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**The Origins and Role of
the Great Fengxian Monastery 大奉先寺 at Longmen ***

The great statue of Rocana and the other sculptures of the Fengxian-si Cave 奉先寺洞 are certainly the most impressive achievements among the many marvels in the Longmen complex.¹ It is no wonder then that the open-air cave and its outstanding statues have always been the object of much attention by scholars. The same cannot be said, however, for the monastery (to which the cave belonged) which has never been studied with due consideration. Until very recently it was even believed that the so-called Fengxian Monastery 奉先寺 was at the exact site of the cave. Although it is unclear whether the cave ever constituted a monastery in itself, it is certain that the original monastery of the 7th century was situated somewhere south of the cave, on the western side of the beautiful valley traversed by the River Yi 伊水. As for its dimensions, the monastery must have been, for reasons I will try to elucidate below, very large indeed.

The relevance of this monastic institution in later times (attested to from 736 to the second half of the 13th century) has recently begun to attract some attention because its name is associated with outstanding religious and literary figures like the Northern Chan master Yifu 義福 (658-736), the two Tantric Indian masters Vajrabodhi (Jingangzhi 金剛智, 669-741) and Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705-774), the two poets Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846),

*This paper was presented at the "International Symposium for the 1500th Anniversary of the Longmen Grottoes" which took place in Luoyang from 6 to 12 September, 1993. Shortly thereafter the symposium I was asked to send in by the end of January 1994, the final text for publication in a volume collecting the papers presented at the symposium. Although I did as requested, problems arose and finally only the papers in Chinese were published in 1996. I did not know what had become of my paper in English. In March 1997 I learned by chance that it would appear very soon in the periodical *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物 (*Cultural Relics from Central Plains*). All my efforts to see the Chinese translation in order to check it before publication were in vain. The English text published here is a slightly modified version of the text I had sent to Luoyang by the end of January 1994.

I would like to express my gratitude to Catherine Ludwik for having corrected the English.

¹ In adopting the Sankrit Rocana for the Chinese transcription Lushena 盧舍那 referring to the central great statue, I follow L. Chandra's thesis in his unpublished paper "Buddhist Colossi and the Avataṃsaka sūtras" which he kindly send me in early 1997: "Rocana is synonymous with Abhyuccadeva: he is the highest Tathāgata. The separate identity of Rocana and Vairocana has been missed by modern scholarship" (p. 10 of the manuscript).

etc. The vestiges of the monastery seem to have been identified, and in 1988 Wen Yucheng 溫玉成 devoted a good part of his study on Fengxian-si to its remains.² If these remains really are those of the Fengxian-si, they must belong to the location it had from 723 onward. We have good reason to believe, in fact, that by 723 the monastery had already moved from its original location, so this later evidence attested to by the remains probably concerns the new location. I will deal with this question on another occasion, and would like, instead, to restrict the attention here to the period from when its foundation was decided in 679 to the time when the monastery was relocated in 723. I think that it was during this period of less than a half a century that the monastery must have enjoyed its greatest glory and reached its climax, and not during the Kaiyuan era (713-741) as some scholars believe.³

Unfortunately, as is sometimes the case for other important monuments, the early history and the motive behind the construction of the sculptural ensemble in the present cave and of the Great Fengxian Monastery are unclear. This apparent lack of information contrasts sharply with the otherwise well-documented history of other minor monuments in the Longmen complex. In fact, almost all we know about the origins of the statues and of the monastery is based on the brief inscription (presumably put in stone in 723) which until recently could be seen on the site, on the northern side of the pedestal of the great Rocana statue.⁴ The inscription, which bears the title *He Luo Shangdu Longmen-shan zhi yang Da Lushena xiang kan ji* 河洛上都龍門山之陽大盧舍那像龕記 (Record of the Niche of the Great Rocana Statue in the South of Mount Longmen in the Sovereign's Capital [between] the He and the Luo [Rivers]), is rather scanty in details, and does not provide much precious information for the historian. Since, however, this inscription is the only account of the origins and early history of the monastic complex, we must particularly treasure it, taking into account the social and political context of the time as well as some other evidence which hitherto has been passed over unnoticed by Longmen specialists.

The issues regarding the role of the Great Fengxian Monastery are of great relevance not only for the history of art, but also for the political and ideological background during a crucial period of East Asian history. To know, then, the origins of the institution and its vicissitudes during the first decades of its life

² Wen Yucheng 溫玉成, "Tōdai Ryūmon jūji no kōsatsu" 唐代龍門十寺の考察 ("Consideration on the ten temples of Tang Longmen"), 1988, pp. 229-233. See pp. 231-233 for the remains of the Fengxian-si. Fig. 7 on p. 231 is an aerial view of the area where the monastery supposedly stood.

³ See, for example, Matsumoto Bunzaburō 松本文三郎, "Ryūmon Hōsenji no zōzō ni tsuite" 龍門奉先寺の造像に就いて (On the Statues of the Fengxian Monastery at Longmen), 1929, p. 168.

⁴ The inscription still seems to be in its place, but can no longer be seen because of a protective layer of cement covering it. See my "Marginalia on the First International Symposium on Longmen Studies," 1994, pp. 75-76. Okada Ken 岡田健, however, writes that the inscription "was destroyed during the recent works of consolidation of the cave." See Okada, "Kyōken sekkutsu to shotō yōshiki" 鞏鼎石窟と初唐様式 ("The Gongxian Grottoes and Early Tang Dynasty Sculptural Style"), 1994, p. 90, note 24.

becomes essential not only to realize fully its historical relevance, but also to understand the interplay of artistic production at Longmen with religion and politics during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. After all, the Fengxian-si Cave is in many respects the most remarkable among the Longmen caves, and we must pay it and the monastery to which it belonged all the attention they deserve. I must say, however, that no deep exploration is possible here and therefore I limit myself to some provisional considerations which will hopefully be of some help to those engaging in further inquiries.

