

Śubhākarasimha (637–735)

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Śubhākarasimha¹ or [Shan]wuwei [善]無畏 (Chou 1945, 251–252 n. 3; Willemen 1981, 362–365; Abe 1999, 486 n. 42) was the first of the Kaiyuan 開元 period (713–741) *mahācāryas* (*dashi* 大師), who translated esoteric texts under imperial patronage (Chen 1997, 12–13; Weinstein 1987, 51–57; Twitchett 1979, 333ff.). However, the only biographical evidence for Śubhākarasimha is found in Chinese hagiographical records (Chou 1945, 246–247), in which legendary tales venerating his thaumaturgies outbalance historical facts; see, for example, *Shenseng Zhuan* 神僧傳 (Biographies of Divine Monks), dated 1417 (*T.* no. 2064, 996b11–996c10; Yu 1998, 912–913).

The epigraph written for Śubhākarasimha’s funeral stele is the earliest extant source: *Datang dongdu Dashenshansi gu tianzhuguo Shanwuwei sanzang heshang beiming bing xu* 大唐東都大聖善寺故中天竺國善無畏三藏和尚碑銘并序 (Inscription with Preface of the Late Trepitaka Upādhāya Śubhākarasimha from Central India, Who Died in the Great Shengshan Monastery in the Eastern Metropolis of the Great Tang). The text is preserved in Li Hua 李華 (d. ca. 770), *Xuanzong chao fanjing sanzang Shanwuwei zheng Honglu qing xingzhuang* 玄宗朝翻經三藏善無畏贈鴻臚卿行狀 (Necrology of Śubhākarasimha, Trepitaka and Translator during the Reign of Xuanzong, to Whom the Title of Director of the Court of State Ceremonial Was Bestowed; *T.* no. 2055, 290b16–292a26), and served as the primary source for the later hagiography *Tang Luojing Shengshansi Shanwuwei Zhuan* 唐洛京聖善寺善無畏傳 (Biography of Shanwuwei of the Shengshan Monastery in Luojing [i.e., Luoyang] of the Tang; annotated English trans., Chou 1945, 251–272), which is collated in the official ecclesiastical biographies of the Northern Song (Bei Song 北宋 960–1279), *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Song Biographies of Eminent Monks; *T.* no. 2061, 714b–716a), compiled by Zanning 贊寧 (919?–1001) in 988 (Chou 1945, 249, 272 n. 115; Vita 1988, 98).

According to these sources, Śubhākarasimha was born in India as the oldest son of King Buddhakara (Foshou-wang 佛手王), alleged ancestor of the Bhauma dynasty Kara

¹ The variant “Śubhakarasiṃha” is a questionable emendation by S. Lévi (Majumdar 1955, 63ff.).

kings who governed the region of Odra (Orissa) between the eighth and twelfth centuries (Chou 1945, 251–252 n. 3; Majumdar 1955, 63–65).² In his teens, Śubhākarasiṃha renounced his status and was ordained. He gained the degree of Trepitaka or “Buddhist Doctor” (Forte 1990, 247–248 n. 7) at Nālandā University, where he had studied under a certain Dharmagupta (Damojuduo 達摩掬多), who is said to have instructed him to disseminate his knowledge of esoteric Buddhism in China (Chou 1945, 251–258).

After changing his route because of unstable conditions in Central India (Snellgrove 1987, 324ff.), Śubhākarasiṃha went through Tibet (Chou 1945, 258–263, 309, appendix B) and arrived in Chang’an in 716 at the age of nearly eighty, carrying with him a collection of manuscripts, the catalogue of which is lost. At the behest of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) he first stayed at Xingfusi 興福寺, but was reassigned in 717 to Ximingsi 西明寺, where he assembled a team of assistants who, under his supervision, started translating his texts and exegeses.³

In 724 he joined the imperial retinue to Luoyang, where he stayed at Shengshansi 聖善寺 and Fuxiansi 福先寺 (Chou 1945, 258–265).⁴ Śubhākarasiṃha died in 735 and was bestowed with the title of “Director of the Court for Ceremonial Affairs” (Honglu qing 鴻臚卿). He was buried in 740 in the hills to the west of the Longmen Caves. On these burial premises the Guanghuasi 廣化寺 was built in 758 (Chou 1945, 270–272).

