised that the illustration might have been executed by Chu Yu, a late T'ang master who specialized in Buddhist and Taoist themes. However, comparison of the Freer scroll with the long handscroll of Buddhist images in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, supports a twelfth-century date for both works. (Lawton (1973), p. 91)

Moritaka Matsumoto pointed out the similarities with the '*Long Roll of Buddhist Images*' 《梵像卷》 in more detail:⁽⁶⁾

- The double flame halo with a jewel is very similar to the flames in frame 82 and 85 of the 《梵像卷》,
- the seated figure is similar to the figure in frame 115, with a dress similar to the king in frame 5,
- the distant mountains in frame 78–80 are similar to the mountains in the background,
- the two cranes flying in the background can also be found in frame 45 of the 《梵像卷》,
- the peacock so prominently placed in this work appears also in frame 44 and 110 of the 《梵像卷》,
- the strange spatial organization of the scene is mirrored in frame 61/62 and 110 of the 《梵像卷》 and distinct from other contemporary artworks.

⁽⁵⁾ This article reprinted in Chapin and Soper (1971b), p. 136 with a note by Alexander C. Soper pointing to the item in the Freer Collection. He also notes the scroll was reprinted in a catalogue called 《唐宋菁華》 by the Yamanaka company who sold the work to the Freer Collection in 1926.

⁽⁶⁾ see Matsumoto (1976), pp. 82–83. The 《梵像卷》 is reproduced in Chapin and Soper (1971b) and in the book's constituent articles, Chapin and Soper (1970a), Chapin and Soper (1970b) and Chapin and Soper (1971a).

Based on these similarities as well as differences to earlier works, he dated the image very close to the 《梵像卷》, i.e. the second half of the 12th century.⁽⁷⁾

A further hint of the works origin in the Dàlǐ region was pointed out by Zhāng Zǒng 张总, who noticed the name of the donor of the scroll follows a naming pattern used in the Dàlǐ kingdom 大理国, 937–1253 CE, see below.

It is interesting to note that the Bái ethnic group 白族 of Dàlǐ 大理 still bring offerings to benefit the recently deceased to Dōngyuè 东岳 at the Dōngyuè Gōng 东岳宫,⁽⁸⁾ i.e. to the Lord of Mount Tàì 泰山王, who, as a Dàoist deity, became the seventh of the Ten Kings.

2 About this Translation

I became aware of the work through its mention in Matsumoto (1991), p. 84, which pointed to its description in Lawton (1973), pp. 91–93.

This non-orthodox sutra, its meaning and history, has been discussed in a variety of works, the earliest perhaps Waley (1931), pp. xxvi–xxx. A comprehensive analysis, including a translation, can be found in Teiser (1994).

The text of the cartouches on the frontispice, which is partly damaged, is included in Zhāng Zǒng 张总 (2001), which I found through its mention in Hóu Chōng 侯冲 (2003).

I compared the text of the sutra with the version published by <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/sutra/10thousand/X01m0021.pdf> (accessed 3rd June 2024).

3 Annotated Translation

3.1 The Frontispiece

On the right hand side of the frontispiece is a cartouche with probably the name of the deceased as well as the names of his wife and son who commissioned the work. They might be the two people depicted in the right hand corner below.

为陈观音庆妇人文殊连男庆福造

Made by Chén Guānyīn Qìng, his wife Wén Shūlián and his son Qìngfú.

Zhāng Zǒng 张总 (2001) was the first to point out that the first name Chén Guānyīn Qìng 陈观音庆 follows the custom practiced during the Dàlǐ kingdom to adopt a religious name in the middle, adding to the evidence that this was a work created in the Dàlǐ region.

I interpret these names as follows: the first name, Chén Guānyīn Qìng 陈观音庆, is the name of the main benefactor, maybe recently deceased, the second the name of his wife Wén Shūlián 文殊连 and the third the name of his son Chén Qìngfú 陈庆福. The son would have obviously shared his father's family name and according to local tradition, the last character of his father's given name would have

⁽⁷⁾ Matsumoto (1976), p. 81.

⁽⁸⁾ ㊦ 25.7N 100.15E. The rituals are performed on the 28th day of the 3rd lunar month and draw significant crowds.