Since the stone inscription of 723 is an obligatory point of departure for anyone who wishes to deal with the origins of the statues and of the monastery, let me begin by summarizing its essential points.⁵ The construction of the nine statues (the Rocana Buddha, two bodhisattvas, the two disciples Kāśyapa and Ānanda, two divine kings [*shenwang* 神王], two *vajra*-guardians) was initiated by an imperial order of May 3, 672 (Xianheng 3.4.1) and was completed less than three years and nine months later, on January 20, 676 (Shangyuan 2.12.30). Then, more than three and half years later, on September 25, 679 (Tiaolu 1.8.15), the foundation of the monastery was decided by edict. Almost five months later, on February 20, 680 (Tiaolu 2.1.15), the panel with the name of the monastery in the calligraphy of Emperor Gaozong was offered. Then, forty-three years later, on January 16, 723 (Kaiyuan 10.12.5), an edict was issued ordering the fusion of Longhua-si 龍花寺 with Fengxian-si. The last date which appears in the inscription is seven days later, January 23, 723 (Kaiyuan 10.12.12), at which time an official letter was sent to the monastery.⁶

As can be seen, no events from the period between 680 to 723 are recorded in the inscription, not even the natural disaster which wiped out the monastery in 722. From the *Jiu Tang shu* (Old History of the Tang) we learn:

開元 [...] 十年二月四日，伊水泛漲，毀都城南龍門天竺、奉先寺。⁷

On Kaiyuan (...) tenth year, second month, fourth day (February 23, 722), the River Yi burst its banks and destroyed the Tianzhu and Fengxian monasteries in Longmen, south of the walls of the [Eastern] Metropolis.⁸

⁵ In due course I will give a fully annotated English version of it. To my knowledge, the only complete translation in a European language is in French and was done by the great sinologist Édouard Chavannes. It was published in as early as 1915 in *La Sculpture bouddhique* (pp. 454-456), included in his *Mission archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale*. Although this translation is generally up to Chavannes' high standards, it is debatable in some parts. For a Japanese version, see *Ryūmon zōzō daiki* 龍門造像題記 (Marked Records on Longmen Statues), Anon. 1974, pp. 112-113.

⁶ The text of the inscription is reproduced in many works. Let us refer here to Chavannes, 1915, Pl. DLXII, no. 1576 (which respects the peculiar order of writing from left to right, as well as the actual line breaks), and Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshio 長廣敏雄, *Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* 龍門石窟の研究 (*A Study of the Buddhist Cave-Temples at Lung-men, Ho-nan*), 1941, p. 324, no. 806.

⁷ *Jiu Tang shu* 37.1357.

⁸ Luoyang was called Dongdu 東都 (Eastern Metropolis) during the Sui and the Tang dynasties

Yet, both the decision concerning the monastery in early 723 as well as the carving of the inscription are, in my opinion, strictly related to this disaster. I will discuss this toward the end of this paper, but it is necessary to stress here that not only does the inscription remain completely silent about the reasons behind the construction of the monastery and its history in the period of more than four decades after its foundation, but it also ignores the very recent event which caused its destruction in 722. The inscription, in substance, leaves us with too many questions unanswered.

In addition to the fundamental question regarding the motive behind the building of the stone statues and of the monastery, many other significant questions arise: what kind of monastery was it, a state monastery or a private one? If it was a private monastery, did it belong either to the emperor, the empress, or to some other members of the aristocracy? If the original motive behind its foundation were clear, or if it were possible to identify definitively Gaozong as the individual who financed its construction and maintenance, as suggested by the inscription, then the above questions could also be answered. Now, although the discouraging laconic nature of the inscription inevitably leads to caution in interpreting of the historical data contained therein, some hypotheses may be advanced.

The names of monasteries, for instance, are often important in helping to understand their nature. We are fortunate in this case, as the inscription of 723 actually tells us that the monastery was called Da Fengxian-si 大奉先寺. This is of interest for two reasons. The first is that the name clearly shows that it belonged to the category of the "great monasteries" (*dasi* 大寺), that is, large and magnificent monastic complexes. The second reason is that the two characters *fengxian* 奉先 point to an institution founded in honour of some ancestor or, more precisely, of one or both parents of the person who founded the monastery. The expression *fengxian* is in fact taken from the *Shu jing* (Book of Documents) where we read: *fengxian sixiao* 奉先思孝, that is "When honouring your ancestors, think how you can prove your filial piety."⁹ Generally speaking, monasteries founded for the "posthumous well-being" (*zhuifu* 追福) of one or both of one's parents as a manifestation of filial piety can be considered as private institutions.¹⁰ The aristocracy of the Six Dynasties and of the Tang founded hundreds of such monasteries. Now, when we come to consider the "great monasteries," although their nature is not fundamentally different from the private monasteries founded by other members of the aristocracy, the fact of being founded by emperors (or heir princes) placed them in a special position for obvious reasons. In a sense, they should be perceived as state monasteries to the extent that the emperor himself was considered to personify the state. I would, however, reserve the

up to 621, and then again from January 22, 658 (Xianqing 2.12.13 [*dingmao*]) (*Zizhi tongjian* 200.6308) for most of the Tang. During the period 684-705 it was called Shendu 神都 (Divine Metropolis), while during 742-761 it was called Dongjing 東京 (Eastern Capital). See des Rotours, 2, p. 681, note.

⁹ Legge, 1865, p. 208.

¹⁰ On the "great monasteries" and the concept of "posthumous well-being," see Forte, "Daiji 大寺 (China)" (*Great Monasteries in China*), 1983, pp. 683-686.

designation of “state monastery” for those institutions like the Dayun monasteries 大雲寺 or the Kaiyuan monasteries 開元寺 (traditionally referred to as “official monasteries,” *guansi* 官寺), and define the “great monasteries” as originally “dynastic monasteries” or “imperial monasteries” belonging to the category “great” based on their dimensions and large scale constructions. It should be added, however, that such monasteries could maintain their status as “great monasteries” even when the dynasty to which the person who had founded them belonged was suppressed. So, for example, two famous “great monasteries” in Chang’an during the Tang dynasty, the Da Zhuangyan-si 大莊嚴寺 and the Da Zongchi-si 大總持寺, were in reality dynastic monasteries (both originally called Da Chandong-si 大禪定寺) of the Sui dynasty (589-618). They maintained their status as “great monasteries” during the Tang¹¹ and were presumably supported by the descendants of the Yang family of the abolished Sui dynasty. Another telling example is the Da Fuxian-si 大福先寺 in Luoyang, a dynastic monastery of the Zhou dynasty (690-705), which survived as a “great monastery” after the Tang restoration in 705.¹² In other words, the continued existence and unaltered dimensions of such monasteries despite the change of reigning dynasty was sufficient reason to classify them as “great monasteries.”

It is evident, then, that the Da Fengxian-si at Longmen was, as its name indicates, a “Great Monastery Honouring Ancestor(s).” In other words, at the time the name was applied, it was conceived as a dynastic monastery of great dimensions devoted to the parent(s) of the reigning emperor. Consequently, if it were possible to determine the date such a name was given, the emperor who established this “great monastery” could also be identified. We read in the inscription that the niche (*kan* 龕, the cave containing the sculptural ensemble) “was constructed” (*suojian* 所建) by Gaozong who also instituted the monastery by edict. Furthermore, the inscription gives the impression that the monastery was called Da Fengxian-si from the time of its foundation in 679. The fact that Gaozong himself did the calligraphy of the plate showing the name of the monastery suggests he actually founded the monastery. None of these points, however, definitively and unequivocally proves that the institution was called Da Fengxian-si since its foundation. In fact, none of the above points is completely free from possible objections. The expression *suojian* 所建 (“was constructed” [by Gaozong])—it could be objected—does not necessarily mean that Gaozong was personally and directly involved. In theory, anything that was done, especially if it was of a certain importance, had to be ordered by the emperor. Therefore, the fact that the relevant edict was issued by Gaozong does not imply that he must necessarily have been the patron. It could simply mean that the monastery and its statues were constructed with Gaozong’s authorization. We are told by the author of the 723 inscription that Gaozong conferred his own calligraphy for the name plate. This,

¹¹ Forte, 1983, p. 698a.

