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The Stone Scriptures of Fang-shan

LI JUNG-HSI

THE COLLECTION OF stone scriptures at Fang-shan comprises a tremendous treasure of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts. Engraved on 15,143 slabs of stone, they are stored in caves on Shih-ching hill, Fang-shan county, seventy-five kilometers southwest of Peking. In all there are 1,031 texts amounting to 3,474 fascicles. They were engraved over a period of one thousand years, beginning from the Ta-yeh period (605–618) of the Sui dynasty up to the T'ien-ch'i period (1621–1627) of the Ming dynasty.

The tradition of inscribing Buddhist texts on rock was initiated in China as early as the Northern Ch'i dynasty (550–577), when engravings of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, the *Vajracchedikā-sūtra*, and other texts were made in Shansi, Shantung, and Hopei provinces for the purpose of preserving the sacred books for future generations. T'ang Yung 唐鑑, a well-known minister at the court of Northern Ch'i, had the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* produced on rocks at Shih-ku mountain, Wu-an county, Hopei province. As to this manner of preserving Buddhist texts, he noted that "silken writing mate-

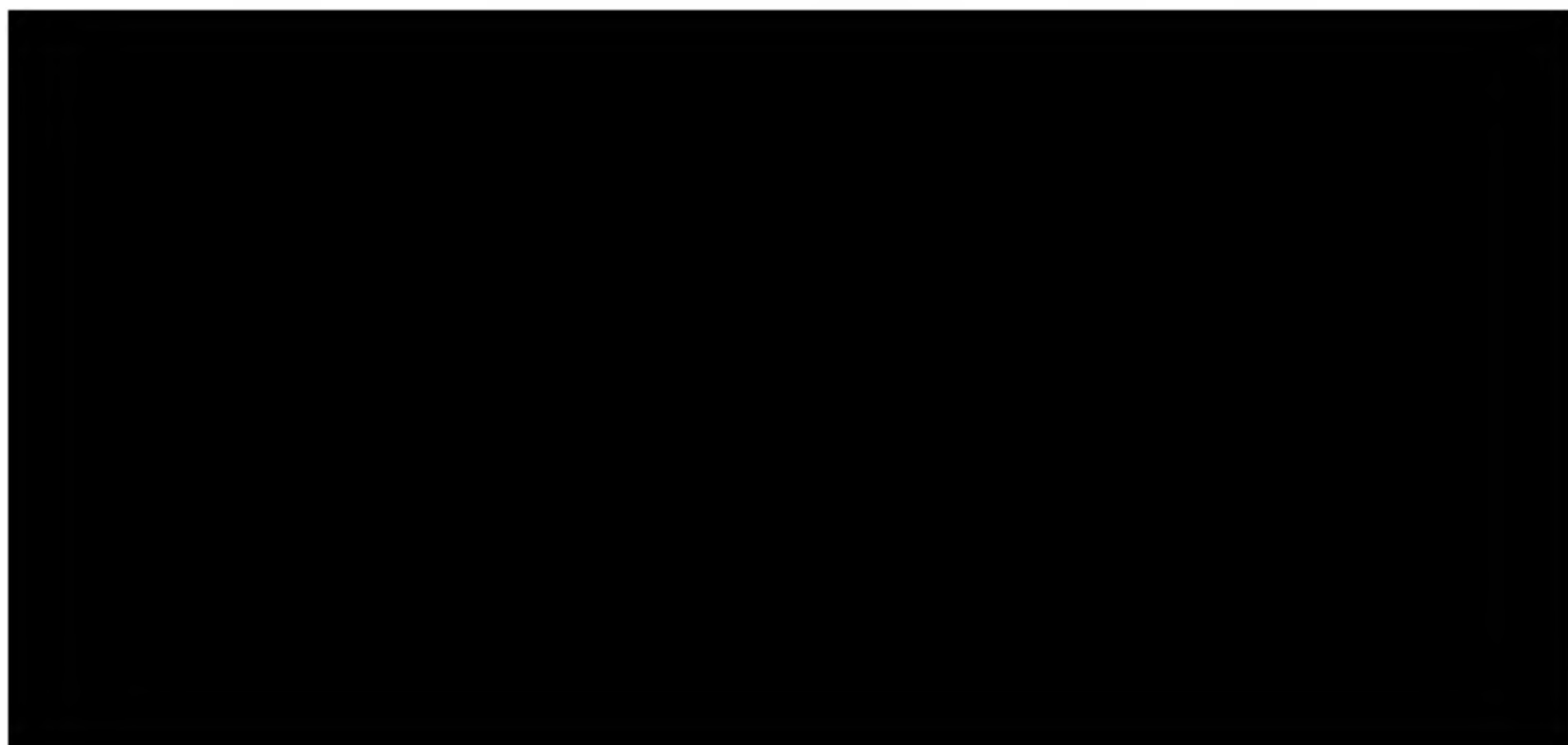
* We are honored to have the opportunity of presenting this paper by Li Jung-hsi, Research Fellow of the Buddhist Association of China, Peking. Professor Li's recounting of the history of the Fang-shan stone scriptures and description of the recent work achieved by Chinese study groups summarizes in part the recent volume compiled by the Buddhist Association, *Fang-shan Yun-chu-szu Shih-ching* 房山雲居寺石經 ("The Stone Scriptures of Yun-chu Monastery, Fang-shan," Wen-wu; Peking, 1978), and brings up-to-date an earlier report published by the Academy of Oriental Culture, Tokyo ("Studies on the Yun-chu-szu, Fang-shan," *Tohō Gakuhō*, March, 1935).—Eds.