Illustration 2:
Beginning of the 《十王经》

been used as the first character in his given name. This was not only common practice, but is also documented for this particular clan, see Zhāng Xílù 张锡禄 (1990), p. 50.⁽⁹⁾

The inscription on the left hand side of the frontispiece reads:

南无灭正报释加牟尼佛会

Homage to the Extinguishing Proper Retribution Śākyamuni
Buddhist Assembly

3.2 The Sutra

The text of the sutra, of which only the first sheet remains, is, with the exception of one added character, identical to other versions of this sutra found at Dūnhuáng 敦煌. The text is translated and annotated in Teiser (1994), pp. 197–200. My translation draws from this and entries in the *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.⁽¹⁰⁾ My translation here only strives for a version understandable enough to show that the frontispiece illustrates the very beginning of this sutra.

Note on typesetting: The text of the sutra below is typeset to reflect the columns on the scroll. The scroll text obviously lacks punctuation, which has been added here following <https://betaonline.dila>.

r3–4: Homage to the Extinguishing Proper Retribution Śākyamuni Buddhist Assembly] Translation in Lawton (1973), p. 92: *Assembly for the Adoration of Sakyamuni Buddha who Nullified Direct Retribution*. The term zhèngbào 正报 is explained in Buswell and Lopez (2014), pp. 285, 1053 to be one of two forms of retribution, directly affecting the individual.

⁽⁹⁾ The insertion of a Buddhist 'middle name' was common practice during the Dàlǐ kingdom, as is documented in names recorded in the 1178 CE *Língwài Dàidá* 《岭外代答》, as well as steles and tombstones, see Zhāng Xílù 张锡禄 (1990), p. 50.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Buswell and Lopez (2014).

edu.tw/zh/X0021 (accessed 9th June 2024). Where the scroll is damaged the missing characters have been filled in from the sutra's text in other versions and the characters in question have in enclosed in brackets.

十王经 5	谨启讽阇 [罗王预修生七往生净土经] 誓劝有缘。以五会启经入赞。	We respectfully begin the recitation of the ' <i>Sutra of King Yama's Preparatory Performances of the Sevens of Live for Rebirth in the Pure Land</i> ', exhorting all those bound by karma. We use the five intonations to begin the sutra and praise it.
十王经 10	念阿弥陀佛。 成都府大圣慈寺沙门藏川述赞	We chant <i>āmítuófó</i> . Narrated and praised by the ascetic of Chéngdū prefecture's Dàshèngcí Temple, Cángchuān.
十王经 15	[佛说阎罗] 王授记四众逆修生七往生净土经 南无阿弥陀佛。	The Sutra of Buddha Speaking to King Yama the Prophecy to the Four Orders of the Sevens of Life to be Cultivated before Death for Rebirth in the Pure Land Homage to <i>āmítuófó</i> .

It follows a chanted section:

十王经 25	赞曰 如来临般涅槃时，广召天灵及地只， 因为琰魔王授记，乃传生七预修仪。 如是我闻：一时佛在鸠尸那城阿维跋提 河边婆罗双树间临般涅槃时。举身放 光普 照大众，及诸菩萨摩河萨、天龙神王、 天王帝 释、四天大王、大梵天王、阿 [修] 罗王、 诸大 [国] 王、	The eulogy is: When the <i>Thus Come One</i> approached <i>parinirvana</i> he widely summoned the spirits of heaven and those of earth to make a prophecy for King Yama and pass on the Rites for the Preparatory Cultivation of the Sevens of Life. Thus have I heard: At the time when the Buddha was in Kusinagara, on the banks of the Āwéibátí River, between the twin sal trees, approaching <i>parinirvana</i> , he radiated light from his entire body, illuminating the assembly, including all the bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas, heavenly dragons and divine kings, celestial king Śakra, the four lokapāla, the great King Brahmā, King Asura, all great state's kings, the celestial prince Yánluō, the magistrate of Mount Tàì, the Ruler of Destiny and Director of Good Fortune , the Great
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[10: 赞] This character is not found in other versions of the text, see Hóu Chōng 侯冲 (2003), p. 446

[21: 如是我闻：一时] The segmentation before the time expression is today standard, but the original sutra texts of course did not have any punctuation. Brough (1950) points out the difficulties in translating such seemingly simple passages, noting that 'Tibetan texts therefore understand the phrase to mean that the sutra was heard at one time'.

r 12–14: The Sutra of Buddha Speaking to King Yama the Prophecy to the Four Orders of the Sevens of Life to be Cultivated before Death for Rebirth in the Pure Land] Teiser (1994), p. 197: '*The Scripture Spoken by the Buddha to the Four Orders on the Prophecy Given to King Yama Raja Concerning the Sevens of Life to Be Cultivated in Preparation for Rebirth in the Pure Land.*'
r 28: the Ruler of Destiny and Director of Good Fortune] Ruler of Destiny 司命 was originally a *Dàoist* spirit, first mentioned by Zhuāngzǐ 庄子, the two appear together later, see Soymie (1966), p. 49.

