

### Marginalia on the First International Symposium on Longmen Studies

Almost ninety years have passed since the great French scholar Edouard Chavannes, in the course of his archaeological journey in Northern China and Manchuria, visited Longmen in 1907. For twelve days (July 24th to August 4th) he stayed there, taking about one hundred and fifty pictures and more than a thousand rubbings (above all from inscriptions).<sup>1</sup> He was at the time no neophyte on Longmen. In fact, in 1902 he had already published an article on it, working on the basis of the pictures and of the rubbings brought by Leprince-Ringuet from his visit to Longmen in 1899,<sup>2</sup> and he certainly knew the description of the Binyang Cave given in 1905 by Philippe Berthelot.<sup>3</sup> After his return to Paris, he delivered a lecture there on March 27th, 1908, about his journey in which he also dealt with Longmen.<sup>4</sup> At that time he must already have been at work on his *Mission archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale* (published in 1909, 1913, 1915), which includes a great quantity of pictures and his precious study on Longmen.<sup>5</sup> Chavannes was accompanied by his pupil Alekeseev and by A. Spruyt, who many years

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<sup>1</sup> See his note of September 5th, 1907, sent to Henri Cordier from Xian and published as “Voyage de M. Chavannes en Chine”, *T'oung Pao*, Series II, Vol. VIII (1907), pp. 561–5. See especially p. 564. I do not know the present whereabouts of Chavannes' rubbings. It is no longer permitted to take rubbings, so the old ones have become particularly precious.

<sup>2</sup> Le défilé de Long-men”, *Journal asiatique*, 1902, pp. 133–59.

<sup>3</sup> See *Comptes rendues de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, pp. 186–206.

<sup>4</sup> “Voyage archéologique dans la Mandchourie et dans la Chine Septentrionale”, *Toung Pao*, Series II, Vol. IX (1908), pp. 503–28.

<sup>5</sup> Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale*. The work consists of four volumes of plates (in six sections) published in 1909, and of two volumes of texts, published in 1913 and 1915 by Ernest Leroux, Paris. Plates on Longmen are found in Vol. 2 (figs. 278–398), in Vol. 3 (figs. 538–747), and in Vol. 4 (figs. 955–61), while Vol. 2 (Tome I, deuxième partie: “La sculpture bouddhique”) of the texts devotes the entire second section to Longmen (pp. 320–561). It is mainly an annotated translation of 423 inscriptions. At the end of the volume the text of 422 inscriptions (figs. 1274–1695) and the reproduction of eight rubbings (figs. 1732–9—only the last, fig. 1739, is an inscription) from Longmen are found.

later published his memoirs.<sup>6</sup> If we exclude some sporadic papers, it can be said that, after Chavannes, no other Western scholar has made consistent advances in Longmen studies.<sup>7</sup> Eastern Asian scholars, in contrast, have been more and more deeply involved with Longmen and a complete bibliography of their works would occupy considerable space. Let us remember here only the two landmarks constituted by the work of Mizuno and Nagahiro of 1941<sup>8</sup> and the two excellent volumes published in 1987–8 by the Heibonsha publishing house in Tokyo.<sup>9</sup>

The Longmen Caves are situated 12.5km south of Luoyang, Henan Province, China. They are considered one of the three most important repositories of cave art in China together with Dunhuang in Gansu and Yungang in Shanxi. According to the latest calculations, there are 2,345 niches, more than 100,000 statues, more than 2,860 inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> The first dated inscription at Longmen is from 495 (tr. Chavannes, 1915, pp. 473–4), but the beginning of sculptural activity there began in 493 (Taihe 17), when the Northern (or Later) Wei (386–534), under the Emperor Xiaowen, transferred their capital from Pincheng (present day Datong in Shanxi) to Luoyang. As to the end of sculptural activity, his epigraphic study permitted Chavannes to establish that the last really devotional inscription is the one dated to 749 (1914, p. 538; tr. p. 428, rubbing no. 273) and to write that Longmen ceased

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<sup>6</sup> A. Spruyt, “Souvenir d’un voyage à la Montagne Sacrée de Long-men”, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 1 (1931–2), pp. 241–62. There are no few mistakes in Spruyt’s article.

