

## Monks and Texts in Stone Inscriptions during the Tang, with Special Reference to the *Dazangjing* Collection

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Since the 20th century one aspect in the history of the scholarship on East Asian Buddhism has been the retrieving of primary sources beyond the boundaries of what had been handed down to us by the previous tradition. It is in part a history of “discoveries” or re-discoveries of texts thought to be lost. This kind of scholarship received a great impulse by the finding of texts in the Dunhuang caves and has been proceeding step by step providing the scholarly community with relevant new contributions over the years. Important discoveries have not stopped also in times closer to us. The last twenty years, for example, the “new” texts found at the Nanatsudera or at the Kongoji came to light in Japan, causing again each on its own scale a productive output of research. Nothing to say of the number of surveys of ancient canonical collections (especially those published in the age of printing) that have been carried out especially in Japanese temples until very recently.

One common feature of the many discoveries of this kind is that they not only draw attention on individual documents, their contents and history being on the foreground. They also posed the important question of their contextual settings, which principally means the place they had in the collection of scriptures held by the religious establishment where they were found. This has been an object of study in itself. As a consequence, the problem of how “canonical” were these collections and the texts therein has been stirring much discussion, as the topics of the papers presented in this meeting also show in the most eloquent fashion.

In other words, we cannot avoid to ask to what extent these texts or collections represented Chinese (or East Asian Buddhism) correctly, how “orthodox” they were in the eyes of the people who read them or used them for ritual purposes. In East Asia certainly one of the many ways to assess orthodoxy was that of including a particular piece of religious writing within an “orthodox” corpus, that is the collection which was supposed to circulate and represent the accepted scriptural heritage. Such a role has been played by the so-called *Dazangjing*, especially since printing made possible a transmission with no fundamental alterations both in contents and overall composition of the collection. In fact, with the printed editions of the various Chinese “canons” went beyond all the variables manuscripts involve such as the difficulty of making copies absolutely identical and the consequent creation of “local” textual traditions, either by purpose or simply dictated by chance.

To put it in a more simpler way, the *Dazangjing* has become a popular subject of research in recent years. I have no time here to go into the details of recent scholarship in this field, but for the purpose of this presentation I would like to say that Professor Fang Guangchang's work on the *Dazangjing* during the Tang dynasty greatly contributed to our understanding of our sources as well of the way the canonical collection of Buddhist texts was conceived of and transmitted at a time when manuscripts were instead the usual medium for circulating a scriptural corpus. Quite naturally, also considering his own professional background, the sources Professor Fang used for his research were basically Duhuang documents (with all the caveat about what they really “represent”) and prose texts originally intended to be carved on stone but handed down to us mostly as samples of literary prose. I refer in particular to those collected in the *Quan Tangwen*. My research, then, received much inspiration by Fang Guangchang's contribution in the attempt to go into a more detailed analysis of specific case studies. In the end, the purpose is that of providing as much evidence as possible on the environment where canonical collections were put together in specific areas during the medieval period.

Since I have not the time to go through a number of specific cases I will concentrate here on the evidence I have at the moment on the creation of a collection of texts in one of the few important religious centers of Buddhist China, i.e. the region of Mount Lushan in Jiangxi province. We have a few pieces, already, mentioned at various places in Fang Guangchang's work which shed light of this historical episode. They are the following ones, in due order.

1. Donglingsi jingzang beiming bing xu 東林寺經藏碑銘并序 by Li Zhao 李肇, famous especially as the author of the *Tangguo shibu* 唐國史補;
2. Donglingsi jingzang xilang ji 東林寺經藏西廊記 by Baijuyi 白居易;
3. Li Zhao Donglingsi beiyin ji 李肇東林寺碑陰記 by Cai Jing 蔡京;
4. Donglingsi timing 東林寺題名 by Wei Zhou 韋宙.

