

The Third Ōtani Expedition at Dunhuang Acquisition of the Japanese Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts

IMRE GALAMBOS

Aurel Stein's 1907 visit to the hidden cave library at the Thousand Buddha Caves near Dunhuang, and especially his acquisition of a large number of manuscripts there, came as exciting news to archaeologists and researchers worldwide. Paul Pelliot's visit a few months later yielded an equally impressive collection of documents, which was soon to stir the interest of leading Chinese intellectuals. As a result of their efforts, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a government directive to transport the remaining manuscripts to the capital in 1909, with this effectively putting an end to the sale of these to foreign explorers. However, the two members of the third Ōtani expedition were still able to acquire a significant number of documents in Dunhuang in 1911-1912.

Japan was a relatively new participant in the exploration of Central Asia. It had recently demonstrated its economic and military strength by unexpectedly defeating the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and emerged as a major player in East Asia. As was the case with European imperialistic powers, Japan's colonial ambitions were accompanied by an increased interest in the Qing empire, especially its non-Han regions of Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The archaeological exploration of North-West China, however, was conducted as a private enterprise rather than a government-sponsored project. The man behind these ambitious plans was Count Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1876-1948), leader of the powerful Nishi Honganji Branch of the Jodo Shinshu sect, who sponsored a series of expeditions with the specific aim of exploring the Buddhist sites of the region. While staying in London in 1900-1902, the young Ōtani was fascinated by the discoveries of Buddhist remains in Western China by European explorers such as Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein. He believed that as a Buddhist priest thoroughly trained in the Chinese tradition he would be able to make a contribution to the exploration of the spread of Buddhism in this region. In 1902, when it was time for him to leave London, he decided to return home to Japan with a handful of followers by taking the overland route via Central Asia. Although his own participation in the journey was cut short by the death of his father, his men stayed behind to continue the exploration for a total of two years.

In 1908, four years after the end of the first trip, Ōtani sent two young explorers to Mongolia and Xinjiang for a second

round of exploration. The two men traversed the Gobi desert and entered Western China from the north. The team leader was the eighteen-year old Tachibana Zuichō 橘瑞超 (1890-1968) who on this trip discovered the famous fourth century Li Bo manuscript 李柏文書 in the vicinity of Loulan, a find that shortly made his name known in academic circles in the West. The expedition ended in India from where Tachibana travelled with Ōtani to Europe. During the six months in London, Tachibana was elected a member of the Royal Geographical Society and was able to meet in person a number of eminent European explorers, including Aurel Stein and Albert von Le Coq. He left London in August 1910 to begin the next expedition, accompanied by his English assistant A.O. Hobbs. This trip is known today as the third Ōtani expedition.

After travelling through Russia and crossing into Chinese Central Asia, the party began excavations near Turfan. After this, Tachibana chose a difficult and rough road to proceed towards Loulan and then farther down to the southern Taklamakan route. In order to travel light and to spare his companion, he instructed Hobbs to transport the bulk of their baggage to Kucha and wait there. In a stroke of bad luck, however, the Englishman contracted smallpox and died shortly before the two of them had a chance to reunite. Under the arrangements of George Macartney, the British Consul General, his body was moved to Kashgar and buried there in March 1910. Tachibana arrived just in time for the funeral, shortly after which he departed for Khotan and then launched an ill-fated attempt to penetrate into Tibet.

Ōtani was keenly following Tachibana's movements, with a series of instructions and reports being mailed and telegraphed back and forth between Kyōto and Xinjiang. However, communication with the young explorer was cut after his departure from Kashgar and his whereabouts remained unknown for many months to come. In the meantime, Ōtani dispatched from Japan another young man by the name of Yoshikawa Koichirō 吉川小一郎 (1885-1978) with a caravan to aid and eventually relieve Tachibana in China. Unlike most of the participants of the three expeditions, Yoshikawa was not a Buddhist priest but a layman whose family was in the service of the Nishi Honganji Temple. At the end of May 1911, he left Kyōto to travel by steamer from Kōbe to Shanghai, and then on horseback to Hankou, Luoyang, Xi'an, Lanzhou, Liangzhou,