十王经 60
示现 [作] 彼琰魔等王；二为多生习善
犯戒
故，退落琰魔天中作大魔王，管摄诸
鬼，科断
阎浮提内。十恶五逆一切罪人，系閼
牢狱、日
十王经 65

ing precepts in past lives, he fell from the heavenly realm of King
Yama and became a great demon king, governing ghosts and spirits,
and adjudicating the ten evil deeds and five rebellious acts within
Jambudvīpa.’

The rest of the scroll is missing. The remaining parts would have been a continuation of the sutra before a colophon with attribution and date. Since the colophon is missing, an unambiguous attribution is impossible.

4 Glossary

- Ānán** 阿难: Ānanda, Buddha's cousin and chief disciple – see page 11, 13
- Āwéibátí Hé** 阿维跋提河: Āwéibátí River, Ajitavati River, see Teiser (1994), p. 198 – see page 10, 13
- Āxiūluō** 阿修罗: asura, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 76 – see page 10, 13
- Bái zú** 白族: Bái ethnic group, officially recognized ethnic minority in China, main settlement area around Ērhǎi – see page 8, 13
- Bānnièpán** 般涅槃: *parinirvana*, in Buddhism state after death after attaining nirvana, from परिनिर्वाण – see page 10, 13
- Cángchuān** 藏川: monk, credited with creating the 《预修十王生七经》 – see page 6, 10
- Chéngdū** 成都: capital of Shǔ 蜀, during the Táng dynasty center of administration for Jiànnán 剑南 – see page 6, 10
- Dàlǐ** 大理: – see page 7, 8
- Dàlǐ Guó** 大理国: Dàlǐ kingdom, successor state to Nánzhào, ruled by the Duàn 段 clan, 937–1253 – see pages 7–9, 13
- Dàshèngcí Sì** 大圣慈寺: Dàshèngcí Temple, temple in 成都, founded during the Táng dynasty, still extant – see pages 6, 10, 13
- Dào** 道: *dào*, key Dàoist concept, often translated as 'the way' – see pages 8, 10, 13
- Dìcáng** 地藏: Kṣitigarbha, bodhisattva in charge of the underworld, also a Dàoist deity – see page 6, 13
- Dìshì** 帝释: Śakra, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 739 – see page 10, 13
- Dōngyuè** 东岳: another name for Tàishān 泰山 – see page 8
- Dōngyuè Gōng** 东岳宫: Dōngyuè Temple, temple in Dàlǐ 大理 (⊕ 25.7N 100.15E) – see page 8, 13
- Dūnhuáng** 敦煌: one of the most important sites of early Buddhism – see page 9
- Ērhǎi** 洱海: Lake Ērhǎi, highland lake in western Yúnnán with the center of Nánzhào on its western side. It was also called Xīěr 西洱, Xīěr Hé – see page 13
- Fàntiān** 梵天: Brahmā, 'Indian divinity who was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon as a protector of the teachings', Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 141 – see page 10, 13
- Fànxiàng Juàn** 《梵像卷》: 'Long Roll of Buddhist Images', a long scroll of Buddhist images painted between 1173 and 1176, see Chapin and Soper (1971b) – see pages 7, 8, 13
- fǔ** 府: prefecture, administrative unit during the Yuán Cháo 元朝 – see page 10, 13
- Jiūshīnà** 鸠尸那: Kusinagara, – see page 10, 13
- Língwài Dàidá** 《岭外代答》: 'Língwài Dàidá', Sòng dynasty geographical work, written by Zhōu Qùfēi 周去非 in 1178 – see page 9, 13
- Móhēsà** 摩诃萨: mahāsattva, an epithet of a bodhisattva, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 508, also used for an advanced bodhisattva – see page 10, 13
- nāmó** 南无: Homage, a loanword from Sanskrit नमस्, its meaning is a humble salutation – see pages 9, 10, 13