¹² Forte, “The Great Fuxian Monastery in Luoyang. A Forgotten Centre of East Asian Civilization” (unpublished paper).

as mentioned above, could indicate that Gaozong was the owner of the monastery, but as it remains unproved that such an act is always in direct relation with the ownership of a monastery, final judgement must be suspended. Moreover, even in the case that this should indicate that Gaozong was the owner, since we do not know if the original name was actually Da Fengxian-si, it is conceivable that the name calligraphed by Gaozong might have been a different one. In fact, not all the monasteries founded by an emperor were necessarily “great monasteries.” Moreover, considering that monastery names changed quite frequently, it is possible that its original name might have been different. Furthermore, the inscription specifies that Gaozong’s wife, the Empress Wu, contributed the sum of 20,000 strings of coins from her private funds. If Gaozong wished to build and dedicate a monastery to his parents as an expression of his filial piety, what need had he—it could be objected—to have recourse to the private funds of his wife? Was he so poor that he could not afford the necessary capital? Is it not unrealistic to think that he would have asked for the help of his wife in a gesture intended to show his filial piety? If so, should we then think that the cave and the monastery were dedicated to Empress Wu’s parent(s)?¹³

Above all, the fact that no early mention of the name Da Fengxian-si is attested to does not help in solving our perplexities. To complicate matters further, the anonymous author of the inscription specifies that the number of monks assigned to the monastery at the time of founding was fourteen, to which another sixteen, specially ordained, were added some months later, when the name plate was given to the monastery. A total population of thirty monks seems too few for a “great monastery.”¹⁴ In sum, besides the fact that it is far removed in time from the date of the monastery’s founding, the least that can be said regarding the 723 inscription, is that it is brief and condensed in character, and that its author tended to skip over details requiring further explanation. Unfortunately, our state of research on the above mentioned matters still leaves much to be desired for many questions are as yet unanswered, awaiting further research and evidence.

Such being the case, while adopting the most realistic and obvious view that Gaozong founded the monastery and named it Da Fengxian-si in 679-680, we should not altogether dismiss the possibility that such a name was given in a period following Gaozong’s death on December 27, 683 (Yongchun 2.12.4 [*dingsi*]).

¹³ Nothing leads us, among other things, to suppose that filial piety was behind the origins of the cave, except in relation to the usual practice in the case of other caves. If we were certain that Gaozong dedicated the cave to one or both of his parents, the private contribution by Empress Wu could be interpreted as the wish to help significantly in an enterprise that she would have considered both of familiar (after all, Gaozong was her husband) and dynastic interest (the great Rocana statue would protect both the family and the Tang dynasty).

¹⁴ We learn, for instance, that when the Da Xianfu-si 大猷福寺 was founded in 684 in Chang’an, two hundred monks were ordained to fill the new “great monastery” (Forte, 1983, p. 699b). But, here again, no conclusion can be drawn since we know of no study concerning the number of monks in “great monasteries.” Moreover, it is possible that the number specified referred to the monks especially ordained by imperial favour, and not to the total number of the monks assigned to the monastery.

Since, as we shall see, the earliest date in which the name Da Fengxian-si is attested to with certainty is 693, the period 684-693 must also be taken into consideration.¹⁵ Let us, then, before elaborating on the Gaozong hypothesis, briefly examine this period dividing it into two parts: (a) 684-690, from Gaozong's death to the foundation of the Zhou dynasty in 690; (b) 690-693, the first years of Zhou (690-705).

(a) 684-690 of the Tang

On the day Gaozong died, the reign name changed to Hongdao 弘道, "expanding the Way." Zhongzong, his son, became emperor seven days later, on January 3, 684 (Hongdao 1.12.11 [*jiazi*]), but he stepped down less than two months later, on February 27, 684 (Sisheng 1.2.6 [*xuwu*]), to be replaced by his brother Ruizong on the following day. Ruizong remained emperor until the proclamation of the Zhou dynasty in October 16, 690. During his reign, his mother Wu Zhao 武曌, the famous Empress Wu, was regent. If the Da Fengxian-si had received this name during the period of 684-690, then the conclusion could be drawn that either Zhongzong or Ruizong instituted it out of filial piety towards their father Gaozong (their mother Wu Zhao was still alive at that time).

Initiatives taken by Zhongzong and Ruizong during this period, in the domain of Buddhist institutions founded for filial piety, could be a fruitful field of study in this connection. For the time being no such study has been done and the fleeting remarks that may have been advanced are too provisional. So, for instance, in 1983 (p. 699a) I expressed the opinion that the Da Xianfu-si 大獻福寺 (mentioned in note 13 above) in Chang'an was founded by the Empress Wu for her husband Gaozong. I now tend to think, rather, that the founder may have been Zhongzong, who wished to express his filial piety towards his father Gaozong. It would not be surprising, in any case, should we discover some day that the Great Fengxian Monastery in Longmen had been given such a name in this period by either Zhongzong or Ruizong, for their father.

(b) 690-693 of the Zhou dynasty (690-705)

If we were certain that the name Da Fengxian-si had been applied after the founding of the Zhou dynasty in 690, then we could conclude that it was founded for the "posthumous well-being" of Empress Wu's "predecessor(s)."

¹⁵ Another inscription on the southern side of the great statue's pedestal may well be the the original text on which the record of 723 (not the official letter at the end) was based. Unfortunately this inscription is very fragmentary and the date of its composition (if it had one at all) is no longer readable. I will deal with this on another occasion. Let me only remark that even if we knew the date of composition, it would remain uncertain whether at this supposed earlier date the name of the monastery was Da Fengxian-si because only the characters *da* 大 and *si* 寺 can be read, while the two characters between them have disappeared. We would be certain, however, that it was a "great monastery."