<sup>7</sup> The book, *Les grottes de Loungmen (Honan)*, by Eugenio Pelzeri, Oriental Press, Shanghai, 1923, is of no use for Longmen studies, although it contains many pictures whose value and originality I cannot judge at present. Many translations from the inscriptions are included in the book, but as the author declares (p. 98), they are copied from Chavannes’s work of 1915. Pelzeri, a missionary of the Saverian Institute in Parma (Italy), has, however, the merit of having collected 395 rubbings of Longmen inscriptions which form three albums and have been kept, since 1925, in the valuable Museum of Chinese Art that the Saverian Institute created in Parma. See Giuseppe M. Tbscano, *Museo d’arte cinese di Parma*, Edizioni Franco, Reggio Emilia, 1965, pp. 414a, 423b–424a. Some of the rubbings are reproduced in Toscano’s book, figs. 584–5, 592–4.

<sup>8</sup> Mizuno Seichi and Nagahiro Toshio, *Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* [English title: A Study of the Buddhist Cave-Temples at Lung-men, Ho-nan], Tokyo: Zayūhō, 1941.

<sup>9</sup> *Ryūmon sekkutsu* [The Longmen Grottoes], 2 vols., in the seventeen volume series, *Chūgoku sekkutsu* [Chinese Grottoes]. The two volumes on Longmen are edited by the Longmen Wenwu Baoguan suo [Institute for the Care of Longmen Cultural Properties, the former name of the Longmen Research Institute] and the Beijing Daxue Kaoguxi [Beijing University, Archeological Department], Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987 (Vol. 1), 1988 (Vol. 2). The work is also being published in Chinese as *Longmen shiku*, by the Wenwu publishing house, Peking. To my knowledge, only Vol. 1, published in 1991, has so far appeared.

<sup>10</sup> See Liu Jinglong and Li Xiangmin, “Qianzai yifeng de shenghui” [A Grand Gathering Occurring Only Once in a Thousand Years], *Zhongguo wenwu bao* [Journal of Chinese Cultural Properties], Sept. 5th, 1993, p. 3. Mizuno and Nagahiro, 1941, pp. 365–449, listed 2,429 inscriptions. Wen Yucheng specified in the paper he presented at the symposium (see below) that the number of the inscriptions is 2,839, while in his article, “Longmen shiku” [Longmen Grottoes] for the volume, *Wenwu bowuguan* [Cultural Properties and Museums] of the *Zhongguo da baikē quanshu* [Great Chinese Encyclopedia], 1993, p. 328b, he writes that the inscriptions number 2,780, of which more than 700 are dated.

to be a devotional centre from the mid-8th century (1915, p. 535, note 4). Longmen was, then, a paramount religious and artistic centre for two and half centuries.

The present great vitality of Longmen studies is now sanctioned by the first “International Symposium for the 1500th Anniversary of the Longmen Grottoes” which took place in Luoyang from 6th to 12th September, 1993. The participants numbered one hundred and eighteen from nine countries, mostly from mainland China (84): Taiwan and Japan were also solidly represented (respectively by eleven and ten participants), followed by the United States (five), Germany (three), South Korea (two), Italy (one), Kazakhstan (one) and Singapore (one). Besides the articles which appeared in the other media, the *Zhongguo wenwu bao* [Journal of Chinese Cultural Properties], a national weekly paper devoted to archeology and cultural properties, gave ample space to the event in its 349th issue of September 5, 1993, with articles by Liu Jinglong and Li Xiangmin (respectively director and secretary of the Longmen Research Institute), Wang Zhenguo (vice-director), and Wen Yucheng, a leading historian of the same Institute.

