

## The Stele of 'Images and Texts of Buddhism and Daoism,' dated 968, in the Guozijian Academy, Chang'an

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This paper discusses the "Stele of Buddhist and Daoist Images and Texts." Now in the Beilin Museum in Xi'an, it is not on display and has not been a focus of study. Taking this stele as evidence, I examine the relationship of Buddhist and Daoist images and the changes in Daoist and Buddhist imagery between Tang and Song and search for new elements and tendencies in the religious art of the tenth century.

### The Stone Stele and its Images

The Guozijian in Chang'an was the highest institution of learning throughout the Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties period. In the Song, its system was extended at the secondary capitals (Guozijian were established at the Western, Southern and Northern capitals under the administration of the court). In the beginning of the Northern Song a very distinctive stone stele appeared at the Guozijian in Chang'an: the "Stele of Buddhist and Daoist Images and Texts." The two sides of the stele are carved with five texts and three illustrations. The front was made in 968, with the Buddhist scripture the *Goddess Marici Sutra Spoken by the Buddha* at the top (with an illustration) and the Daoist *Scripture of Secret Spells of the Yellow Emperor* (with an illustration). The back is dated 980 and has the Daoist *Scripture of the Eternal Purity of Supreme Lord Laozi* (with illustration), the *Supreme Mysterious Scripture for Dispensing Calamity and Protecting Life*, and *The Supreme Scripture Spoken by the Heavenly Lord on Being Born in Heaven and Achieving the Dao*. There are separate inscriptions of the names of the donor, calligrapher, carver, and the artists.

The three engraved illustrations display a new slender figural style, each having its own special features:

#### 1. The *Eternal Purity Scripture* illustration (artist, Bai Tingcan)

The appearance of the Supreme Laozi is like a bodhisattva, and was mistaken for a bodhisattva by Ming and Qing observers.

- The Laozi has an *urna* on the forehead. (This is the second time in history, the first being in the Northern Wei. Daoist images of the Sui, Tang and after Song do not have the *urna*). The beard has been reduced.
- The aureole has a border of flames (this derives from Five Dynasties bodhisattva images) The aureoles of the Sui and Tang are circular or in the form of a lotus.
- The figure wears a long scarf (the form is like a bodhisattvas scarf), which fall off the shoulders and over the arms. It is a mode that was popular among women of the Five Dynasties and Song (The scarves of Tang ladies is worn over the shoulders). By the Southern Song this is standard for images of the Three Purities of Daoism, as seen at Shuchengyan, Dazu.
- The two Zhenren sages, one with thin face and one round, are copied from Buddhist images with two disciples, which is not seen in Tang Daoist images.
- The flying clouds have wings added. These are inventions that have the shape of *apsarases*.

Other details: The throne has a flower offering in front (as in mural paintings in the Yuan Yonglegong)

Compared to a Maitreya bodhisattva made by Gao Wenjin in 984 (in a Japanese collection), there are similarities in design and detail—the right hand holding a fan, the *urna*, and the pose.

#### 2. *Goddess Marici Sutra* illustration (artist, Li Fenggui)

The goddess Marici is similar to those with the same label at Dunhuang, but the people are more slender. The style of crown is changed: from a female headdress to the high crown of the Heavenly King Vaisravana, so that the sex is less clear and beauty is transforming into power, a manifestation of the popular concern with dispelling calamity of the time. In the late Northern Song and Southern Song a completely different type of Marici with multiple heads and arms appears (as at Beishan, Dazu). Goddesses are transformed into stern military figures, taken from newly translated sutras. Two translations for comparison are the T

### 3. The Secret Spells Scripture illustration (artist, Di Shousu)

This is of a narrative genre. In the Ming it was said to be “Huangdi inquiring after the Dao;” in the Qing it was called “Li Quan meeting the Goddess of Lishan.” The evidence that this is the Goddess of Lishan: there are flames rising from the branches of the tree, and the old person holding the staff has no beard.

The three artists: Bai Tingcan has no historical record; Li Fenggui and Di Shousu appear in the *Tuhui baojian*, *Buyi* section.

The donors. There are more than ten names of Buddhists and Daoist including a Daoist priest.

#### **The Nature and Purpose of the Stele**

The scriptures selected are brief and are not major texts.

The donors are ordinary people and officials of low position.

The Buddhist and Daoist stele from the Guozijian has the appearance of a work of the amalgamation of the Sanjiao (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism), but is not a synthesis of the major currents are not core ideas but a superficial mixture of elements beneficial for a popular audience.

The purpose of making the stele is 1) to loosely combine elements of popular belief for averting calamity and praying for good fortune. 2) The use the Guozijian to promote Buddhism and Daoism. 3) to seek out and expand the commonalities among the Sanjiao.

#### **Connections and comparisons between the earlier and the later periods.**

Daoism in the Tang Dynasty gradually established its iconography, which became self-contained (and therefore distanced from Buddhist art) in the late Northern Song and early Southern Song period. During the period between the Five Dynasties and the early Song, however, the iconography was ambiguous. Related to the vague features of the earlier Heavenly Lord image in Cave No. 23 of the Yuanjue Grottoes in Anyue, Sichuan---the only known combined cave of Buddhism and Daoism dating to the Five Dynasties---as well as the Heavenly Lord image at Mt. Wudang dating to the early Northern Song this should be an intentional creation aiming at a coherence with Buddhist imagery and a synthesis of the Three Teachings as represented by Chen Tuan. The Buddhist and Daoist imageries departed from each other in the late Northern Song and early Southern Song. According to the newly translated scriptures, the new imagery of Marici subsequently became popular, as is seen in the northern grottoes at Dazu. During this period, Daoist iconography also became pronounced. The images of the Three Pure Ones (*sanqing*) completely distinguished themselves from Buddhist images.

Connections: Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song opposed to the mixing of Buddhist and Daoist images.

Art from the Five Dynasties and early Song periods was not an “interpolation” between the Tang and the Song. Rather, it contained elements different from the cultural mainstream of the Tang and Song. Whether an image is Heavenly Lord or Buddha, Laozi or Bodhisatva may be a problem in reading pictures, or sometimes it may not. The ambiguity could be a purposeful creation of the

artists who intended to express a new style or concept. When interpreting Chinese religious art via iconography, we should pay attention to this special feature.