Suzhou, and Anxi (Fig. 1). Ōtani's Chinese chef Li Yuqing 李毓慶 went along in the double capacity of cook and interpreter.¹

During the entire journey, Yoshikawa kept a meticulous diary in which he recorded the events of each day, his exact geographical location and altitude at that moment, and a short weather report. This sort of field documentation was part of the instructions the explorers received from Ōtani, who was monitoring their progress remotely from Japan. A telling example of the degree of Ōtani's hands-on management may be found in the collection of the Ryūkyō University Library—two small handwritten booklets written by Ōtani for his expedition members. One of them is the *Ryōkō kyōhan* 旅行教範 (“Instructions for travel”) in which he gives a long list of general rules to follow in the field, including the daily distances one should cover on foot or horseback, items to be recorded in the diary, or even what to wear when meeting local officials and gentlemen. He writes, for example, that “especially on British territory you should not forget to prepare a tailcoat.”² The other booklet called *Tanken shizusho* 探検指図書 (“Expedition guidelines”) is a detailed itinerary mailed to Yoshikawa shortly after he had begun his trip. These instructions reveal that to a large extent Ōtani planned the entire expedition ahead and was running it remotely while the actual on site explorers were simply acting in accordance to his instructions. Accordingly, there was very little leeway for individualistic ventures, the expedition members being obliged to follow orders from Kyōto.

Yoshikawa's diary was published in 1937 under the title *Shina kikō* 支那紀行 (“Travels in China”).³ Tachibana's account of this expedition called *Chūa tanken* 中亞探検 (“Exploration of Central Asia”) was published in 1912 shortly after his return to Japan.⁴ It is primarily based on these sources that we know how the Japanese collection of Dunhuang manuscripts was acquired in 1911-1912.⁵

According to the original plan, Yoshikawa was to meet the team leader Tachibana in Dunhuang at the end of August 1911. However, Tachibana was nowhere to be found and without him Yoshikawa was unable to proceed with the expedition. His four months in Dunhuang were mostly spent in enforced idleness, since he lacked the funds to buy manuscripts, which was his reason for being there. With the anti-Manchu revolution the country was sinking into a turmoil and communication was getting increasingly difficult as postal, telegraph, banking, and other services were often rendered dysfunctional for extended periods of time. Thus Yoshikawa was neither able to receive funds from Japan, nor had access to the remainder of Tachibana's money.

Coming from the direction of Anxi and running behind schedule, Yoshikawa arrived in Dunhuang on 5 October 1911,

accompanied by the Chinese interpreter/cook Li. They rented some space in the suburbs of the city in a house owned by a local Muslim family (Fig. 2) and this was to become their home for the following months. Apart from providing a place to stay, the landlord also ran a number of small errands for his tenants and was even to play a role of a semi-official middleman during the purchase of Dunhuang manuscripts.

After his arrival, Yoshikawa began his protocol visits to the local officials, including the customary exchange of gifts. On his second day in town, for example, the county magistrate sent him two chickens, some pears, peaches, walnut, and sugar, before coming over himself. At the Yamen Yoshikawa was allowed to examine the luggage deposited there by Tachibana several months earlier. The following days were spent resting and taking shorter excursions in the vicinity of the city, at any moment expecting Tachibana's arrival. However, when the latter did not show up, Yoshikawa decided to visit the Mogao caves by himself (Fig. 3). His diary entry for 10 October describes his initial encounter with the caves and their guardian Abbot Wang the following way:

... At 10 am, I set off with a servant, my landlord and another Muslim to go to the Dunhuang Thousand Buddha Caves. Along the way, in a small field shop we bought some sweet melons and bread for the road. We went along farmlands and land covered by sand or pebbles. Moving in a south-east direction for about 40 *li*, we arrived at the caves. It was 2 pm. Compared with the Qiaozi caves, these Thousand Buddha Caves were truly magnificent. Moreover, there were so many of them that it was impossible to see all of them in a single day. I negotiated with the Daoist priest telling him that I was interested in acquiring the Tang sutras he had. A long discussion ensued but eventually I was granted my wish. He agreed that he would let me take a closer look at them sometime later, and we returned home at 6:30 pm.