There were sixty-four papers presented at the symposium. Since I have given a summary account of these papers elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> I prefer here to discuss some points connected with the restoration and conservation of Longmen monuments and with the protection of their natural environment. Since Longmen questions should be seen in the context of Luoyang history and present cultural policy, I will briefly touch on some projects which risk transforming the whole Luoyang area into an immense amusement park.

When Chavannes visited Longmen in 1907, the caves were in a state of abandonment. In his lecture of 1908 (p. 514), remarking that some Buddhist religious activity was still carried out at Longmen, he added, “Je dois ajouter, pour être véridique, que le bonze de Longmen sait concilier avec ses devoirs de prêtre le métier plus lucratif de logeur pour fumeurs d’opium, et, pendant la nuit, les grottes ressemblent plus à des tabagies qu’à des sacristies.” His companion Spruyt (p. 262), remembering that many caves had been transformed into opium dens, wrote, “... je me souviens de l’étonnement qui nous saisit lorsque, pour la première fois, nous pénétrâmes dans ces étranges sanctuaires. Dans la pénombre, nous n’avions pas aperçus les fumeurs étendus sur le sol, et nous dûmes enjamber leurs corps pour examiner les parois de la grotte.” Frequently Spruyt spoke of the abandoned state of Longmen (where they stayed night and day for one week) and harshly denounced the destruction by the iconoclasts who broke the statues to sell their heads to unscrupulous collectors (p. 262). But the natural beauty of the place was unspoiled and the same Spruyt (p. 250), remembering their first view of Longmen, wrote, “Lorsque nous nous trouvâmes à l’entrée at dans l’ace du défilé et pûmes embrasser du regard le paysage tout entier, le spectacle qui

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<sup>11</sup> “A Symposium on Longmen Studies, Luoyang, 1993”, *East and West* (to appear).

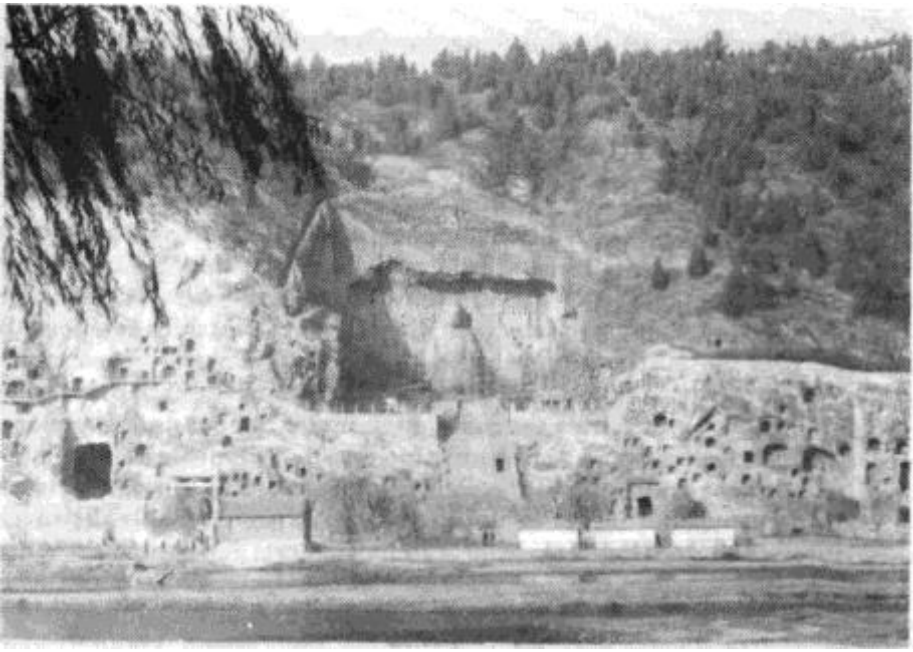
s'offrit à nos regards dépassait en grandeur tout ce que notre imagination avait pu concevoir.”

