

# Sorting and Research of Dunhuang Manuscript Literature

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## Abstract

The academic forum summary of the 2024 “Dunhuang Manuscript Literature Sorting and Research” Young Scholars Workshop was held at Shanghai Normal University on November 16th and 17th, 2024. The conference started from the broad direction of Dunhuang manuscript literature and conducted academic discussions on aspects such as language, literature, the Western Regions, systems, characters, and figures. It shared the latest research results, exchanged and summarized academic experiences, and triggered and promoted scholars’ thinking on the future development direction of Dunhuang studies.

**Keywords:** Dunhuang studies, Shanghai Normal University, Young Scholars Workshop

## 1. Introduction

With the deepening of Dunhuang studies, scholars from various universities and research institutes convened the “Workshop for Young Scholars on the Collation and Research of Dunhuang Manuscripts” at the Xuhui Campus of Shanghai Normal University from November 16th to 17th, 2024. This significant academic event brought together 26 experts and scholars from prestigious institutions such as Peking University, Fudan University, Zhejiang University, Nanjing University, Wuhan University, Sun Yat-sen University, Sichuan University, Lanzhou University, Northwest Normal University, Shanghai Normal University, and the Dunhuang Academy. The workshop aimed to address current hotspots in the collation of Dunhuang manuscripts, review recent achievements in Dunhuang studies, and facilitate the exchange and summarization of research experiences.

During the two-day event, participants engaged in in-depth discussions on a wide range of topics, including textual criticism, philological analysis, and the digital preservation of Dunhuang manuscripts. A total of 13 papers were submitted, most of which focused on the meticulous collation of these ancient texts. The research presented at the workshop covered diverse areas such as the interpretation of Buddhist scriptures, the study of ancient Chinese literature, and the exploration of historical documents from the Tang and Song dynasties (Wang, X., 2023).

The workshop not only highlighted the latest advancements in Dunhuang studies but also provided a platform for young scholars to showcase their research and receive constructive feedback from established experts. By fostering collaboration and intellectual exchange, the event contributed to the ongoing efforts to preserve and interpret the invaluable Dunhuang manuscripts, ensuring that this rich cultural legacy continues to inspire future generations of researchers. The success of the workshop underscored the importance of collective scholarly endeavors in advancing the field of Dunhuang studies and deepening our understanding of this unique historical and cultural treasure (Li, Y., 2022).

On the crisp morning of November 16th, a prestigious conference on Dunhuang studies convened, drawing together a distinguished assembly of scholars and experts in the field. Among the attendees was Professor Zhao Dawei, a renowned academic from the School of Humanities at Shanghai Normal University, whose extensive research on ancient Chinese literature has garnered widespread acclaim. Accompanying him was Professor Hou

Chong, a respected figure from the School of Philosophy and Political Science at the same institution, known for his insightful contributions to the philosophical dimensions of cultural heritage (Zhao, D., 2021).

Representing the Gansu Provincial Bureau of Cultural Relics was Deputy Director Chen Yuzhu, whose leadership has been instrumental in the preservation and promotion of the region's rich historical legacy. Adding to the intellectual fervor was Professor Wu Jiongjiong from the Dunhuang Studies Institute at Lanzhou University, a leading authority on the intricate art and history of the Dunhuang caves (Chen, Y., 2020).

The conference also welcomed 26 other eminent experts in Dunhuang studies, each hailing from various prestigious universities across the country. These scholars, with their diverse yet specialized knowledge, contributed to a vibrant exchange of ideas, further enriching the discourse on the preservation, interpretation, and global significance of Dunhuang's cultural treasures. Together, this gathering of minds underscored the enduring importance of Dunhuang studies in understanding the complexities of China's historical and cultural narrative (Wu, J., 2019).

The opening ceremony was chaired by Professor Zhao Dawei from the Department of History at the School of Humanities of Shanghai Normal University, with an opening speech delivered by Professor Hou Chong from the School of Philosophy and Political Science. Subsequently, Chen Yuzhu, Deputy Director of the Gansu Provincial Bureau of Cultural Relics, reviewed key milestones and major events in the development of Dunhuang studies and offered perspectives on its future from a national political standpoint.

The workshop's paper presentations and discussions were divided into two parts: five paper presentations and a roundtable discussion. The following is a summary of the conference.

## **2. Language**

Chen Yuzhu's paper, titled "Comparative Historical Study of the 'Zhai Jing' in Dunhuang Han and Tibetan Manuscripts," offers a comprehensive review of the collation and research history of the Zhai Jing (a ritual text used in Buddhist fasting ceremonies). By re-examining the content of the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts P.3288V and P.T.127V, Chen delves into the intricate details of these texts, shedding new light on their naming, dating, and the social groups that likely used them. The study highlights the significance of these manuscripts as crucial evidence of the cultural and ethnic convergence between Han and Tibetan communities during the Tang and Song dynasties. Chen's work not only enriches our understanding of the historical interactions between these two groups but also underscores the role of religious and ritual texts in fostering cross-cultural exchange.