When Yoshikawa arrived back in the city and found that Tachibana still had not arrived, he hired a local Muslim to travel to Sepnor and Mahai to see if perhaps there were any traces of him there. The messenger, however, came back a month later without any news. In the meantime, Yoshikawa was getting increasingly anxious about his absence. Tachibana had been appointed by Ōtani as the team leader and was supposed to be the person examining the manuscripts and conducting the negotiations. His failure to show up at the appointed time not only raised concerns for his personal safety but was also running the risk of jeopardizing the overall objective of the expedition.

Almost a week after his initial trip to the caves, on 16 October Yoshikawa went back to the caves to take a closer look at them. His diary entry for that day reads:

I went along the same route as the other day and this time it took me about 2.5 hours. I went straight into the caves where I found some sutra fragments. My horse carriage and servant arrived later, shortly after 6

pm, and we lodged at the guest room within the main hall. In the adjacent room a Tibetan monk was staying. He was about 23 years old, a painter by the name of Cheechee. He was quite comical but also very enthusiastic about reciting his sutras in the morning. At this location, the water comes from the river and is quite bad, very saline.

The next morning he woke up to the sound of the Tibetan monk's chanting, and began his inspection of the caves, finishing the lower row in the afternoon. The next day he had to take a rest because he became sick from the food and water of the day before. He continued his examination the following day and photographed the murals inside the caves. The specialist for preparing rubbings whom he had hired back in the city also arrived at Mogao and began working. In the meantime, Yoshikawa went through the second row of caves, taking many photographs. Unfortunately, he was not able to carry his camera to some of the higher points, even though there were many interesting details in the second and third rows.

When he had finished his preliminary examination of all the caves, it was the time of the Mid-Autumn Festival and the air around the caves was filled with the sound of firecrackers. The very next day he commenced a second round of inspection, now taking his time and paying more attention to details. After some negotiations he managed to buy two skillfully carved statues from the abbot. But by this time his horse carriage that had been sent for him from the city arrived and instead of continuing his inspection of the caves he packed his luggage and the next morning returned to Dunhuang.

Abbot Wang came into town to see him the very next day with some Tang sutras for sale. Yoshikawa paid him 11 taels for the manuscripts and for his help during the time spent at the caves. As there was still no news from Tachibana, more days were wasted in idleness, meeting with local friends and riding out of town for short trips. One of the useful things Yoshikawa could do during this period was to begin making prints from the photographs he had taken. As a precaution, he also photographed the manuscripts he had already acquired (Fig. 4).⁶

The first news he heard of Tachibana was on 8 December when the local Yamen received a letter from the Yamen of Aksu saying that Tachibana might have been in Khotan at the end of September. Accordingly, by then he could have been arriving in Dunhuang. After a few more days of waiting, a Muslim messenger was dispatched with a letter to Khotan, hoping that he would somehow run into Tachibana. Meanwhile China was sinking into chaos and travelling was becoming increasingly dangerous.

On 23 December, Abbot Wang came to Dunhuang for another visit. He claimed that he had wanted to go to Suzhou to solicit funds for the restoration of the caves but due to the current chaotic situation would not be able to get a substantial amount from the Yamen there. For this reason, he decided to

sell some of his Tang sutras to the Japanese explorer. When told that the manuscripts he brought with him were not particularly good, he eventually agreed to bring over some better ones later. Yoshikawa's diary reveals that at the time he thought that the Taoist priest was rather cunning and suspected that he had some sort of secret arrangement with his Muslim landlord.