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rial was liable to rot, bamboo plates were not durable, metal sheets difficult to get, while parchment or paper could easily be destroyed." Thus he utilized stone to record Buddhist scriptures for the benefit of posterity.

For political and economic reasons, Buddhism as a religion was suppressed and its followers persecuted on several occasions in the history of China. Even before the time when the first stone scriptures of Fang-shan began to be engraved during the Sui dynasty, two such persecutions had already taken place. One was carried out in 446 by Emperor Tai-wu of the Northern Wei dynasty, and another in 574 by Emperor Wu of the Northern Chou dynasty. Under these persecutions Buddhism suffered heavily. Vast amounts of Buddhist texts were burned to ashes and monasteries were demolished. Such disastrous occurrences undoubtedly left a very deep impression upon Buddhists, so much so that when the unhappy incidents were over they set about contemplating the problem of how to preserve their scriptures should further persecutions occur. It is natural that stone, the most durable material for preserving Buddhist texts against possible damage or destruction in times of religious persecution, should have been chosen.

The monk Ching-wan 靜琬, who initiated the task of engraving Buddhist texts in Fang-shan county during the Ta-yeh period of the Sui dynasty, was a disciple of Hui-ssu (515-577), the second patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school of Buddhism in China. Under the inspiration of his teacher, Ching-wan planned to have twelve scriptures inscribed on slabs of stone. He had a cave excavated (Cave 5 in the present arrangement) on Shih-ching hill the walls of which were inlaid with 146 slabs inscribed with the *Saddharmapundarika-sūtra* as well as other texts. The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* in forty fascicles was another one of the twelve scriptures engraved. It was completed in the fifth year of Chen-kuan (631) of the T'ang dynasty on 120 pieces of stone and stored in Cave 7. When the entrance was sealed, there was a marker placed above it bearing the inscription: "In this cave there is stored one set of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* and nothing else. It is engraved as a pattern edition for use in the remote future at a time when Buddhism is no more." The *Avatamsaka-sūtra* in sixty fascicles was stored in Cave 8. Its fragmentary inscription, dated the eighth year of Chen-kuan (634), bears the words: "This scripture has been engraved to serve as an original copy in some future time when Buddhism may have undergone persecution. Do not open this cave as long as this scripture is ob-



A rubbing of the inscription accompanying the Avataṃsaka-sūtra, dated 634.

tainable in the world" (see photograph). Among other texts which Ching-wan had engraved were the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, the *Śrīmālāsīṃhanāda-sūtra*, the *Vajracchedikā-sūtra*, the *Amitāratha-sūtra*, the *Sūtra of the Buddha's Last Instruction*, and the *Sūtra of Meditating on Maitreya Bodhisattva Ascending to Tuṣita Heaven*.