The period of abandonment and large scale robberies has fortunately finished, since the founding of the Peopled Republic of China in 1949. The creation of a special Institute in 1953 set the start for a new epoch of study and preservation of such a great cultural heritage. The conference of September 1993, then, appropriately also celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the institute established in 1953. Called in 1953, “Longmen Shiku Wenwu Baoguansuo” [Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Properties of the Longmen Grottoes], the Institute changed the original name into “Longmen Shiku Yanjiusuo” [Longmen Grottoes Research Institute] in 1990. For simplicity, we will shorten its name to “Longmen Research Institute” and will use this even for the period before 1990. Staffed initially with only seven persons in all, the Institute has grown in importance little by little and more than seventy persons are now working in it. In these forty years it has done a tremendous amount of work and its members have greatly contributed with their publications to the advancing of Longmen studies. The enthusiasm and the devotion of those who organized the symposium is also indicated by the amount of scholarly work they succeeded in publishing in time for the beginning of the conference. In fact, on arrival in Luoyang all participants were offered five books on Longmen, all published between June and September 1993 by the Shanghai Renmin Meishu publishing house in Shanghai and the Zhongguo Kexue Jishu publishing house in Peking.<sup>12</sup>

Some interventions on the caves are disputable. In order that they may be easily visited, concrete stairs have been constructed everywhere in Longmen. When I first visited the caves in 1974, there were very few such stairs. In November 1989 I was astonished above all by the huge concrete stairs leading to the Fengxian Si Cave, where the Great Vairocana statue is found (see fig. 2, p. 75). In November 1990 ecological changes (see below) were evident. My last visit in September 1993, during the symposium, brought new griefs. The great number of concrete stairs built in the last years has undoubtedly changed the appearance of the caves. But that is not all. The real shock came from the Dragon Palace (see below), something I would never have imagined possible.

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<sup>12</sup> (1) Li Wensheng, *Longmen shiku yu Luoyang lishi wenhua* [The Longmen Caves and Luoyang Historical Civilization], Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu, June 1993; (2) Longmen Shiku Yanjiusuo [Longmen Research Institute] (ed.), *Longmen shiku yanjiu lunwenxuan* [A Selection of Research Articles on the Longmen Caves], Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu, August 1993 (pages 533–40 contain a bibliography of Chinese works on Longmen); (3) Wen Yucheng, *Zhongguo shiku yu wenhua yishu* [Chinese Caves, Civilization and Art], Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu, August 1993; Liu Jinglong (ed.), *Longmen shiku baohu* [The Protection of the Longmen Caves], Peking: Zhongguo Kexue Jishu, Sept. 1993; (5) Longmen Shiku Yanjiusuo [Longmen Research Institute] (ed.), *Longmen liusan diaoxiang ji* [Lost Statues of the Longmen Caves], Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu, August 1993.



*Fig. 2: Longmen. The Fengxian Si Cave and the concrete stairs constructed before 1989. Photograph by L. H. Moramarco (November 1989).*

I must also say that I am rather perplexed by some protective measures that seem to me a little bit too radical, for all the good intentions which may have inspired them. As an example, I will tell here about the inscription of 723 on the northern side of the base of the great statue of Vairocana. The afternoon of the very day of the inauguration of the symposium on September 6th, all the participants were guided to the caves for a first general visit. As we reached the site, I separated myself from the group and skipped the caves for the reason I will explain below. I did not wish, however, to return to Luoyang without having paid at least a hurried visit to the great statue of Vairocana in the cave called after the Fengxian Monastery and to its inscription of 723, which is the only remaining evidence of the origin both of the monastery and of the impressive sculptural complex in the cave. I did not expect that soon after the shock of the Dragon Palace, another shock would be awaiting me. The inscription had disappeared and in its place there was a surface of flat cement. I did not believe my eyes and thought that my memory was betraying me, but Okada Ken, whose presence there I had not yet noticed, observing my bewilderment, confirmed for me that the inscription was no longer there and told me that he too was surprised by its