The abbot came back two weeks later on 7 January with some scrolls written in a script that to Yoshikawa resembled Mongolian. Not being able to evaluate the manuscripts, he decided to wait with the purchase for Tachibana who had a significantly better command of scripts and languages.

Nor was Wang the only man who brought manuscripts for sale. Even before reaching Dunhuang, Yoshikawa already obtained a Tang scroll from the Head of the Anxi Telegraph Office in exchange taking his family's photograph. Later on, one of his Muslim friends in Dunhuang also gave him a manuscript scroll as a present. With time, his eagerness to acquire old manuscripts must have become known around Dunhuang because occasionally he was also approached by locals. Thus in January Yoshikawa bought two Tang scrolls from a peasant for 2.2 taels. Another Chinese man brought 5 Tang scrolls, one of those in a nearly perfect condition. From the initial quote of 30 taels for all of them, the price was eventually bargained down to 5 taels for 4 scrolls.

After months of delay, Tachibana showed up on 26 January, disguised as a Muslim. Apparently, he had run into Yoshikawa's messenger with a letter addressed to himself and immediately rushed to Dunhuang. At the time of his arrival, Yoshikawa had just dispatched Li, the cook to send a telegram to Kyōto, informing Ōtani that Tachibana had still not shown up and that a more comprehensive search was needed to find him. A servant was immediately sent out after Li to change the text of the telegram. After spending a whole day recounting their experiences, the two young men picked up from the Yamen the 30 cases Tachibana had deposited there. The very same afternoon, they rode out to the Thousand Buddha Caves to examine the caves and buy manuscripts.⁷

They stayed overnight and began to look at the caves in the morning. Around 9 pm, the abbot showed them 40 some scrolls of Tang manuscripts for inspection. According to Yoshikawa's description, Wang resembled a thief who was displaying his hidden treasures. Upon being asked whether he had any more, Wang reappeared with around 40 more scrolls. The following day the two Japanese examined some manuscripts stored in the abbot's room. After some negotiation they managed to buy 169 scrolls, loaded those onto horses, and rode back to Dunhuang.

The next day Wang visited their residence in order to negotiate the prices and pick up the payment. In the end, a total of 300 taels were paid for the 169 manuscripts. As a means to

induce him to sell more items, Tachibana only gave 100 taels to the abbot, promising to pay the remaining 200 when he brings to them some better scrolls. Reluctantly, the abbot consented to the arrangement and came back the next day with 200 more scrolls. Yoshikawa's impression was that Wang had intentionally included some fakes among the manuscripts, and they had to work late into the night separating the documents into three categories: superior, medium, and inferior. In the process, Yoshikawa's landlord did his best to inflate the prices in an attempt, as it was soon recognized by all those present, to increase his commission.

The following night, Wang came by again with a large batch of manuscripts and a demeanor that suggested to his Japanese buyers that this time he was expecting to make a significant profit. As usual, the landlord turned up to do his share of "helping." At the first stage of negotiations the abbot was adamant that he would not go under 300 taels but in the end he sold the whole lot for only 50. In reality, Yoshikawa had budgeted 100 taels for the purchase, as he had also promised the landlord a reward of 50 taels. Much to his surprise he later learned that from those 50 taels the landlord paid 20 to the cook Li as part of yet another secret arrangement.⁸

Having acquired the manuscripts, the Japanese explorers felt that they had completed their task at Dunhuang. After a day's rest, the two of them left the city on 6 February 1912 in the direction of Anxi. From there they entered Xinjiang and carried out excavations in the vicinity of Turfan. Within a few weeks, at the end of April, Tachibana returned to Japan. In order to avoid the civil war in China proper, he travelled north to Russia and then took the Trans-Siberian Railway. He left the main portion of his baggage and the expensive expedition gear with Yoshikawa, taking with him only some of the more valuable acquisitions. Among the few things carried back to Japan at this time were the Dunhuang manuscripts.