When Ching-wan first arrived in Fang-shan county to begin the work of engraving the stone scriptures, there was no monastery at Shih-ching hill. It was he who founded, with the help of the local people, the Yun-chu (Abode in the Clouds) monastery at the foot of the hill. This monastery became the center for inscribing the Buddhist texts to be stored on Shih-ching hill. In its heyday, there were more than 400 monks residing there at one time.

When Emperor Yang (r. 605–618) of the Sui dynasty visited Cho prefecture, Hsiao Yu, an imperial attendant and younger brother of the empress, informed his sister about this unusual Buddhist activity which was taking place in Fang-shan county. When she heard of it, the empress, a devout Buddhist, had a 1,000 rolls of silk and other valuable goods donated to the monastery to help promote the enterprise. Following her example, both government officials and the common people contributed money to Ching-wan to help him carry out his plan. With this imperial patronage, Ching-wan directed the carving of scriptures which filled seven caves.

After Ching-wan's death in the thirteenth year of Chen-kuan (639) of the T'ang dynasty, his disciple Hsuan-tao 玄導 succeeded him. Scriptures

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engraved under his direction include the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Kumārajīva's translation in thirty fascicles), the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, the *Viśeṣacintā-brahma-paripṛcchā-sūtra*, and the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra*. There are also other stones bearing remarks made by Hsuan-tao.

Hsuan-tao's successor was Seng-yi 僧伊, of whose life nothing is known. We do know that during his lifetime, which roughly corresponds to the reign of Empress Wu-tse-t'ien (684-704), only a number of shorter texts were engraved.

In the ninth year of K'ai-yuan (721), the abbot of Yun-chu monastery was Hui-hsien 惠暹, under whose direction the inscription of the *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna-sūtra* in seventy fascicles was completed in the seventeenth year of K'ai-yuan (729). In the following year (730), Hsuan-fa 玄法 succeeded Hui-hsien as abbot of the monastery. In that same year, with imperial consent, the Senior Princess Chin-hsien, eighth younger sister to the reigning emperor Hsuan-tsung, had more than 4,000 fascicles of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts sent to Hsuan-fa as pattern copies for making inscriptions. The person appointed to accompany the texts to Yun-chu monastery was the well-known monk Chih-sheng, who that year had just completed his *K'ai-yuan Catalogue of Buddhist Books*. In addition to the pattern texts, the Senior Princess also assigned estates, orchards, and forests as donations to the monastery to defray the expense of engraving scriptures. With this financial aid from the imperial house, Hsuan-fa started the engraving of the most voluminous text, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, translated by Hsuan-tsang in 600 fascicles. Carved on 1,512 pieces of stone, the work was completed during the reign of Emperor Sheng-tsung (983-1031) of the Liao dynasty.

Besides the official support extended to monks for engraving scriptures, individual Buddhists also made contributions to the enterprise as a means of acquiring merits. These religious-minded people would donate a sum of money to the monastery to pay for the expense of engraving a single slab, a short text, or one fascicle of a longer text, as their means allowed. For example, the notation on slab 21 of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, fascicle nine, reads: "Offered by Li Hsien-yao, a native of Fan-yang county, on the eighth day of the second month in the first year of T'ien-pao (742), on behalf of his deceased parents." It is apparent that their intention in making donations to the cause of engraving scriptures as a means of acquiring merits did not coincide with the motive of the monks, who desired to preserve Buddhist texts for use in a time when these manuscripts would

no longer be available to Buddhist followers. Their contributions, nonetheless, aided substantially in the realization of this Buddhist cultural enterprise.