disappearance. When, on the following day (September 7th) I presented my paper on the origins of the monastery and was speaking about the evidence furnished by the inscription, I profited from the occasion to ask publicly what had become of the inscription. Wen Yucheng, who presided over the session, answered that the inscription had been protected. Two nights later, during a friendly meeting I had with Hu Ji, Geng Chengyong, Wang Bangwei and Deng Wenkuan, Professor Hu Ji told me that after my lecture he had gone to verify on the spot and was assured by a reliable person that the inscription was in its original place, that it had been protected and isolated, and that the cement was applied as a protection. Now, I guess that such a procedure aims at giving the maximum protection to this very important inscription, yet I wonder whether a different solution could not have been found. A protection that definitively buries the inscription under cement and excludes it from the view of all people seems to me too drastic. To all those who knew about its existence and had had the chance to see it before, the first impression was, anyway, that it had disappeared altogether. Probably, however, the restorers had good reasons (which I shall ignore) for doing so. When we consider the thoughtful paper presented at the symposium by Liu Jinglong, Director of the Longmen Research Institute, who follows the principle of the prominent scholar of traditional Chinese architecture, Liang Sicheng (protective measures should be so discrete as to give the impression that they do not exist: the so-called “*you ruo wu*” theory), we feel assured that some good reason must have compelled him to adopt a measure that seems to go against his own principles and could be temporary. Besides, the Longmen Research Institute members on several occasions declared that they are ready to learn from those who have better experience and eagerly seek international support and collaboration in the field of restoration and protection of cultural properties. I was asked by Liu Jinglong for the collaboration of my university, Naples’ Istituto Uaiversitario Orientale, and the setting up of an exchange programme. I initiated the necessary procedures and I hope that the collaboration will be put into effect as soon as possible.

The debate on the protective measures to adopt has also become an important issue beyond the restricted circle of specialists. The scholars and the authorities responsible for Longmen have to deal with the government agencies concerned with the development of tourism, which boldly hold that projects that are solely for protection are unnecessary. Their concern is above all that tourists be able to enter the grottoes and see the carvings inside.

Today, in fact, the work by competent authorities, scholars, and archeologists faces the danger of the enormous input of capital for developing activities of various kinds and from mass tourism. The waters of the river were previously (during my second visit in November 1989) still as clear perhaps as the waters eulogized by Bo Juyi (722–846), the celebrated poet who had established his residence in the eastern hills of Longmen. In November 1990 I wished to share my fascination for the clear waters gently touching

the edge of the path along the western caves, with my daughter Erika on her first visit to the site, but I found them disappointingly dirty (because of a dam?). Then I crossed the bridge and went alone to the eastern side in search of the niche where the monk Baolong (we only know him by his Chinese name) almost thirteen centuries ago put a image of Śākyamuni and left an inscription declaring himself a “disciple of the Three Basket [Master] from Northern India”. The inscription is dated the 1st year of Jingyun, 9th month, 1st day (September 28th, 710). From it we know that he had come to Longmen from the country of Tukhāra (northern Afghanistan) far away in Central Asia, which is the same country from which the monk Mituoshan (Mitraśānta?) had also come to Luoyang carrying a *dhāraṇī* (which he translated into Chinese between 690 and 705, together with the master Fazang, a text fundamental in the history of printing.<sup>13</sup> Baolong’s master must have been Manicintana, a Kashmiri monk who was at that time building on the same side of Longmen a monastery which was inaugurated in 711. “It was built in foreign style and was given the name of [ . . . ] Monastery of India [ . . . ] his disciples also came to dwell in this monastery. In truth, many were the feelings inspired by his purity and sincerity.<sup>14</sup>” The traffic (above all, tracklaying vehicles) on the road along the eastern side of the river was already very heavy in 1990. The air pollution, the vibrations, and the horrible noise amplified by the rocky walls on both sides of the valley rendered my walk on that road very unpleasant indeed. Is the silence enjoyed by Chavannes and his companions in 1907 gone forever? “Quelques barques glissaient silencieusement à la surface de l’eau, tandis qu’un groupe d’ouvriers établis sur un petit îlot, pompaient au moyen d’énormes tuyaux de bambous l’eau d’une mine de charbon toute proche.”<sup>15</sup> Leur chant rythmé troublait seul le silence.”<sup>16</sup> Must economic development necessarily destroy beauty?