Yoshikawa stayed behind and continued the exploration of Xinjiang for another year. He finally began making his way eastwards and on 14 February 1913 he visited Dunhuang once again. On 17 February he met with Abbot Wang and, leaving aside enough money for his return trip, gave all the money that was left from the expeditions to the priest. For this he received 88 scrolls.⁹ Having spent all his money, the last member of the Ōtani expeditions continued his journey back home, finally arriving in Japan on 10 July 1914.

But even when Tachibana returned home in June 1912 with the main bulk of the manuscripts acquired from Abbot Wang, the cave library of Dunhuang was already a hot topic in Japan. To a significant degree this was due to the presence of the eminent Chinese scholar and collector Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866-1940) who had moved to Kyōto with his entire family and enormous library, in an attempt to avoid the chaos of the

revolution. His protégé and fellow researcher Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) came with him.¹⁰ Ōtani was closely involved with Luo's activities in Japan and after Tachibana's return let him examine the collection.¹¹

It is rather unfortunate that before the material from Dunhuang and other Central Asian locations could be properly organized and published, a financial scandal occurred at the Nishi Honganji Temple, in the course of which Ōtani was forced to resign from his position as Abbot. From the point of view of the expeditions, this happened in a most disastrous moment, as the enterprise that lasted twelve years and cost a small fortune was just reaching conclusion. Yoshikawa and the remaining spoils of the third expedition arrived only a couple of months after, by which time Ōtani had already withdrawn from public life and retired to his villa, Niraku, near Kōbe.¹² The majority of the archaeological material from the three Central Asian expeditions was stored, organized, and studied here. In an attempt to raise funds, for a period of time some of the items were even put on display. Trying to clear his debts, in December 1915 Ōtani sold the villa with his collection of Central Asian material, which thus became dispersed before it was properly organized and published.

The Dunhuang manuscripts, however, were not sold with the villa. These had been already moved with a smaller number of precious items to Dalian and Lüshun in China which by this time, together with Shanghai, had become his main bases.¹³ The items from his Lüshun villa later became part of the Kantōchō Museum 關東庁博物館, which was later renamed Lüshun Museum. The Museum had 428 Chinese and 209 Tibetan items from Dunhuang. In 1954 these were transferred as an exhibition loan to the Beijing Library (present-day National Library of China) and, due to the political situation in China at the time, were never returned.¹⁴

The cave library at the Thousand Buddha Caves near Dunhuang was the largest manuscript discovery ever made in China. Following Stein's visit to the caves in 1907, the documents have been dispersed around the world, the majority of them having found their way to Britain, France, Russia, and China. The collection acquired by Yoshikawa and Tachibana during the third Ōtani expedition ranked forth in its size, only slightly smaller than the one rescued and transferred to Beijing by the Chinese authorities. This is all the more astonishing since the Japanese was a privately funded expedition, with its spoils owned by a private individual, albeit a prominent one. Perhaps this was part of the reason behind the ill-fated destiny of the manuscripts, which were further scattered as a result of Ōtani's resignation and the associated financial difficulties.

Notes

¹ According to Yoshikawa, Li was not specifically sent by Ōtani but wanted to go back to China and because of this shared the boat ride to Shanghai. Once in China, Yoshikawa asked him whether he wanted to come along to Western China and Li consented. At the end of this trip, Li sent Yoshikawa off at the port of Tianjin and stayed behind in China.

² See Ueyama Daishun 上山大峻, “*Tanken shizusbo to Ryokō kyōhan*” 『旅行教範』と『探検指図書』, *Bunka isan* 文化遺産 11 (2001 April):34-5.

³ The diary came out as part of a monumental two-volume edition entitled *Shin Saiikiki* 新西域記 (“New Record of Travels to the Western Regions”), a belated attempt to gather together the documentation related to the Ōtani expeditions. The title of the work shows that the Central Asian expeditions were considered as a continuation of the work commenced by the celebrated Tang pilgrim Xuanzang whose account was known as *Xiyuji* 西域記 (“Record of Travels to the Western Regions”). See Uehara Yoshitarō 上原芳太郎, *Shin Saiikiki* 新西域記 (Tōkyō: Yūkōsha, 1937).