We know that Wu Zhao's father, Wu Shihuo, died in 635 (he was born in 577). I have not found any instance of a monastery being dedicated to him by Wu Zhao. This is only natural, since when her father died she was about ten years old, still too young—and above all too powerless—to make any such decision. The same cannot be said, however, about the time when her mother, of the Yang clan 楊氏, died on October 3, 670. Wu Zhao had been empress since 655, very active in politics, and powerful. Little by little a network of Buddhist monasteries sprung up for the “posthumous well-being” of her mother. We do not know exactly how many of these monasteries there actually were, but the first was probably the Taiyuan-si 太原寺 in Chang'an, which was founded on October 31, 670, less than a month after the death of her mother. This monastery became very important for many reasons, among them the fact that the famous Avataṃsaka master Fazang 法藏 (643-712) lived there and wrote most of his works there. Later Avataṃsaka masters like Zongmi 宗密 (780-841) and Zixuan 子璿 (965 [or 946]-1038), who commented on Fazang's works, under the exegetical necessity of explaining the origin of the monastery where Fazang had lived, both expressed the opinion that it was one of the “five Taiyuan monasteries” (Wu Taiyuan-si 五太原寺). They did, however, contradict one another in regard to the origins and locations of these monasteries. The number five may be correct, but I think we need not believe the theories of these two authors, especially Zongmi.¹⁶ Be that as it may, let us limit ourselves here to such institutions originally called Taiyuan monasteries in Chang'an and Luoyang.

Originally built for the “posthumous well-being” of Lady Yang 楊氏, Wu Zhao's mother, they can be classified as “principality monasteries” (*guosi* 國寺), a category which potentially could become “dynastic” if the defunct aristocrat to whom they were dedicated became the ancestor of a ruling emperor. As in other instances, the monasteries founded by Empress Wu also changed their name according to the changes in the aristocratic posthumous titles of Wu Zhao's parents. The successive names were: Taiyuan-si 太原寺, Weiguo-si 魏國寺 and Da Zhou-si 大周寺. Now, we must bear in mind that Wu Zhao abolished the Tang dynasty in 690 and founded a new dynasty which she called Zhou 周, according to the aristocratic title her parents had at that time. With the new dynasty then, the “principality monasteries” she had founded became “dynastic monasteries,” a category that included, as noted above, monasteries which were dedicated to the parents of the emperor of the reigning dynasty. That is why the two monasteries founded by Wu Zhao in Chang'an and Luoyang are often called in the sources Da Zhou xisi 大周西寺 (Great Zhou Western Monastery) and Da Zhou dongsi 大周東寺 (Great Zhou Eastern Monastery), the first being situated in Chang'an, the Western Capital, the second in Luoyang, the Eastern Capital, where Da Zhou 大周 refers to the reigning dynasty. In the sources these monasteries are also called respectively Chongfu-si 崇福寺 and Da Fuxian-si 大福先寺. These two names

¹⁶ On this question, see my “Chongfu-si 崇福寺 in Chang'an. A Neglected Buddhist Monastery and Nestorianism,” 1996, pp. 455ff.

clearly indicate their character as monasteries instituted for the “well-being” (*fú* 福) of some deceased person. We know that this person was, at the time of their foundation, Wu Zhao’s mother, but presumably they were dedicated to both of her parents once the monasteries became “dynastic” in the new Zhou dynasty. In any case, what is important here is that they did become dynastic ancestral monasteries of the Zhou.¹⁷ As such they are to be clearly distinguished from the state Dayun monasteries 大雲寺, whose function was the protect the state and whose creation in every prefecture was rendered possible thanks to a special edict of December 690.

Now, coming back to our monastery in Longmen founded in 679, in principle we cannot exclude from consideration the possibility that Wu Zhao wished to devote it to the “posthumous well-being” of her mother (or her father). The date given for the edict ordering the sculpture of the statues, May 3, 672, that is, nineteen months after the death of her mother, one and half years after the foundation of the Taiyuan Monastery in Chang’an, allows us to advance such a suggestion. The peculiar circumstance of Wu Zhao contributing 20,000 strings of coins from her funds, for the realization of the sculptural complex would not be unusual if it were intended for the “posthumous well-being” of her mother. If the hypothesis that it was founded for Wu Zhao’s mother were true, then its initial name would necessarily have been Taiyuan-si (as in the case of the two monasteries in Chang’an and Luoyang) and it would have undergone the same name changes.¹⁸ Then, the name Da Fengxian-si would have been given after the Zhou dynasty’s foundation in 690 when it became a “dynastic monastery.” The case would be analogous to that of the Taiyuan monastery in Luoyang which was called Da Fuxian-si after 690 or 691.

This was my opinion in 1976. I was strongly influenced in putting forward such a hypothesis by the fact that the Elder of the Great Fengxian Monastery was, in 693, one of the top leaders of the Buddhist church in China, and in 690 he had been very instrumental in the establishment of the Zhou dynasty (690-705).¹⁹ I was also convinced at that time that since the qualification of “great monastery” applied exclusively to monasteries of the reigning dynasty, it was logical that a monastery qualified as “great monastery” in 693 (as in the case of the Da Fengxian-si) could have been only a dynastic monastery of the reigning Zhou dynasty (690-705). Although I realized later that “great monasteries” of past dynasties could very well survive into the next dynasty,²⁰ when sending in my summary in January 1993 for

¹⁷ For an outline of both monasteries, see Forte, 1983, pp. 693a-695b. The Chongfu-si is dealt with in Forte, 1996. It does not seem that this monastery was enlarged so as to be included in the category of the “great monasteries” (Forte, 1996, p. 460, note 280).

¹⁸ Weiguo-si after 687 and Da Zhou-si after 690. Note that, however, the posthumous noble title of Wu Shihuo was Prince of Wei 魏王 from November 3, 684 (Guangzhai 1.9.21).

¹⁹ Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century*, 1976, pp. 96-98, note 116. See also Forte, 1983, pp. 695b-696a.

²⁰ I have given above the examples of two Sui “great monasteries” which survived during the Tang, and of one monastery of the Zhou dynasty (690-705) which also survived after the Tang

the symposium on Longmen to be held the following September, I was still in favor of the hypothesis that the Great Fengxian Monastery at Longmen was an ancestral monastery of the Empress Wu. However, the more closely I examined all the possible solutions, the more I realized that no special reason subsisted for favoring such a hypothesis. The fact that the name Da Fengxian-si is first attested to in 693 does not mean that it did not exist before the proclamation of the Zhou dynasty. As for the political support of Empress Wu by the Elder of the Great Fengxian Monastery, it could have been given to her all the same had the monastery belonged to Gaozong. All considered, my original hypothesis struck me as just one of the possible hypotheses, rather than the most plausible one, and the paper presented at the symposium finally reflected such an attitude. Moreover, as appropriately observed by Prof. Hu Ji 胡戟 during the symposium, since Empress Wu had already founded a monastery for her mother in Luoyang (the above mentioned Taiyuan-si) in 675, there was no need to found a second one in 679 in Longmen which administratively belonged to Luoyang. Instead, in 679 Gaozong had not yet founded any Buddhist institution for his parents in Luoyang, and therefore the probability exists that the Da Fengxian-si in Longmen was just the monastery needed in the area of Luoyang. Although not conclusive (there is no trace of a set limit in the number of such establishments), this reasoning contributed in convincing me that the Gaozong hypothesis was after all the most reasonable among the possible hypotheses. Thus, until further evidence becomes available, let us consider what historical evaluation can be drawn based on such a hypothesis.