Every new visit to Longmen seems to bring new griefs. My worst surprise in 1993 came on September 6th, the afternoon of the very day of inauguration of the symposium, when all the participants were brought by bus to the caves. We entered the western side of the valley from the north. Since time was limited, I skipped all the caves and their magnificent sculptures, which I had seen in my previous visits, and went directly to the most southern part,

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<sup>13</sup> See my, “Scieaza e tecnica”, in: *Dalla dinastia Han a Marco Polo*, Milan: Electa, 1986, pp. 38–48. In that paper I wrote that the *dhāraṇī* was translated into Chinese in 704. Actually we do not know the exact date of translation, which took place sometime between 690 and 705. An English translation of this paper was published without my control. It is full of mistakes. See, “Science and Techniques [sic]”, in: *China and Venice: From the Han Dynasty to Marco Polo*, Milan: Electa, 1986, pp. 36–49.

<sup>14</sup> See my, “The Activities in China of the Tantric Master Manicintana (Pao-ssu-wei: ?–721) from Kashmir and of his Northern Indian Collaborators”, and N.S. 34.1–3 (Sept. 1984), p.313. At the time I worked on this paper, I did not know of the niche with Baolag’s inscription.

<sup>15</sup> See Chavannes, 1909, Vol. 4, fig. 961.

<sup>16</sup> Spruyt, 1931–2, p. 250.

where I had never been before. My intention was above all to verify whether south of the caves there was a space large enough where a Great Monastery could have been built in the 7th century. I was (and still am) convinced in fact that the Great Fengxian Monastery originally stood somewhere south of the caves, in a low and large place near the river.<sup>17</sup> Upon approaching the southern entrance, however, I felt a menacing look from on high (see fig. 3, p. 79). I raised my eyes and I saw a gigantic, monstrous concrete dragon. It was a real shock to me and for a moment I thought that it could not be true. Unfortunately it was true. Once out of the southern gate of the cave complex, I came near to the huge walled space where the dragon was. Above the gate, the two characters Longgong (Dragon Palace) were written; on a panel beside it, it was explained that the so-called palace had been completed very recently. My hypothesis that there was a large space for a Great Monastery was confirmed (assuming that the bed of the river had not changed much since), but, Alas! where once the Great Fengxian Monastery had possibly stood with its magnificent halls and pagodas, now there was only the Longgong with its concrete dragon.

As I also wished to know where the Weiwan Village was (I wondered what the origin of the name Wei for the bend of the river which gave the village its name, could be), I asked a man if it was far and in which direction. He said to me that it was very near and showed me a large path along the southern slopes of the Longmen hill. After a short walk I reached the Luoyi gonglu public route, saw the village on the left and went towards it. From the elevated place of the route I could see from the west the palace and its dragon. If before, when I saw it from the front side, only the height of the head had bewildered me, now I could see the dragon in all its colossal dimensions. The sweet and harmonious natural beauty of the valley is spoiled, the view on the eastern hill vilified; nature has been rudely violated by a monstrosity that one cannot imagine as the product of a sane mind.

