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A NOTE ON PTOLEMY IN CHINA

PAR

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In their often cited paper on the Manichaeic works in China¹, Chavannes and Pelliot first mentioned three books of which titles were recorded in the official history of the T'ang Dynasty, but which were no longer existent. They are (1) *Tu-li-ching* (都利經), (2) *Yü-ssu-ching* (聿斯經), and (3) *Ssu-mên-ching* (四門經). The two great French orientalist suggested that the three books, which were closely related with each other, might have belonged to some Sogdian school of astrology. The provenance of the first two books, as they maintained, were somewhere in the Central Asia, and the ultimate origin of the third one could be sought in north India because *ssu-mên* (四門) seemed to be related with the division of the 28 lunar mansions (nakṣatra) into four cardinal directions. In fact, however, the argument was based on a fragile ground, because the division of the 28 nakṣatra into four directions is more a Chinese practice than Indian. Although Chavannes and Pelliot knew that the third title was also recorded in the list² of the 35 books which the Nestorian priest Adam (Chinese name: Ching-tsin 景淨) offered to the T'ang Dynasty in about A.D. 780, they did not develop the discussion further.

Inspired by Chavannes and Pelliot, Mikinosuke Ishida³ collected further evidence on these books in Chinese as well as Japanese documents. The titles of the books were sometimes found in the combined forms, e.g. *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching* (都利聿斯經), *Yü-ssu-ssu-mên-ching* (聿斯四門經), and Ishida even suggested the possibility of the complete original title *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ssu-mên-ching* (都利聿斯四門經). As Ishida discovered the *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching* is exactly the title that is found in the list⁴ of the books brought from China to Japan by the Buddhist monk Shuei (or Soei 宗叡) in 864. He further collected some Japanese documents in which were found fragmentary quotations from the *Yü-ssu-ching*. Supporting, with reservation, Chavannes and Pelliot's view of the Indian origin of the *Ssu-mên-ching*, Ishida concluded that the *Yü-ssu-ching* also belonged to Buddhist astrology. Both texts were used in Japan by the Buddhist school of astrology called Sukuyodo (宿曜道) which flourished in the Heian Period.

The problem did not attract much attention of the orientalist outside Japan, until recently when Jao Tsong-yi, in a paper⁵ dealing with an astrological manuscript of the Touen-Houang documents, proposed a new interpretation of *Tu-li* (都利) as the Sogdian name of the river Talas. This interpretation, however, is not convincing enough, because it was not explained why the river name should have been used as the title of the book on astrology.

Recently a new perspective was cleared by two Japanese savants. Hiroyuki Momo⁶, after studying fragments of the *Yü-ssu-ching*, which are quoted in the class of documents called *Sukuyo-kanmon* (宿曜勘文), suggested that the text in question was neither of Indian nor of Chinese origin but it was rather characteristically Hellenistic. This view was supported by Kiyosi Yabuuti⁷, who independently proposed a very revealing idea that the *Ssu-mên-ching* might have been somehow related with Ptolemy's astrological book *Tetrabiblos*, because both titles denote 'work consisting of four books'.

Fully agreeing with Momo and Yabuuti, I want to proceed further to say that the first four Chinese characters in the title *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching* (都利聿斯經) represent a phonetic translation of the very name of Ptolemaios. Thus the longest title *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ssu-mên-ching* which Ishida proposed could possibly mean 'Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos'. From whichever language the book was translated, Syriac, Sogdian, Pahlavi, or Arabic, these four Chinese characters evidently preserve the five graphic elements, i.e., [t], [l], [y], [v], [s], only the initial [p] and the medial [m] between [l] and [y] being lost. The written forms of Ptolemaios' name as attested in Syriac texts⁸ and Arabic manuscripts are P-T-L-M-W-S (P-Ṭ-L-M-W-S) and B-T-L-M-Y-W-S (B-Ṭ-L-M-Y-W-S) respectively. The loss of initial sound /p/ of the cluster /pt/ is a very common phenomenon (as in modern English pronunciation of Ptolemy). What remains to be explained is only the disappearance of [m] in the middle in this phonetic or, possibly, graphic environment.

It is not surprising at all if Ptolemy's works were transmitted to the T'ang Dynasty China, because most of the books which Adam offered to the Dynasty were of Hellenistic origin. Furthermore the important role of Nestorian priests in the transmission of the Greek science to the East is one of the established historical facts. As Nau's papers⁹ have shown Ptolemy's astrological works, *Tetrabiblos* and *Karpos*, were translated into Syriac already in the mid seventh or early eighth century. Soon after that a Pahlavi version of the *Tetrabiblos* appeared. When 'Umar ibn Farrukhân made his Arabic translation of the *Tetrabiblos* in 812 he made it from the Pahlavi version.

I do not dare to say that the text bearing Ptolemy's name is to be identified with the *Tetrabiblos*. It is possible that the *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching* was a Chinese

the Chinese name *Tu-li-yü-ssu*, Prof. Itō refers to another Pahlavi form 𐭠𐭲𐭩𐭥𐭲𐭩𐭥𐭲 (T'TLGTWS) which is attested in the *Vicārišn i catrang* ('Explanation of Chess', a well-known text included in Nyberg's *A Manual of Pahlavi*, pp. 118-120). Prof. Itō regards this as a corrupted form of *Tatritos*, which is again a corruption of *Patrimos*. *Tatritos* as attested in the *Vicārišn i catrang* is the very name of the Indian who transmitted the game of chess to the Sassanian court in Khusraw I's reign (531-579). Thus, according to Itō, the corruption of the name is partly ascribed to the Indian intermediary.

Although valuable is Itō's suggestion, I rather wonder how the name of Ptolemy, after such a long journey of corruption, finally reassumed in China the form rather close to the original. Since the Pahlavi form PTLMYWS evidently refers to Ptolemy, with the initial [P] and medial [M] being preserved, it is evident that the Chinese form must have been from another source. But it does not necessarily follow that we should hypothesize an Indian intermediary.