Through the texts of these inscriptions—which apparently do not exist any longer in stone—we can follow in some detail the history of the collection of Buddhist writings kept at the Donglingsi on Mount Lushan, a monastery with a glorious history going back to the times of Huiyuan. The time span is that of the 9th century, before and after the persecution of the Huichang 會 period.

The history of Lushan during the Tang is not easy to follow, and one of the preliminary tasks should be that of gathering all the relevant information on the milieu in which its scriptural canon was put together. Most of this information can be extracted from the texts of the stela erected on different occasions. However, another good, albeit later source, can also be Chen Shunyu 陳舜俞(?-1076)'s *Lushan ji* 廬山記. Besides providing a detailed picture of the physical characteristics of

the region, its scenic beauties, historical spots and religious establishments of the time, Chen also put together a collection of documents (especially biographical data of figures related to the mountain in the early period) and a catalogue of the texts inscribed on stone and still extant at his time. These are mostly inscriptions dating back to Tang times. Given the antiquarian interests of most literati, Chen Shunyu's attempt follows a Song vogue that will produce also the first specimens of catalogues and collections of epigraphical texts among other things. However, as far as Lushan is concerned, chapter seven is aptly titled "Catalogue of old stela" (*Gubei mu* 古碑目) and contains the titles, authors and circumstances of the erection of a considerable amount of stela in the 5 major Daoist and Buddhist monasteries located there. The section on the Daolinsi is particularly enlightening from our point of view, for the overview we can gather on the stone inscriptions erected in Tang times and still visible during the Song. Moreover, at the end of the biography of Huiyuan in section 5 of Chen's work it is clearly stated that the Donglinsi had been "abolished" (*fei* 廢) in the 5th year of Huichang (845) to be rebuilt 3 years later. It is of some interest then to find confirmation of this historical fact in the list of stela Chen Shunyu provides. Many of them were in fact put back in their place after the persecution, as Chen explicitly remarks. Most likely the stones were not destroyed, but rather kept aside somewhere to be collocated again in their original places once the persecution was over.

Given all of this, what were the circumstances that led to the formation of the canonical collection at the Donglinsi? The social environment in which the enterprise was carried out stands out quite clearly in the piece attributed to Li Zhao, beyond the set of almost formulaic conventions that the genre required. In his introductory section it follows roughly the tradition of epigraphical documents, and begins by presenting the conceptual framework of the subject to be celebrated. Standing in full evidence in front of the building which accommodated the collection of texts, an object like a stela has in mind the visitor who will read it, and in its incipit adopts an elevated style for extolling the importance of texts in the transmission of the Buddhist teachings. The tradition has to be remembered first. So, the idea of the function of the "scriptures" is set. In other words, the concept at very core of the message the text conveys is established first. Scriptures are the material support of the teachings, which will have disappeared if they did not exist. Moreover, to give to the collection of Buddhist texts an even "heavier" status and translate in some way the concept into the language of literati these are compared to the "Confucian" classics. This is also the usual recalling of the tradition of China which seems to be another topos of memorial writings, not by chance usually commissioned to literati famous for their literary skills.

Next, the power of the tradition is asserted also in historical terms, not only in the

abstract terminology of doctrine. There is then a reminder of the “myth” of the Buddhist councils and the earliest antecedents of the texts transmitted down to the present, with a description of their material form and the kind of writing systems involved. We can consider as equally formulaic the overview which is given on the problem of translation and exegesis, with mention of the main figures involved on the Chinese side in this kind of endeavour. Dharmarakṣa and Daoan stand there as representative figures, heroes to whom the formation of the scriptural heritage is profoundly indebted. The final outcome of this long historical process is finally presented in the terms of the 5418 juan of the *Kayuan shijiao lu*. That is the “canon” that the monastery is keeping, intriguingly enough called *shilu* 實錄, “veritable record”. However, the story could not be complete without recalling the most recent developments, and therefore the enormous contribution of Xuanzang is not left unmentioned. The texts he translated also did find their way into the scriptural repository of the Donlingsi on Lushan, as the following of text duly explains.