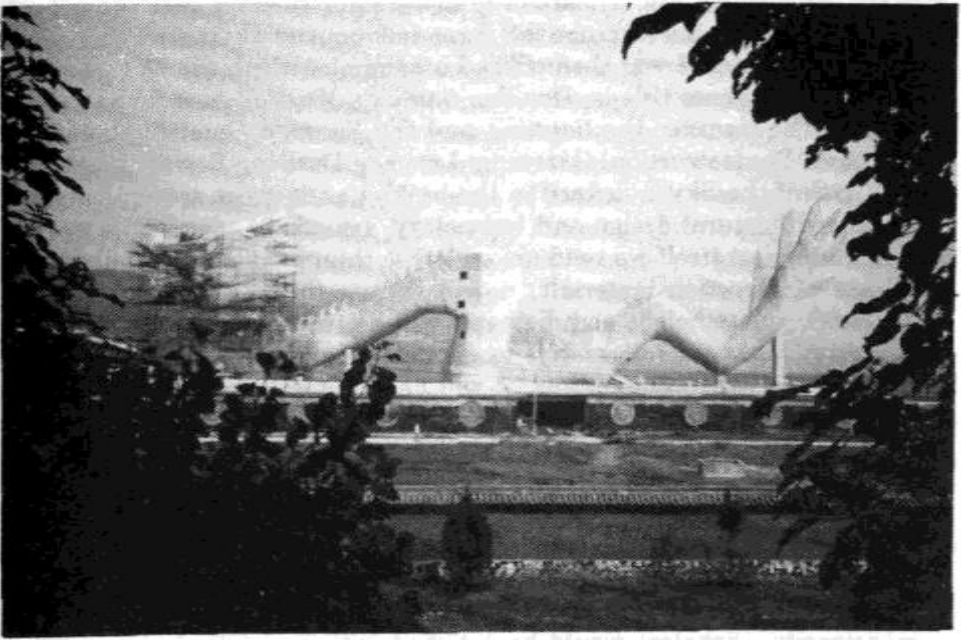
I have especially dealt here with the case of Longgong, but I must say that many other reasons to be worried exist. During the days we were in Luoyang for the symposium, all participants could see here and there in the town strange colourful constructions which reminded us of the fantastic castles we had read about in fairy tales when we were children. I have nothing particular against these sorts of fairy land or disneylands if they do not destroy a natural spot and do not spoil the city. But it does not seem to me that the ones I have seen should be considered a positive achievement for Luoyang.

There is, in addition, the question of the reconstruction in Luoyang of the “three heavenly” (*santian*) monuments of Empress Wu’s time, that is the

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<sup>17</sup> See my, “The Origins and Role of the Great Fengxian Monastery at Longmen”, to appear in the volume(s) of the papers presented at the symposium, being edited by the Longmen Research Institute.





*Fig. 3: Longmen. The huge concrete dragon in the Longgong. Photograph by Antonino Forte (September 1993).*

Axis of the Sky (*tianshu*), the Hall of Heaven (*tiantang*) and the Yingtian Gate. Since 1981 I have studied two of these monuments, the *tianshu* and the *tiantang*, and I have published some results of my studies. As to the *tianshu*, it had attracted the attention of scholars in Japan, France (by Granet, especially, in his last, unfinished and unpublished work, *Le Roi boit*<sup>18</sup>), and Hong Kong before me, but only recently have mainland Chinese scholars become aware of its importance. Yang Zhengxing's contributions of 1985 and 1987 on the subject are considered important. I have not yet seen Yang Zhengxing's papers, but they inspired other studies and, surprisingly, an ambitious project is probably due to this scholarly rediscovery of the ancient monument.

In November 1990, when I visited the Luoyang Capital Museum (Luoyang Ducheng Bowuguan), which had recently been established, I was astonished to see well in evidence on the wall to the right of the entrance a large colour picture reproducing the three monuments of Empress Wu's time, one of which

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<sup>18</sup> R. A. Stein, "Présentation de l'œuvre posthume de Marcel Granet: 'Le Roi boit'", *L'Année sociologique*, 1952, p. 77.

was the Axis of the Sky. I learned to my greater surprise that the project had been set up to reconstruct the three monuments exactly as they were seen in the picture. I was then offered a pamphlet which the Museum had just published, whose title is, *Tianshu, tiantang, Yingtianmen fuyuan shuomingshu* [The *tianshu*, the *tiantang* and the Yingtian Gate: Explanations About their Reconstruction] (Luoyang: Luoyang Ducheng Bowuguan, 1990).