- Nánzhào** 南诏: southern *zhào*, regional power with its center on Ērhǎi during the 8th and 9th centuries – see page 14
- Póluō Shù** 婆罗树: sal tree, see Teiser (1994), p. 198 – see page 10, 14
- Púsà** 菩萨: bodhisattva, Chinese term for bodhisattvas – see pages 10, 11, 14
- Pǔxián** 普贤: Samantabhadra, Púsà 菩萨 – see page 11, 14
- Rúlái** 如来: *Thus Come One*, ‘common epithet of the Buddha’, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 897 – see pages 10, 11, 14
- Shāmén** 沙门: ascetic, a Buddhist monk, derived from a Sanskrit term श्रमण – see page 10, 14
- shí wáng** 十王: Ten Kings, the ten judges of the underworld from the *Shíwáng Jīng* 十王经, see Teiser (1994) – see pages 6, 8, 14
- Shíwáng Jīng** 《十王经》: ‘*Ten Kings Sutra*’, 10th century sutra, see Teiser (1994) – see page 5, 14
- Shìjiāmóuní** 释加牟尼: Śākyamuni, Chinese name for the historic Buddha – see pages 6, 9, 14
- Shìzūn** 世尊: *World Honoured One*, customary address for the Buddha – see page 11, 14
- Sīlù** 司禄: Director of Good Fortune, Soymie (1966), p. 48 translates the term as ‘*Directeur des revenus*’, but acknowledges that this is not the best translation. Xiāo Dēngfú 萧登福 (1988), p. 199 notes that this name of a deity is often miswritten as *sīlù* – see page 10, 14
- Sīmìng** 司命: Ruler of Destiny, Daoist ‘numinal spirit that controls the longevity and fortunes of human beings’, Littlejohn (2020), p. 68, today often conflated with Zàoshén 灶神, who reports to him. Translation of the name according to Legge (1891), vol. 2, p. 7: ‘Ruler of our Destiny’ – see page 10, 14
- Sìtiān Dàwáng** 四天大王: lokapāla, world guardians, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 480 – see page 10, 14
- Sòng Cháo** 宋朝: Sòng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 960–1279 – see page 14
- Tàishān** 泰山: Mount Tàì, sacred mountain – see page 14
- Tàishān Fǔjūn** 太山府君: magistrate of Mount Tàì, another form of Tàishān Wáng 泰山王, seventh of the gods of the underworld – see page 10, 14
- Tàishān Wáng** 泰山王: Lord of Mount Tàì, seventh of the Shí Wáng 十王, presides over the passage of the dead at forty-nine days – see page 8, 14
- Táng Cháo** 唐朝: Táng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 618–907 – see page 14
- Wǔdào Dàshén** 五道大神: Great God of the Five Paths, ‘one of the prominent otherworld bureaucratic deities in Chinese popular religion since the early medieval period’, Chen (2018) – see page 10, 14
- Wǔhuì** 五会: five intonations, ‘five-tempo intonation of [the name of] the buddha’, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 1000 – see page 10, 14
- Xīěr** 西洱: shorter form of Xīěr Hé, a reference to Ērhǎi –
- Xīěr Hé** 西洱河: Xīěr River, historic name for Ērhǎi, now in use for the river that flows out of the lake – see page 14
- Yánfútínèi** 阎浮提内: Jambudvīpa, term for India, see Buswell and Lopez (2014), p. 377 – see page 12, 14

- Yánluō** 阎罗: Yama, another name for Yánmó Wáng 阎魔王 – see pages 10, 11, 15
- Yánmó Wáng** 阎魔王: King Yama, Buddhist god of hell and judge over the dead – see page 6, 15
- Yǎnmó** 琰魔: Yama, another name for Yánmó Wáng 阎魔王 – see pages 11, 12, 15
- Yùxiū Shíwáng Shēngqī Jīng** 《预修十王生七经》: ‘*Scripture of the Preparatory Performances for the Ten Kings Concerning the Sevens of Life*’, sutra, written by Cángchuān 藏川, see Teiser (1994) – see pages 5, 6, 15
- Yuán Cháo** 元朝: Yuán dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 1279–1368 – see page 15
- Yúnnán** 云南: at the time of the Táng dynasty the name for the geographic region south of its Jiannan district – see page 7
- Zàoshén** 灶神: Kitchen God, – see page 15
- zhào** 诏: *zhào*, term for a local ruler or his realm – see page 15
- Zhōu Qùfēi** 周去非: author of the *Língwài Dàidá* 岭外代答 –
- Zhuāngzǐ** 庄子: Zhuāngzǐ, early Chinese philosopher – see page 10, 15

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