However, in spite of its ancient tradition and renown, the problem that the Donglingsi had to face were the gaps in its “canon”. This is clearly mentioned as the original drive behind the enterprise the inscription is supposed to remember.

Regional Inspector (Guanchashi 觀察使) of Jiangxi Wei Dan 韋丹 was the local authority the monks could have involved in the pious endeavour of giving them the financial means to get new collection of scriptures and build a construction that could accommodate them. The collecting of texts was apparently a common effort in which all the monasteries of Hongzhou 洪州 participated. According to the inscription, however, Wei Dan’s role as a pious donor had a counterpart from the side of the religious establishment in the the Dade Yi Tong 義彤, who for more than forty years had been taking care of the project of having a canon in proper order at Lushan.

We have then some information on the work of this local “editor” of the canon. He would not include Chinese commentaries in the collection, for example, because he considered them as extra-canonical. Moreover, Yi Tong added a special holding of scriptures (more than 4900 juan under seven headings) translated after the Kaiyuan period, and even compiled a catalogue of these in 7 juan. On all of this in relation to the actual use of the *Kayuan shijiao lu* as a model of canon in this period Professor Fang Guangchang has already given us a meticulous scrutiny of the sources and I will not insist here on the same points.

The actual shape of the building where the “canon” was kept is described in the details by a slightly later piece by Bai Juyi written in 819, more than ten years since Wei Dan died leaving the work unfinished. Bai Juyi helped the monastic community to complete a building that he rhetorically depicts in all its magnificent details and in his piece he also provides us with a curious

piece of information on the funds he used to finish the work of his predecessor. The poet himself donated his honorarium as a writer of epigraphical texts for building the external hall on the West side of the sutra storehouse. What is curious is that Bai Juyi had received that reward for writing a memorial inscription dedicated to a Vinaya master (Jingyun 景雲) of the same Daolinsi. The hundred pieces of silk the “disciples” of the latter gave to the poet were put to use to give a final shape to the depository of scriptures Wei Dan had begun to build (step by step we can assume on the basis of what later Jing Cai says on the back of Li Zhao’s inscription) a decade or so earlier.

How the scriptures were vulnerable to historical events we can also see from the other two inscriptions, the first authored by Cai Jing and the second relating the activities of another high official called Wei Zhou. In fact, through all these four texts it is possible to follow a continuous process of collection and re-collection of texts over many years, in face of the external circumstances that led to destructions and losses. The occasion of the inscription by Li Zhao already was a reconstruction of the integrity of the monastic library at the Donglinsi, a work completed a few years later thanks to a donation by Bai Juyi. Then, several decades later (the events described refer in fact to 858-59, the 12th year of Dazhong 大中), Cai Jing gives us testimony of the contribution by another regional high official, himself again a Wei, i.e. Wei Zhou, who came to pacify the region because of an ongoing rebellion. Cai Jing, on the back side of the stela with the text by Li Zhao, begins with a narration of how the persecution of Buddhism had brought substantial damages to the collection of scriptures and how this could be restored a first time. The building, however, was not there any longer. The texts had to be kept in a cave (*shishi* 石室), a fact of some interest to us for what we know of caves accommodating temple libraries. However, Wei Zhou, in collaboration with temple authorities (who also had been filling the new gaps in the titles kept in the cave), was apparently behind the new re-construction of the sutra repository, as the *timing* reports in the context of a narration of the meetings of this high official with eminent monks from the Donglinsi.

In conclusion, I think we can collect similar stories from other, more or less important regional centers in order to understand from all these small pieces of evidence how monks were involved in a continuous effort to keep scriptures “up-to-date”. This effort had to be connected to a flow of communication from the center to regional areas, and this is actually what apparently happened, as Fang Guangchang has showed also thanks to the help of the Dunhuang documents. All these activities, as everything else, enjoyed the active support of local donors, who were in fact the driving financial factor that made possible keeping, restoring and transmitting the textual heritage of Buddhism.