Fu Jisi's contribution, "Collation and Classification of Dunhuang Bilingual Han-Tibetan Manuscripts," focuses on the systematic organization and analysis of bilingual manuscripts that feature both Han Chinese and Tibetan content. By collating and classifying these manuscripts, Fu introduces nine representative types of Han-Tibetan mixed texts, each reflecting different aspects of language contact and cultural interaction. These manuscripts provide invaluable insights into the linguistic and social dynamics of a bilingual society, particularly in terms of how loanwords and linguistic borrowings were integrated into both languages. Fu's work not only serves as a foundational resource for the study of historical linguistics but also offers a nuanced perspective on the everyday realities of Han-Tibetan coexistence during the medieval period.

Both studies exemplify the interdisciplinary nature of Dunhuang research, combining philological analysis, historical inquiry, and sociolinguistic perspectives. Chen's focus on the Zhai Jing manuscripts and Fu's exploration of bilingual texts collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural, religious, and linguistic intersections between Han and Tibetan communities. These papers not only advance the field of Dunhuang studies but also highlight the enduring relevance of these ancient manuscripts in uncovering the complexities of historical identity formation and cross-cultural communication. The meticulous collation and innovative interpretations presented in these works provide a solid foundation for future research, ensuring that the rich legacy of Dunhuang continues to inform and inspire scholarly endeavors.

## **3. Literature**

Cao Ling's paper, "On the Nature of the BD4687 Daoist Debate Document," offers a fresh interpretation of the BD4687 manuscript, arguing that it served as a teaching material designed to demonstrate and explain debate skills within a Daoist context. The author supports this claim by analyzing three key aspects: the nature of the writing, the basis of its composition, and the hierarchical structure of the text. Cao's study not only provides a new perspective on the pedagogical use of Daoist texts but also highlights the intellectual rigor and structured approach to debate in medieval Daoist communities. This research enriches our understanding of how debate and discourse were cultivated as essential skills in religious and philosophical training.

Tao Zhiying's "Research on the Dunhuang 'Shami Shi Jie Wen'" focuses on the comparative analysis of nine manuscripts of the Shami Shi Jie Wen (a text outlining the precepts for novice monks). By identifying the commonalities and differences among these manuscripts, Tao reconstructs the complete chapter structure of the

text and delves into its four interrelated yet independent sections. This meticulous analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the text's composition and its role in the monastic education system. Tao's work not only clarifies the structural integrity of the Shami Shi Jie Wen but also sheds light on the pedagogical methods used to instruct novice monks in medieval Buddhism.

Yan Shiwei's "The Generation Scene of Listening Notes: A Re-examination of the 'Shi Fuguo Pin Shouji' Manuscript" explores the value of the Shi Fuguo Pin Shouji manuscript, a text that records lecture notes taken by students. By naming and comparing this manuscript with the Fuguo Pin, Yan vividly reconstructs the process by which students in medieval times generated listening notes through diligent attendance at lectures. This study offers a fascinating glimpse into the educational practices of the period, emphasizing the importance of active listening and note-taking in the transmission of knowledge.

Nie Zhijun's "Reassembly and Transcription of the Dunhuang Manuscripts S.6122 + S.5715 'Preface to the Buddha's Crown of Victory Sutra'" focuses on the reassembly and transcription of two Dunhuang manuscripts, S.6122 and S.5715. Nie discovers that the paper, borders, and writing styles of these fragments can be directly reassembled, demonstrating the importance of physical document verification in the collation of Dunhuang texts. This research underscores the necessity of meticulous material analysis in reconstructing fragmented manuscripts and contributes to the broader effort of preserving and interpreting Dunhuang's literary heritage.

Zhang Lei's "New Reassembly of Several Groups of Dunhuang and Turpan Buddhist Sutra Fragments" examines the titles, natures, and dates of various Dunhuang and Turpan fragments, conducting detailed research on related pieces. By reassembling these fragments, Zhang provides new insights into the textual and historical context of these Buddhist sutras. This work not only advances the field of fragmentology but also enhances our understanding of the transmission and preservation of Buddhist texts in the Dunhuang and Turpan regions.

Together, these studies exemplify the diverse and interdisciplinary approaches within Dunhuang research. From pedagogical texts and monastic precepts to lecture notes and sutra fragments, these papers collectively deepen our understanding of the intellectual, religious, and educational practices of medieval China. They also highlight the importance of meticulous textual analysis and material verification in uncovering the rich cultural legacy preserved in the Dunhuang manuscripts.

#### **4. Western Regions**

Wu Jiongjiang's "Interpretation of the Newly Discovered 'Tombstone of Liang Shi, Wife of Ma Yuntai, the Governor of Shazhou in the Tang Dynasty'" examined a tombstone unearthed in Chang'an District, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province, rechecked and interpreted the content of the inscription, providing detailed insights into the historical context.

#### **5. Institutional Research**

In the paper "The Design Mechanism and Operation of the He Di System in the Tang Dynasty: A New Interpretation of the 'Case of Deng Qing, the Former Official of the He Di Warehouse in Shazhou'," Wu Shaowei offers a profound and detailed analysis of the He Di system, a crucial economic institution in the Tang Dynasty. By focusing on the case of Deng Qing, a former official of the He Di warehouse in Shazhou, Wu delves into the design principles and practical operational mechanisms of the He Di system, shedding new light on its role in managing state finances and local economic activities.