Institution of the Great Fengxian Monastery in 679-680 by Gaozong

Supposing that the monastery was named Da Fengxian-si by Gaozong in 679-680, it could only have been a Tang dynastic monastery. As Gaozong was the emperor of the dynasty, we should think that it was a religious institution founded for the "posthumous well-being" of one or both his parents. We do actually know something about Gaozong's filial piety practised through the foundation of other Buddhist monasteries.

Gaozong's father, Taizong, died in 649, while his mother, the Empress Wende 文德皇后, died on July 28, 636 (Zhenguan 10.6.21 [jima]). I am not aware of any monastery founded for his father, but the splendid monastery he founded in Chang'an for the "posthumous well-being" of his mother is well known. It was the Da Cien-si 大慈恩寺 whose Dayan-ta 大雁塔 is one of the main attractions of present day Xi'an. This was a monastery for monks. Another monastery, also in Chang'an, was founded later, in 663 (Longshuo 3), but it was for nuns. It was called Zisheng-si 資聖寺.²¹ The fact that he had already founded two monasteries

restoration in 705.

²¹ Forte, 1983, p. 693b.

(one for monks, the other for nuns) in Chang'an, while no such institutions are attested to in Luoyang, suggests that the Da Fengxian-si founded in 679 at Longmen might have been the needed ancestral monastery in the Luoyang region. From March 12, 671 (Xianheng 2.1.26 [*jiazi*]),²² the imperial court resided more and more frequently in Luoyang, and it was there on all the dates indicated above for the construction of the cave and of the monastery.²³ Then, from May 15, 682 (Yongchun 1.4.3 [*bingyin*]) its residence became fixed in Luoyang for almost twenty years,²⁴ and it was in the Zhenguan Palace 貞觀殿 in Luoyang that Gaozong died in December 27, 683.²⁵ In connection with the imperial court transfer to Luoyang, it is not unusual that an ancestral monastery should be considered necessary in Luoyang as well.

What was the history of the monastery after its foundation? No information is available from the inscription due to its terseness and absolute silence concerning the forty-three year period from 680 to 723. It becomes clear, then, that any material referring to this forty-three year period is of the greatest importance for us.

It is indeed fortunate that the *Jiu Tang shu* has left us the record of the great flood of the Yi River which destroyed the Fengxian Monastery in 722. Wang Qufei 王去非 noticed this piece of evidence in 1956²⁶ and, following his lead, those who have dealt with the question have not failed to put it in direct relation to the stone inscription of 723. Before discussing this point, however, I would like to stress that we have at least one other piece of evidence that is far more important for our inquiry and for understanding the political and religious role played by this institution.

The Colophon of the Baoyu-jing 寶雨經 of 693

I am referring to the original colophon dated October 7, 693 (Changshou 2.9.3 [*jichou*]) of the *Baoyu-jing* 寶雨經 (*Ratnamegha sūtra*), represented in a considerable number of ancient Chinese and Japanese manuscripts. Although it is at present the oldest extant contemporary evidence concerning the Great Fengxian Monastery, it has curiously escaped the attention of all the concerned scholars. I pointed out its importance for the history of the monastery in 1976.²⁷ I realize, however, that since my remarks were made in a footnote of a book mainly dedicated

²² *Zizhi tongjian* 202.6366.

²³ The *Zizhi tongjian* simply skips all these events concerning Longmen, although it attests to the court presence in Luoyang at the dates indicated above.

²⁴ Through the Tang up to 690 and the Zhou up to 701, the court resided in Luoyang: *Zizhi tongjian* 203.6413 and 207.6557.

²⁵ *Zizhi tongjian* 203.6416.

²⁶ Wang Qufei 王去非, "Longmen zaji" 龍門雜記, 1956, p. 58.

²⁷ Forte, 1976, pp. 96-98, note 116.

to historical and ideological questions, art historians and Longmen specialists in general might not have easily noticed it. I take this opportunity then to present here, with the necessary emphasis, this peace of evidence.

For our purposes, let us consider here Dunhuang manuscript no. 2278 in the Stein collection, now kept at the British Library. This manuscript consists of *juan* 9 of the *Baoyu-jing*. At the end it is clearly indicated that it was copied on May 26, 695 (Zhengsheng 1.4.8). The colophon contains the date when the translation of the *Baoyu-jing* was completed, that is, October 7, 693 (Changshou 2.9.3), and all the names of those who participated in the translation work together with their respective titles and functions. Among the thirty-two names in the colophon, we find, in 18th place, the following mention:

大奉先寺上座、當陽縣開國公、沙門慧稜證義。²⁸

Śramaṇa Huileng, Elder (*sthavira*) of the Great Fengxian Monastery, Duke of the Danyang Subprefecture, Founder of a Principality (*kaiguo*), verified the meaning.²⁹

The first remark that must be made is that, thanks to this colophon, we know that on the date of October 7, 693 the name of the monastery was certainly Da Fengxian-si. Now, the fact that the monastery at this date belonged to the category of the “great monasteries” certainly indicates that it was a dynastic monastery. This, however, does not mean that the dynasty to which it belonged was necessarily the reigning one, the Zhou (690-705). In fact, as noted above, there are several instances of “great monasteries” of abolished dynasties which continued to hold this special status.³⁰

Who was the monk Huileng 慧稜? The colophon tells us that in 693 Huileng was *shangzuo* 上座 (Elder, *sthavira*), that is, the eldest monk (in terms of monastic age) in the monastery, the one who had the greatest spiritual authority. In 1976 I published all the evidence I could collect concerning him. Such evidence—I must say—is very scanty, but significant enough to enable us to say that he was one of the ten most important leaders of Buddhism in the late seventh century. In around 685 these ten leaders were *bhadanta* monks of the Imperial Chapel (*nei daochang*) 內道場 in Luoyang. Then, on August 17, 690, they presented the *Dayun-jing Shenhuang shouji yishu* 大雲經神皇授記義疏 (Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Shenhuang in the *Great-cloud Sūtra*), the most

²⁸ See Plate I below. See also Forte, 1976, Plate XXXII.

²⁹ Forte, 1976, p. 174.

³⁰ This was possibly out of respect for the abolished dynasty, but more probably because the status corresponded to some characteristics (dimensions, number of monks assigned to the monasteries, etc.) that were not easy to modify, and the monasteries tended to survive as long as the owner continued to sustain them and the new sovereign did not deem it necessary to abolish them. I have given the example of two Sui “great monasteries” (Da Chanding-si 大禪定寺) which maintained their status during the Tang. We have also seen that the Da Fuxian-si in Luoyang, which became a “great monastery” during the Zhou, continued to be so, long after the Zhou dynasty was abolished in 705.