⁴ Tachibana Zuichō, *Chūa tanken* 中亜探検 (Tōkyō: Hakubunkan, 1912). This work was also included in *Shin Saiikiki*. Tachibana’s diary of this trip, however, was lost. Most likely it was part of the material that was destroyed in a fire when years later his family temple in Nagoya was burned down.

⁵ Many years later, as an old man of ninety, Yoshikawa also gave an interview in which he added a number of interesting details regarding his experiences in China. See Kasubuchi Hiroaki 粕渕宏昭, “Ōtani tankentai hiwa: Taiin Yoshikawa Koichirō san ni kiku” 大谷探検隊秘話——隊員吉川小一郎さんに聞く, *Shiruku rōdo* 5 (1979):13-23; 6 (1980): 3-18.

⁶ During the first Ōtani expedition of 1902-1904, a large number of photographs developed in Japan were unsuccessful. Learning from this, Yoshikawa developed his photos along the way, whenever he had clean water and enough time. This method was also a useful way of pleasing Chinese officials who would occasionally present him with a Tang manuscript in exchange for taking a picture of them or their wives.

⁷ In his travel account (*Chūa tanken*), Tachibana retold the story of how the Mogao caves became quite famous in academic circles in the West. He described how Lajos Lóczy, Head of the Hungarian Geographical Society, had been the first modern explorer to visit the site in 1870, during his participation in the expedition of Count Széchenyi. It was Lóczy who made the Dunhuang and the Mogao caves widely known in the West. Based on his information, Stein paid a visit to the caves and took most of the manuscripts discovered here back to London, displaying them at the British Museum for the masses. The Chinese government suddenly felt cheated and from there

on banned the selling of antiquities from ancient temples and monasteries. (Uehara, *Shin Saiikiki*, 785.) In fact, Stein did not take most of the manuscripts and the central Chinese authorities did not take action until after Pelliot’s visit to Beijing when Chinese scholars learned of the finds.

⁸ To illustrate the value of currency at the time, we may note that right before their departure Tachibana bought a horse for 65 taels. Thus the cost of travel was significantly larger than the actual price paid for the manuscripts.

⁹ Yoshikawa’s diary did not specify how many scrolls he bought at this time. This was related in the interview he gave almost seventy years after the events. See Kasubuchi, “Ōtani tankentai hiwa” (1980), 15.

¹⁰ On the role of Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei in the development of Dunhuang studies in Japan, as well as their connection with Ōtani, see Shirasu Jōshin 白須浄真, “Ōtani tankentai to Ra Shingyoku: Kyōto ni okeru tonkōgaku no kōryū to dai san ji Ōtani tankentai” 大谷探検隊と羅振玉——京都における敦煌学の興隆と第3次大谷探検隊, in *Sōsōki no tonkōgaku* 草創期の敦煌学, ed. Takata Tokio 高田時雄 (Tokyo: Chisen shokan, 2002), 13-45.

¹¹ Luo published Tachibana’s catalogue of the manuscripts he brought back from Dunhuang as part of his *Guoxue congkan* 國學叢刊 series. See Tachibana Zuichō, *Riben Ju shi Dunhuang jianglai cangjing mulu* 日本橘氏敦煌將來藏經目錄, *Guoxue congkan* 國學叢刊, Vol. 9 (1914).

¹² This luxurious villa built on Mount Rokkō, overlooking the bay and the city of Kōbe, was one of the extravagances for which Ōtani had been criticized within his own sect. The building of complex cost ¥300,000, today approximately equivalent to \$75,000,000. See Richard M. Jaffe, “Buddhist material culture, ‘Indianism,’ and the construction of Pan-Asian Buddhism in prewar Japan,” *Material Religion* 2, no. 3 (2006), 266-92.

¹³ Following his resignation Ōtani spent the rest of his life living and travelling abroad, only returning to live in Japan at the very end of his life. Dalian/Lūshun, Shanghai and the southern islands of Java and Celebes were the places where he spent most of his time.