About six kilometers south of Yun-chu monastery, there is a rich quarry which for more than a thousand years has produced and is still producing a fine quality, grey-coloured marble suitable for making inscriptions. It was from here that slabs for the stone scriptures were obtained. A number of men worked the quarry at regular intervals to meet the needs of Buddhist devotees. Nearby the quarry was a temple called Mo-pei-ssu (Slab Polishing Temple), in which the uncut marble from the pit was fashioned and polished into slabs ready for engraving. Finally, at Yun-chu monastery, a group of calligraphers and engravers laboured under the guidance of monks. Even today the stones are mute but eloquent testimony to the consummate artistic skill of the master calligraphers and expert engravers found among them. To the slabs, once they had been carved, the names of the donors were inscribed, the devotee merely paying for however many inscriptions desired, without regard to its contents.

Once the slabs had been inscribed with scriptures, they were temporarily stored in Yun-chu monastery. On the Buddha's birthday, the eighth day of the fourth month, Buddhist devotees flocked to the monastery in a festive manner to dispatch the slabs accumulated over the year to the caves on Shih-ching hill for permanent storage. On such occasions, with music reverberating and streamers fluttering in the air, the monks would perform ceremonies while devotees volunteered to remove the heavy stones to the hilltop caves by hauling and dragging them in a procession, an act by which the participants acquired merits for themselves and their families. Another part of the engraving activities, this annual event invested Shih-ching hill with a colourful religious atmosphere once a year.

Owing to political instability during the Five Dynasties period (907-960), the engraving of stone scriptures in Fang-shan county practically came to a standstill. When the Liao dynasty extended its power to this part of the country, the activity of carving stone scriptures was revived with renewed vigour. During the Ying-li period (951-960) of Emperor Mu-tsung, the monk Chien-feng 兼風, then abbot of Yun-chu monastery, organized the Thousand People Society to raise funds for the upkeep of the caves and the maintenance of the monastery. Members of the society, both poor and rich people, paid regular fees for this religious purpose.

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At that time there were slabs of scripture inscribed with over 4,200,000 words preserved in the nine caves on the hill. During this period, however, no noteworthy new inscriptions were added to the store.

In the seventh year of the T'ai-ping period (1021-1031), the regional magistrate Han Shao-fang 韓紹芳 had the caves opened and checked all the inscriptions stored within. Of the fascicles carved on a total of 2,130 stones, he found among them the *Saddharmasmṛty-upasthāna-sūtra* in seventy fascicles, the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* in eighty fascicles, and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in 520 fascicles (incomplete). A report of his investigation was made to Emperor Sheng-tsung (r. 983-1031) who, upon hearing of this Buddhist cultural activity, willingly resolved to lend his assistance. As a result, the remaining eighty fascicles of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* were engraved to complete the text in 600 fascicles. In the seventh year of Chung-hsi (1038), the reigning emperor Hsin-tsung had a dispensation set aside from the imperial treasury, the accrued interest from which was used to defray the cost of engraving more stone scriptures. The next emperor, Tao-tsung, also donated money with which 180 stones were engraved with forty-seven bundles of scripture.

At the time of Emperor Tao-tsung, the monk Tung-li 通利 endeavoured to produce more stone scriptures at Yun-chu monastery. He had a unique way of raising funds for the purpose. On New Year's day of the ninth year of Ta-an (1093), he conducted an ordination ceremony in the monastery, the individual donations from which amounted to as much as 10,000 strings of cash. Tung-li used this sum to make 4,080 pieces of inscription, consisting chiefly of vinaya texts and Mahayana śāstras, among which were the *Bodhisattvacarya-nirdeśa* in nine fascicles, the *Bodhisattva-prātimokṣa* in one fascicle, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* in 100 fascicles, and the *Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra* in 100 fascicles. By the following year, his funds were exhausted, and the project could not be carried any further. All nine caves on Shih-ching hill were full by this time, and it was not until after Tung-li's death that his disciples had a subterranean chamber constructed in the southwest corner of the monastery to store the 4,080 pieces of stone carved under his management and the 180 slabs made by order of Emperor Tao-tsung.