佛說寶雨經卷第九

大南寺主僧慧稜已元子夏月二日已前佛後記譯

大白馬寺大德沙門懷義監譯

南印度沙門達摩流父宣釋梵本

中印度王使沙門梵摩宣梵本

京漢住持沙門戰施譯證

佛後記寺沙門慧智證譯證

佛後記寺沙門道昌證梵文

瓜官寺沙門道輝證梵文

大南寺寺主僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

佛後記寺都維那僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

佛後記寺沙門思玄綴文

長壽寺寺主沙門智綴綴文

佛後記寺都維那僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

大南寺寺主僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

瓜官寺上座沙門知道證義

大南寺寺主僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

瓜官寺上座沙門知道證義

大南寺寺主僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

長壽寺工座沙門知曉證義

大南寺寺主僧慧稜開闢公沙門法明證義

佛後記寺沙門神英證義

佛後記寺沙門神英證義

京漢住持沙門戰施證義

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 凡爾知切德僧道利抄校寫
 同知僧法琳昌校

S. 2278 from Dunhuang. Colophon of *juan 9* of the *Baoyu-jing* 寶雨經. In this colophon the name and title of Huileng 慧稜, the Elder of the Great Fengxian Monastery 大奉先寺, are mentioned.

important document of political propaganda in favor of Empress Wu's direct assumption of power which permitted her to suppress the Tang dynasty and replace it with the Zhou on October 16, 690. Less than two months later, on December 4 (or 5) of the same year, the ten monks were given noble titles in acknowledgment of their merits. It was on this occasion that Huileng must have received the noble title which appears above in the colophon, Duke of the Subprefecture of Dangyang, Founder of a Principality. Three years later, in 693, besides participating in the translation work of the *Baoyu-jing*, as we have seen, he also took part in the nineteen other translations signed by Bodhiruci.¹¹

The events which brought about the overthrow of the Tang and the foundation of the Zhou dynasty on October 16, 690 are well known and I think it is not necessary to recount them again here. I wish only to underline the determinative role played by orthodox Buddhism (only too often and mistakenly treated as being constituted of fake monks) in the foundation of the new dynasty. Huileng belonged, together with the other *bhadantas* of the Imperial Chapel, to orthodox Buddhism. Leaving aside the particular case of Huaiyi 懷義, a Maitreyist, the following is a list of the nine other monks of the Imperial Chapel in the order in which they appear in the *Jiu Tang shu*, including the noble titles and functions they held in 693 according to the colophon of the *Baoyu-jing*:

MONASTERY	FUNCTION	NOBLE TITLE	NAME	
1. 大周東寺	上座	江陵縣開國公	Faming	法明
2. 大周東寺	都維那	清源縣開國公	Chuyi	處一
3. 大周東寺	都維那	豫章縣開國公	Huiyan	惠儼
4. 大奉先寺	上座	當陽縣開國公	Huileng	慧稜
5. 佛授記寺	寺主	渤海縣開國公	Xinggan	行感
6. 佛授記寺	都維那	昌平縣開國公	Degan	德感
7. 佛授記寺	都維那	贊皇縣開國公	Zhijing	知靜
8. 中大雲寺 (Luoyang)	都維那	象城縣開國公	Xuangui	玄軌
9. 大雲寺 (Chang'an)	不詳	不詳	Xuanzheng	宣政

It is clear that the above is not a random assemblage of names, but a protocol list in which the names are given in the order of importance of the monasteries and of the monks' functions in these monasteries. In all, five monasteries appear: (a) Da Zhou dongsi 大周東寺 (that is, the Da Fuxian-si 大福先寺 in Luoyang), (b) Da Fengxian-si (Longmen), (c) Fo shouji-si 佛授記寺 (Luoyang),

¹¹ Forte, 1976, p. 96.

(d) Central Dayun-si 中大雲寺 (Luoyang), (e) Dayun-si 大雲寺 (Chang'an). The Da Fengxian-si in Longmen is the second among the monasteries, and its Elder (*sthavira*) Huileng, the fourth after the three monks of the Da Fuxian-si in Luoyang.

The first place is held by the Da Fuxian-si in Luoyang which, as noted above, was an ancestral monastery of the Zhou dynasty. The Da Fengxian-si at Longmen appears second. If it was, as is probable, an ancestral monastery of the abolished Tang dynasty founded by Gaozong for one or both his parents, its second place in the list is logical. Since the protocollary list of the *Jiu Tang shu* must date from the Zhou dynasty, it is not surprising that this Tang dynastic monastery (Da Fengxian-si at Longmen) should follow the Zhou dynastic one (Da Fuxian-si in Luoyang). At the same time it is also to be expected that the Longmen monastery should precede all the others because it is the ancestral monastery of Empress Wu's husband Gaozong. The third monastery is the Fo shouji-si, also in Luoyang, which had been founded by the heir apparent Prince Li Hong 李弘 (652-675) for his mother Empress Wu in 657 or 658. It was a Tang "great monastery" devoted not to the "posthumous well-being" of Wu Zhao, as she was at the time of its foundation very young (about 32) and—we suppose—very energetic, but rather to her present well-being. Wu Zhao must have considered it more or less as her own monastery both during the life and after the death of her son in 675. Strictly speaking, however, the monastery had been an institution of her son, a Tang prince, and there is no reason to believe that its nature would have changed. The fact that three of the monastery leaders were members of the Imperial Chapel in 685 is not surprising since the dynasty in power was the Tang, but at the same time it certainly shows how closely they were connected with Empress Wu, the regent who held the real power at that time. After the foundation of the Zhou dynasty in 690, the institution must have lost its status as a "great monastery" (its new name is never preceded in contemporary sources by the character *da* 大 which had defined its status previously), and changed its name into Fo Shouji-si (Buddha's Prophecy Monastery) in evident allusion to the prophecy contained in the *Dayun-jing* 大雲經 (Great-cloud Sūtra). Still, we cannot conclude that by that time it had become a monastery of Wu Zhao with no connection to the abolished Tang. As to the other two monasteries, the first in Luoyang, the second in Chang'an, they were the two most pre-eminent institutions of the chain of state monasteries founded according to an edict by Wu Zhao of December 690.

In other words, the above list shows the order of importance of the five quoted monasteries during the first years of the Zhou dynasty. At the same time it identifies the monastic institutions and the individuals who lent Empress Wu the greatest support in abolishing the Tang dynasty and establishing the new Zhou dynasty in 690. It is significant that the second and the third monasteries in the list where Tang dynastic monasteries, the first founded by the Emperor Gaozong, the second by the heir prince his son Li Hong. This means that Wu Zhao had skillfully won the support of the leaders of these institutions.