¹⁴ From this collection, the National Library of China today has 412 Chinese and 208 Tibetan items. The remaining seven items were left in Lūshun. The only Dunhuang manuscripts from the original Ōtani collection that remain in Japan are the 49 scrolls housed at the Ōmiya Library of Ryūkyō University. These have been digitized by IDP Japan and are available online through the IDP website: <http://idp.bl.uk>. I am grateful to Lin Shitian of the NLC and Kitsudo Masahiro of Ryūkyō University for clarifying the complex process of how and where the manuscripts ended up.



Fig. 1. Yoshikawa Koichiro (right) in Anxi, with the Central Magistrate (middle) and the Head of the Telegraph Office (left). Glass negative from the collection of the Omiya Library, Ryukoku University. Photograph courtesy of the library.



Fig. 2. The Muslim family in whose house Yoshikawa lived for three months in Dunhuang. Glass negative from the collection of the Omiya Library, Ryukoku University. Photograph courtesy of the library.



Fig. 3. Thousand Buddha Caves near Dunhuang. Glass negative from the collection of the Omiya Library, Ryukoku University. Photograph courtesy of the library.

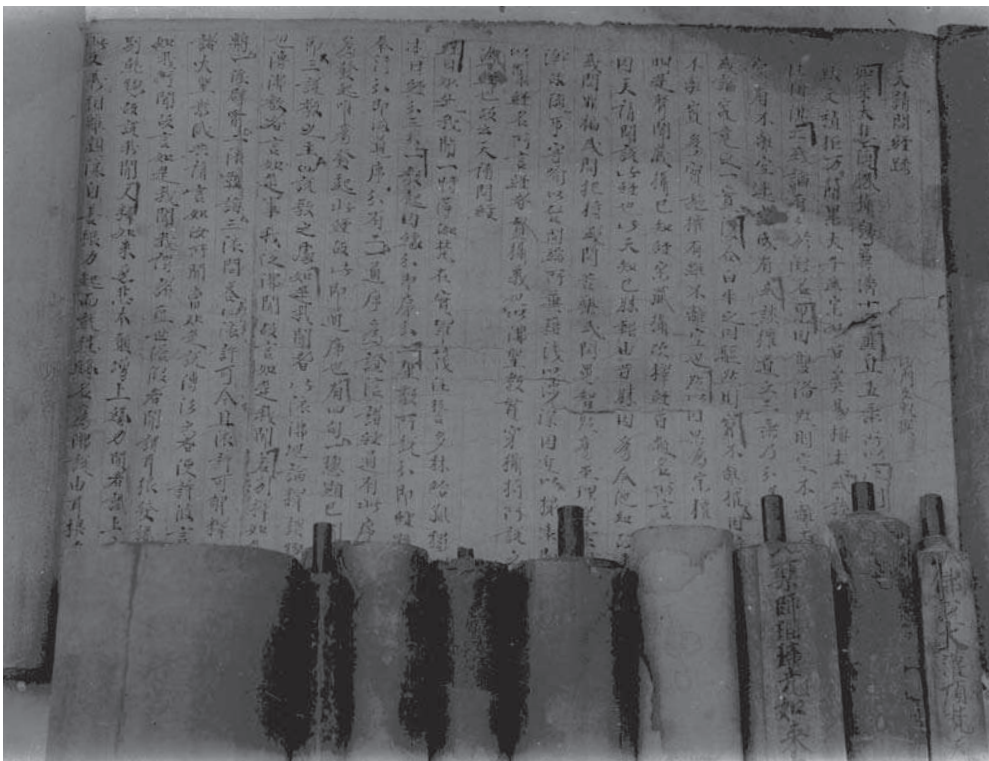


Fig. 4. A photograph of manuscripts from the Dunhuang cave library collection. Glass negative from the collection of the Omiya Library, Ryukoku University. Photograph courtesy of the library.