Śubhākarasiṃha is most reputed for translating the *Mahāvairocana sūtra* (T. no. 848), finished with the help of Yixing (683–727) ca. 724–725. The latter wrote its most authoritative commentary (T. no. 1796) based on notes from Śubhākarasiṃha’s lectures (Chou 1945, 264–246; Weinstein 1987, 54–56).⁵ Nevertheless, the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (Kaiyuan Period [713–741] Catalogue of Buddhism; T. no. 2154, 571c27–572a26), compiled by Zhisheng 智昇 in 730, ascribes three other works to

² Another theory speculates that he was heir-apparent to Mādhavarāja II, alias “Yaśobhita II of the Śailodbhava dynasty ruling over Koṅḡa [i.e. Odra] during the third quarter of the seventh century” (Hodge 2003, 19–20).

³ On Xuanzong’s relation to Buddhism, see Chou (1945, 265 n. 78, and 320, appendix L); Weinstein (1987, 51–57); and Twitchett (1979, 333ff.). For Xingfusi, see Chou (1945, 264 n. 71). For Ximingsi, see Chou (1945, 264 n. 72); Forte (1983, 700b–701a); and Abe (1999, 116, 485 n. 20). On the state and monastic institutions under the Tang, see: supra: A.2.)

⁴ For Shengshansi and Fuxiansi, see Forte (1983, 696a–696b and 695a–695b, respectively).

⁵ On Śubhākarasiṃha’s expertise in both the *Mahāvairocana* and *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha* lineages, see Orzech (1989, 91).

Śubhākarasiṃha, the first of which was completed in Chang'an in 717, the others translated in Luoyang ca. 726:

- (1) *Xukongzang-pusa nengman zhuyuan zuishengxin toloni qiuwen chifa* 虛空藏菩薩能滿諸願最勝心陀羅尼求聞持法 (Method for Reciting the *Dhāraṇī* of Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, Whose Unsurpassed Mind Can Fulfill All Requests; *T.* no. 1145);
- (2) *Suxidi jieluo jing* 蘇悉地揭羅經 (*T.* no. 893; hereafter, *Suxidi*), i.e., the Chinese version of the “Susiddhikāramahātantrasaddhanopāyikāpaṭala” (“Section on Expedient Means for Rites of Accomplishment” in the *Susiddhikāra Great Tantra*);
- (3) *Supohu tongzi jing* 蘇婆呼童子經 (*T.* no. 895), the Chinese translation of the *Subhāhu-paripṛcchā* (Questions of Subhāhu).⁶

Although there is neither contemporary catalogographical nor biographical evidence for any other works written by Śubhākarasiṃha, the *Taishō Daizōkyō* 大正大藏經 lists him as the translator/author of a series of sixteen additional translations/compilations (Tajima 1936, 24 n. 1; Demiéville 1978, 286). These include ritual manuals related to the *Mahāvairocana sūtra* (*T.* nos. 850–851); *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha* (*T.* no. 877); *Suxidi* (*T.* no. 893); initiation (*T.* no. 917); *Vijaya-uṣṇīṣa* (*T.* no. 973); Avalokiteśvara (*T.* nos. 1068 and 1078–1079); Maitreya (*T.* no. 1141); Kṣitigarba (*T.* no. 1158); Āṭavaka Vidyārāja (*T.* no. 1239); Gaṇeśa (*T.* no. 1270); and Dṛdhā (*T.* no. 1286).⁷ Three additional texts (*T.* nos. 905–907) have been unmasked as Japanese forgeries (Chen 1997; 1998). Aside from the latter, and the author’s own work on *T.* no. 917 (Pinte 2004), so far no substantial effort has been made to identify these works and/or to date and explain their attribution.

PRIMARY SOURCES

T. nos. 850, 867, 893, 1428, 1429, 1435, 1442, 1454, 1484, 1579, 1666, 1668, 1804, 1806, and 1808.

⁶ On *T.* no. 1145, see Chou (1945, 264 n. 75); Nanjiō (1975, 116); and van der Veere (2000, 60). For *T.* no. 893, see Giebel (2001, 114; English trans., 125–324). For a French study and excerpts from *T.* no. 895, see Strickmann (1996, 221ff.).

⁷ For partial studies on *T.* nos. 1068, 1078–1079, 1158, and 1270, see General Introduction.B.1a.

ABBREVIATIONS

None (aside from T.).

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