One fact at least has become eminently clear thanks to the colophon, that is, the Great Fengxian Monastery at Longmen had by 693 become a stronghold of Zhou ideology. By that date its *sthavira* Huileng was actively participating in the

well-known interpolation in the *Baoyu jing*, which offered Wu Zhao the needed Buddhist legitimization in order to become the universal sovereign *cakravartin* of the Buddhist ideology.³² There is no reason to believe that after 693, during the Zhou (690-705), the Great Fengxian Monastery changed its ideological position. It is true, however, that almost no other evidence remains from this period.³³ Although nothing is known of the monastery's history from the period after the Zhou dynasty was abolished and the Tang restored in 705 until 722, it can be guessed that it retained its privileged status as a "great monastery" of the restored Tang dynasty. Furthermore, it would not be astonishing to discover that it remained a stronghold of Zhou ideology, but unfortunately evidence at this time is completely lacking.

The Monastery after the Flood of 722

Now, what happened after the flood of 722 washed the Great Fengxian Monastery away? In the official letter of January 16, 723 (Kaiyuan 10.12.5) recorded in the stele inscription we read:

勅旨龍花寺宜合作奉先寺

By imperial decision, the Longhua Monastery should jointly function as the Fengxian Monastery.

In other words, the Fengxian monastery as an institution was not abolished. It would seem, however, to have lost its status as a "great monastery" if we are to attribute any significance to the fact that in this official letter, which supposedly quotes the imperial decision, the name of the monastery appears without the character *da* 大. I would suggest then, unless some other evidence proves to the contrary, that we should assume that from January 16, 723 the institution was no longer a "great monastery." It is possible that it even lost its status as a dynastic monastery. This might explain why it was not included in the list of dynastic monasteries contained in *juan* 48 of the *Tang hui yao*.

Why was the merger decided upon? The answer to this question should not be difficult to find at the present stage of our inquiry. We know of the flood of the

³² On this issue, see Forte, 1976, pp. 125-145.

³³ All we know is that a *jiaren* 家人 from the monastery had a niche built in 704 in the present Tang zi Cave 唐字洞 for his dead mother. See *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 龍門石窟 (*The Longmen Grottoes*), Anon., 1988, p. 308. The relevant inscription is very fragmentary. It is found outside the Tang zi Cave, on the northern side. Surprisingly, the name of the monastery is Fengxian-si, without the character *da* 大. I wonder, however, if one of the missing characters which precede the name of the monastery might have been *da* 大. A close look at the inscription itself could resolve the question. I tried in vain to locate the inscription during a visit to the Tang zi Cave with Deng Wenkuan 鄧文寬 on September 11, 1993.

River Yi and of the destruction of Da Fengxian-si. We know also that political power had shifted and that Longmen was not, to say the least, one of the main concerns of the Emperor Xuanzong who had come to power in 712. In substance, the monks of the destroyed monastery were influential enough to save their institution from extinction, but not enough to have the monastery restored to its previous scale and magnificence. The Longhua-si, which the flood must have spared, was probably in the vicinity and the monks of Da Fengxian-si, who after the flood had become homeless, solved their lodging and cultic problems at the expense of Longhua-si, whose structures remained but whose name probably disappeared.³⁴

On the one hand, the fact that the Fengxian-si survived, although it had been so involved in the ideological support of Empress Wu, shows a level of concern from the Tang emperor Xuanzong that is unexplainable had it not previously been a Tang dynastic monastery. The Zhou dynasty had come to an end in 705, and after a seven year period of struggle by the Tang restorationists against the members of the Wu family and their political supporters, Xuanzong seized power in 712 and tried his best to restore the political situation that had existed before Wu Zhao's rule. The fact that the Fengxian-si survived, notwithstanding the destructive flood, would confirm, then, that it was a Tang dynastic monastery. On the other hand, one wonders why Xuanzong showed himself unwilling to reconstruct it and maintain its original status as a "great monastery." After all, Gaozong was his grandfather and the monastery belonged to his family. Could Xuanzong's indifference be interpreted as a sign that the monastery did not belong to Gaozong? Not necessarily. Rather, the fact that the monastery had been a stronghold of Zhou ideology and that it had been very influential in the suppression of the Tang dynasty in 690 must not be underrated. It is true that Xuanzong had some afterthoughts in his attitude towards the supporters of Empress Wu's politics, due to the political struggle which he was not entirely successful in quelling. In 721 Zhang Yue 張說 (667-730) was appointed chief minister and the emperor arrived in Luoyang on February 26, 722 (Kaiyuan 10.2.7 [*wuyin*]),³⁵ three days after the disastrous flood which had destroyed the Da Fengxian-si. This was an unfortunate coincidence. Zhang Yue was attempting hard at that time to resume some of the politics of Wu Zhao's time, and in November 722 the *mingtang* 明堂 resumed its function.³⁶ The emperor was to leave Luoyang at the end of 727,³⁷ so he was there

³⁴ I am not aware of any mention of the Longhua-si thereafter, but the Fengxian-si is well attested to. See Wen Yucheng, 1988. The wording itself in the edict seems to indicate implicitly that the Longhua-si lost its identity as an institution.

³⁵ He had left Chang'an twenty-one days earlier, on February 5 of the same year (Kaiyuan 10.1.15 [*dingsi*]). See *Zizhi tongjian* 212.6749, both for the date of departure from Chang'an and of the arrival to Luoyang.

³⁶ Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock*, 1988, pp. 247-248, on Zhang Yue and the *mingtang*.

³⁷ *Zizhi tongjian* 213.6780. Xuanzong left Luoyang on November 9, 727 (Kaiyuan 15.9 intercalary, 22 [*gengshen*]) and reached Chang'an on the 28th of the same month (Kaiyuan 15.10.11 [*jimao*]). The date of December 4, 724, given in Forte, 1988 (p. 228 and p. 268), for Xuanzong's departure from

when the decision concerning the Da Fengxian-si had to be taken. For all the successes of the unquelled supporters of Empress Wu's politics, this must not have been sufficient to lead Emperor Xuanzong to take the decision to go so far as to restore the Fengxian Monastery. The fact that Zhang Yue, although already in charge, encountered all sorts of difficulties in the implementation of his political programme may also have been unfortunate for the destiny of the monastery. The decision regarding the monastery came in late 722 or early 723, while Zhang Yue only dominated the political scene unhindered from April 7, 723. After all, why should Xuanzong restore a monastic complex whose monks had significantly contributed to the abolition of the Tang dynasty? I would suggest then that the previous political involvement of the monks belonging to the monastery was sufficient to justify Xuanzong's indifference towards the destroyed monastic complex, and that his decision to have it merged with the Longhua-si was a viable compromise in the current political context.