Tung-li was by no means the last person to add to the storage of stone scriptures on Shih-ching hill. After his death, his disciple Shan-fu 善銳 had thirteen bundles of texts comprising more than 100 fascicles carved, which included the *Mahāvaiṣṭya-dhāraṇī-sūtra* and the *Āṅgulimālīka-sūtra*.

The prominent feature of the scriptures engraved during the ensuing Chin dynasty (1115-1234) is that they were mostly Tantric texts and sūtras of the Āgama class. This was the period when Tantric Buddhism became popular in China and many new Tantric texts were translated into Chinese by such master translators as T'ien-hsi-tsai, Dharmabhadra, and Dānapāla. By this time most of the main Mahayana texts had already been engraved. The efforts of the Buddhists were thus directed toward the carving of the Āgama sūtras, which were among the scriptures needed to make the collection complete. Beginning from the tenth year of T'ien-hui (1132) and continuing up to the twenty-second year of Ta-ting (1182), more than fifty-nine bundles of scriptures were engraved. These slabs, with the exception of those bearing the *Mahātantrarāja-sūtra* kept in Cave 3, were stored in an extension of the subterranean chamber, the entire cellar now measuring nineteen meters long, ten meters wide, and five meters high.

By the end of the Chin dynasty the country had again fallen into disorder. This had an adverse effect upon the engraving of new stones. During the ensuing Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) the work was completely suspended and Shih-ching hill was in a state of total desolation.

When Emperor T'ai-tsu, the founder of the Ming dynasty, ascended the throne in 1368, the carving of stone scriptures on Shih-ching hill once again enjoyed the patronage of the imperial house. In the twenty-first year of Hung-wu (1388), the eminent monk Tao-yen 道衍 (also known as Yao Kuang-hsiao) was appointed by the emperor to make an inspection tour of Shih-ching hill. As a result, the Ming court appropriated a sum of money in the twenty-sixth year of Hung-wu (1393) for the renovation of Yun-chu monastery and for the maintenance of the caves. There is a historical record stating that Emperor Ch'eng-tsu issued the following decree in the eighteenth year of Yung-lo (1420): "A complete set of the Tripitaka should be engraved in stone and stored in a large grotto, in order that, when even the wooden printing blocks are destroyed, these stone scriptures should remain in the world." However, no Ming inscriptions on stone of the Chinese Tripitaka have yet been uncovered. While not inattentive to the stone scriptures stored on Shih-ching hill, the Ming emperors do not seem to have added any new inscriptions to the store. In the third year of Hsuan-te (1428), however, some Taoists with the same intention as the Buddhists of ensuring the transmission of their doctrine to posterity, carved and stored a number of Taoist texts in Cave 7.

The last contribution to the Fang-shan stone scripture store was made

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during the Wan-li and T'ien-chi periods (1573-1627) at the end of the Ming dynasty. A group of lay Buddhists in Peking commissioned a monk named Chen-cheng 眞程 to engrave some Buddhist texts on small slabs of stone. These were sent from the capital to Fang-shan county to be stored on Shih-ching hill. Among the texts inscribed were the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* in forty fascicles, the *Brahma-jāla-sūtra* (a Mahayana vinaya text), and the *Sukhāvatiyūha*. With all caves on Shih-ching hill already full, a new one, Cave 6, smaller in size than the others, was excavated to receive the newly-prepared slabs. The *Avatamsaka-sūtra* in forty fascicles, engraved by the monk Chen-cheng in the third year of T'ien-chi (1623), put a termination to the task of scripture carving which had been started by the Sui dynasty monk Ching-wan at the beginning of the seventh century, fully one thousand years before. It was thanks to the sustained efforts of Chinese Buddhists during this period of one thousand years that this wonderful Dharma treasure was produced. Comprised of 14,641 pieces in all, the inscriptions are stored in different caves on Shih-ching hill:

Cave 1	1,131 pieces
Cave 2	1,091 pcs
Cave 3	333 pcs
Cave 4	164 pcs
Cave 5	146 pcs
Cave 6	200 pcs
Cave 7	285 pcs
Cave 8	819 pcs
Cave 9	390 pcs
Subterranean chamber	10,082 pcs

In addition to the above slabs, there are also 420 fragments of engraved slabs and eighty-two inscriptions of various content carved in the eighteenth century during the Ch'ing dynasty concerning the history of the stone scriptures and Yun-chu monastery. Found scattered outside the storage area, most of these stones are now kept on the monastery premises.

In the spring of 1956, the Buddhist Association of China initiated the unprecedented task of taking rubbings from all the stone scriptures stored on Shih-ching hill. This work took three years to complete. The caves and subterranean chamber were opened and the slabs removed to a temporary workshop where the rubbings were made. Except for those from the subterranean chamber, the slabs were returned to their respective caves

and sealed up as before. Those from the subterranean chamber were not returned to their underground vault, but were installed in a storehouse specially designed for the purpose. A total of nearly 30,000 rubbings were made from the 15,143 engraved slabs, most of which were carved on two sides, and, in a few cases, on four sides.

These 30,000 pieces of rubbings are a rich source of research material for studies on such varied topics as the history of Buddhism in China, the social conditions of the times when the slabs were carved, and the arts of engraving and calligraphy. This set of the Tripitaka inscribed in stone is most important in that it served as a standard edition for the later collations of Chinese Buddhist texts copied or printed at different times. Whereas error was liable to creep into handwritten manuscripts in the course of transcription or into printed texts when preparing the wood blocks, texts inscribed on stone slabs were written and carved with meticulous care, for words once engraved were not easily altered.

Still more interesting is the fact that a number of texts not included in any existing edition of the Chinese Tripitaka, whose titles are recorded in catalogues but which are regarded as lost works, have been found among the stone scriptures of Fang-shan. For instance, five of the ten texts translated by Maitreya-bhadra, who came to China during the Liao dynasty, have been found well-preserved in the caves of Shih-ching hill. The whereabouts of these texts, specifically, the *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya*, the *Mahākaruṇā-hṛdaya-dhāraṇī*, the *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhāraṇī*, the *Mahāpratyaṅgirā-dhāraṇī*, and the *Mahāpratisarāvidyā-dhāraṇī* were hitherto unknown (cf., Mochizuki Shinkō, *Bukkyō daijiten*, vol. II, pp. 1766-7).

The last cave mentioned above, Cave 6, offers an interesting point for further investigation. In an inscription carved in 965 describing the formation of the Thousand People Society, there is mention made of nine caves on Shih-ching hill with stone scriptures bearing 4,200,000 words of text. With the additional new cave excavated at the end of the Ming dynasty, there should be ten caves in all. But actually there are only nine caves of which the locations are known. Moreover, several biographies mention a set of stones carved with the *Buddhacarita* in sixty fascicles, said to be stored in the "Peacock Cave." However, among all the rubbings made from engraved slabs both inside and outside the existing caves, only one slab, which was found broken in three pieces, has been discovered bearing an inscription from the *Buddhacarita* (fascicle thirty-one). This broken slab testifies to the existence of a complete set of the *Buddhacarita*

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carved on slabs and stored at Shih-ching hill. But where are the other inscribed stones, and where is the mysterious Peacock Cave? The conjecture is that the engravings in question must have been made at a time when Buddhism was in decline in China, and thus they were buried somewhere on the hill in secrecy. Efforts should be made to discover the cave and recover this missing scripture.