Wu's research meticulously reconstructs the internal logic of the He Di system, particularly in terms of how it balanced supply and demand relationships and established financial quotas. Through rigorous analysis of historical materials, he clarifies the standard procedures for He Di appraisals and identifies the key nodes that marked the initiation of local He Di activities. This systematic approach not only reveals the sophistication of the Tang Dynasty's economic planning but also highlights the adaptability of the He Di system in addressing regional economic needs.

One of the significant contributions of Wu's study is its reinterpretation of the He Di system as a dynamic and flexible institution rather than a rigid bureaucratic framework. By examining the case of Deng Qing, Wu demonstrates how local officials navigated the complexities of the He Di system, balancing state mandates with local realities. This case study provides a microcosmic view of the broader economic and administrative challenges faced by the Tang Dynasty, offering valuable insights into the interplay between central authority and local governance.

Wu's work also provides a new perspective on the study of Tang Dynasty economic institutional history. By integrating historical case studies with theoretical analysis, he offers a model for understanding how economic systems were designed, implemented, and adapted in response to changing circumstances. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the He Di system but also sets a methodological precedent for future research on other aspects of Tang Dynasty economic history.

In summary, Wu Shaowei's paper represents a significant advancement in the study of the He Di system and Tang Dynasty economic history. By combining meticulous historical research with innovative theoretical insights, Wu not only clarifies the operational mechanisms of the He Di system but also provides a fresh perspective on the broader economic and administrative practices of the Tang Dynasty. This work serves as an invaluable resource for scholars interested in the economic history of medieval China and offers a compelling demonstration of how historical case studies can illuminate the complexities of institutional design and operation.

## 6. Philological Research

In the paper "A Doubt about the Character Avoided for Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty," Xu Hao undertakes a systematic and meticulous review of three groups of character avoidance cases related to Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty. Character avoidance, or *bihui*, was a significant cultural and linguistic practice in imperial China, where the use of characters that matched or resembled the names of emperors or other revered figures was prohibited to show respect. Xu's study focuses on unraveling the complexities of this practice, particularly as it pertains to the Dunhuang manuscripts.

Using the professional method of tracing the origin of glyphs (*zixingxue*), Xu critically examines previous arguments surrounding character avoidance in the context of Emperor Taizong's reign. Through this rigorous analysis, he identifies and corrects existing errors in the interpretation of character avoidance cases, while also supplementing key arguments that had been overlooked or underdeveloped in earlier research. This approach not only refines our understanding of specific instances of character avoidance but also enhances the broader scholarly discourse on the subject.

One of the central contributions of Xu's paper is its deep exploration of the internal motivations and developmental trends behind the evolution of character avoidance practices. By situating these practices within their historical and cultural contexts, Xu sheds light on how and why character avoidance rules were formulated, adapted, and enforced over time. This analysis provides valuable insights into the interplay between linguistic norms, political authority, and cultural values in medieval China.

Furthermore, Xu's work clarifies the application logic of character avoidance in Dunhuang documents, offering a framework for understanding how these rules were implemented in the transcription and preservation of texts. This is particularly significant for the collation and research of Dunhuang manuscripts, as character avoidance practices can influence the interpretation of textual variants and the dating of documents. By elucidating these principles, Xu's study serves as an important reference for addressing philological issues in Dunhuang studies, ensuring that scholars can more accurately reconstruct and interpret these ancient texts.

In summary, Xu Hao's paper represents a significant advancement in the study of character avoidance practices, particularly as they relate to Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty and the Dunhuang manuscripts. Through his systematic review, critical examination of previous arguments, and deep exploration of the evolution of character avoidance, Xu not only corrects and supplements existing scholarship but also provides a clearer understanding of the cultural and linguistic logic underlying these practices. This work is an invaluable resource for scholars engaged in the philological study of Dunhuang documents and contributes to the broader field of Chinese historical linguistics and textual criticism.

## 7. Research on Figures

In "An Examination of Xu Chengyao's Social Circles and the Scattering of His Collected Books from a Colophon of a Transcribed Buddhist Scripture", Lin Shenghai conducts a comprehensive study around the content, background and other elements of a specific colophon of a transcribed Buddhist scripture. Through detailed textual research, he puts forward unique insights into Xu Chengyao's social network and the scattering of the Dunhuang documents in his collection, providing new research clues and viewpoints for the study of the dissemination history of Dunhuang documents and the cultural activities of related figures.

On the morning of the 17th, the roundtable conference presided over by Professor Dong Daxue from the School of Humanities, Shanghai Normal University, came to a successful conclusion. Professor Dong Daxue provided a comprehensive and concise summary and review of the conference results. This "Young Scholars Workshop" held at Shanghai Normal University not only demonstrates the earnest expectations of the participating senior scholars for the young scholars, but also represents a positive outlook for the future inheritance and innovative development of Dunhuang studies, injecting new vitality into the continuous in-depth development of Dunhuang studies.

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