The terseness of the inscription and the absence of any mention of the person who composed the text or the person who made the calligraphy may be also interpreted as evident signs reflecting the political power's basic apathy and indifference towards the monumental complex at the time the decision was made. The ideology it represented was no longer effective. If its reconstruction had ever become a real issue at the time, we can easily imagine the anti-Buddhist arguments of those who had brought Xuanzong to power and who always feared of the resurgence of a Buddhist state such as the one Wu Zhao had built. To them the flood of the Yi River must have appeared rather as a manifestation of the heavenly decision to wash away one of the most despised centres of the Zhou ideological support. In 1976 (p. 98, note) I suggested that the inscription of 723 was not a record celebrating the inauguration of new monastery, but one sanctioning its death. In a sense this is true because the monastic institution ceased to exist as a "great monastery" and a prominent centre of power in 723. This opinion, however, was too extreme as we know now for certain that the Fengxian Monastery did not die out at that time, but survived for many centuries after. Its survival was characterized by regression and crisis which eventually brought the monastery to its unavoidable demise. If the cave with its stone statues were not there to remind us of the past glory and magnificence of the Great Fengxian Monastery to which it belonged, we would have known merely the name.

Luoyang, is based on a mistaken reading of *Zizhi tongjian* 212.6762, and must be emended to November 9, 727.

SUMMARY

Summing up, according to the stone inscription of 723 placed on the northern side of the base of the great Rocana statue in Longmen, the Da Fengxian-si 大奉先寺 was established south of the statue on September 25, 679 (Tiaolu 1.8.15). We are not told what motivated the foundation of such a monastic establishment, nor can we be absolutely certain that its original name was Da Fengxian-si because of several unsolved questions, and because, above all, no contemporary evidence concerning the monastery confirms this. It is to be assumed, nevertheless, that the monastery was instituted by the emperor Gaozong (r. 649-683) and given this name by him personally at the time of its foundation in 679. If so, it would have been dedicated to the “posthumous well-being” (*zhufu* 追福) of one or both his parents.

As to the early history and role of the monastery, several manuscripts, including at least one from Dunhuang, have hitherto passed unnoticed by Longmen specialists, although they are of manifest importance. They contain the original colophon, dated October 7, 693 (Changshou 2.9.3 [*jichou*]), of the translation of the *Baoyu-jing* 寶雨經 (*Ratnamegha sūtra*). It is the earliest extant evidence we have on the monastery, as it is only fourteen years after its foundation and thirty years earlier than the inscription of 723. The colophon shows that by 693 the monastery name was definitely Da Fengxian-si. Interestingly, it also shows that the Elder (*sthavira*) of the monastery at that time was the monk Huileng 慧稜, a religious leader whose activity is documented from about 685 to 693, who was very instrumental in the establishment of the Zhou dynasty (690-705). Consequently, even if Da Fengxian-si was an ancestral monastery founded by Gaozong, it is clear that by around 685 it was firmly in the control of Wu Zhao (Empress Wu). Although Huileng may well have respected Gaozong's personal ideas and wishes, he (and hence the monastic community belonging to the prestigious Longmen institution) did not support the cause of the Tang dynasty, but rather helped the empress to abolish it and to establish in its place the new Zhou dynasty in 690. Moreover, in 693 Huileng was instrumental in legitimizing Wu Zhao as the universal sovereign dreamt of in Buddhist Asia.

In February 23, 722 the Great Fengxian Monastery was destroyed by a disastrous flood of the River Yi. Xuanzong had left Chang'an on February 5 of the same year, and happened to arrive in Luoyang just three days after the flood, on February 26, 722. He was there when he had to make the delicate decision of what to do with the monastic institution whose physical structures had been destroyed. He decided, in late 722 or early 723, that the monastery would not be rebuilt, but would rather merge with another monastery in the vicinity, the Longhua-si 龍花

寺, which had been spared by the flood. It was at that time, we think, that it lost its special status as a “great monastery.” Xuanzong’s decision to allow the survival of the institution was probably due to the consideration that it belonged to his family, given that it had been founded by his grandfather Gaozong. On the other hand, if he also decided that the monastery should lose its privileged status as a “great monastery,” that was possibly a consequence of Xuanzong’s indifference, if not diffidence, for an institution whose members had effectively contributed to the overthrow of the Tang dynasty almost thirty-three years earlier, in October 690.

REFERENCES

Abbreviations

- S. Chinese manuscript from Dunhuang in the Stein Collection, British Library London.
 T. *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō*.

Baoyu-jing 寶雨經 (*Ratnamegha sūtra*), tr. by Bodhiruci (d. 727) in 693. T. 16, no. 660.

Dayun-jing Shenhuang shouji yishu 大雲經神皇授記義疏 (Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Shenhuang in the Great-cloud Sūtra), 1 *juan*, written by Faming 法明 and others in 690 A.D. Two fragmentary manuscripts from Dunhuang (S. 6502 and S. 2658) are kept in the British Library. References are to Forte, 1976, where the text is translated and the two manuscripts are reproduced in full.

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龍門大奉先寺探源

福安敦 (Antonino FORTE)

據大盧舍那佛像座基北側 723年刻的「河洛上都龍門山之陽大盧舍那像龕記」所載，大奉先寺置於唐調露元年八月十五日（即西歷 679年9月25日）離大像窟南方之地。「龕記」未明建寺動機，但由於其時有關此寺之史料無一留存，又以唐佛寺改名常為慣例，故 723年「龕記」上之「大奉先寺」是否建寺當初寺名不得不加以探討。

我們雖然還有若干疑問，但仍然可接受大奉先寺是為唐高宗皇帝親自賜寺名的，以其寺名「奉先」，顧名思義（取自『書經』「奉先思孝」）想必為高宗為其母后或其皇父追福所建。

周長壽二年九月三日（693年10月7日）所譯『寶雨經』跋文為至目前有關大奉先寺最早的記載。此跋文寫於 723年的「龕記」落筆前三十年。其雖有數本存於敦煌及日本寫卷中，但至今仍未引起研究龍門專家們的注意。

由此譯經跋文中，我們得知此寺於 693年已稱「大奉先寺」，並知當時沙門慧稜是大奉先寺「上座」，其 685年以後的活動可考字典籍。他與武曌於 675年所建洛陽太原寺（大福先寺）的寺僧三綱有密切關係。高僧慧稜於 690年改朝換代中扮一重要角色。慧稜雖身屬唐朝佛寺重地龍門佛僧，不僅不護皇保宗，且棄唐幫周建國立朝，又參與撰寫「大雲經神皇授記義疏」，鼓吹女皇神權，立武曌為佛經上之「轉輪聖王」位極至尊。

722年2月23日，大奉先寺為伊水泛漲所毀。時正恰玄宗於2月5日離長安，26日抵洛陽時，正值水患三天之後。重建大奉先寺即成當前急務。於 722年末或 723年初，玄宗敕旨「龍花寺宜合作奉先寺」，而決定不重建大奉先寺。如此奉先寺不僅移址於龍花寺，且失去了「大寺」之頭銜。玄宗之決定保留奉先寺，可能基於此寺為其祖父高宗所建，而不保留其「大寺」頭銜，可能因此寺僧侶於 33年前參與武氏滅唐建周之舉。