The Axis of the Sky is defined in the booklet as “a great accomplishment of Tang architectural design and technology, something rare in the world”. About the project itself we read among other things that “principally using available construction materials, it will imitate the effects of bronze and iron. However, its height and diameter will be twice as big, then it will be 67.2 metres high and 7.68 metres in diameter. Inside will be put elevators and stairs and when climbing it, it will be possible to have a view of the beautiful scenery of the Luo River and far over to Mount Song and Longmen. The inside of the iron mountain will be empty and a long corridor will run around the Axis of the Sky. There will be shops, bars and restaurants for the convenience of tourists. Such an architectural monument could compare favourably with Paris’ Tour Eiffel and Pisa’s Leaning Tower in Italy.”

These words need no commentary. It is clearly a project to attract tourists and one is left wondering about the forthcoming results, which risk becoming a monstrosity. Scholars would be satisfied with a simple design or by a reduced scale model. Yet, provided that it is a faithful reconstruction and the curious idea of doubling its proportions and putting in bars and restaurants is abandoned, it is not a bad idea to reconstruct the Axis of the Sky. After all, we are accustomed in Japan to the acceptable results of reconstructed ancient castles.<sup>19</sup>

The real problem is, however, to know how far the reconstruction will be faithful. It is clear that only deep historical research would permit maximum fidelity. Now, from the illustration that appeared in the pamphlet published in 1990 by the Luoyang Capital Museum, it does not seem to me that the historical research was at that moment so advanced. Besides, the historians with whom I spoke at the museum did not know that the Axis of the Sky is mentioned in a stele that was discovered at the beginning of the century near Luoyang. The stele has revealed that it was a Persian named Aluohan (Middle Persian Warhrān?) who “asked the kings of the barbarians to build the Axis of the Sky”. It happened at that time that I had taken with me

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<sup>19</sup> I have dealt with the Axis of the Sky in 1981 and 1988 (see the book quoted in the following note 20, pp. 233–49; the references to the paper of 1981 will also be found there). Recently I presented a paper at the 38th International Conference of Orientalists in Japan, May 22nd, 1993, where I publicly expressed some of the above opinions. See “On the Persian Warhrān (616–710), Promoter of the Axis of the Sky, Messenger of China to the Byzantine Empire”. The paper was not published, but was distributed to all those who joined the Conference. A new version (“On the So-called Abraham from Persia: A Case of Mistaken Identity”) will appear in *L’Inscription Nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou: A Posthumous Work by Paul Pelliot*, Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 1994.

a photocopy of the text of the stele as given in the 21st *juan* of the *Taozhai cangshi ji*, published in 1909. I showed the copy to Su Jian, who took note of this, but I do not know if he used thereafter the evidence concerning Aluohan. Of course, although Aluohan's stele is very important as a historical source, it does not give any information concerning the aspect, shape, material or decoration of the Axis of the Sky, therefore it is useless for the reconstruction. This is not the case with another piece of data which was ignored. In fact, Fayun (1088–1158) in the 6th *juan* of his *Fanyi mingyi ji*, quoting an earlier source, clearly says that the character *wan* became a Chinese character in the second Changshou year (December 14th, 692, to December 2nd, 693) of the Great Zhou, and was written on the Axis of the Sky (see the Taisho edition, Vol. 54, p. 1147a2–7). This is very important historical evidence for many reasons. It confirms, for example, that the Axis of the Sky was above all a Buddhist monument. The character *wan* was an essential part of the great bronze pillar erected by Empress Wu because it symbolized the universality and pacifism of her rule. In an eventual reconstruction it cannot be excluded.

In conclusion, if it is decided that one should proceed with the project for the reconstruction of the Axis of the Sky, I hope that at least it will be done only after careful investigations have been completed and that it will be in accordance with the sources.

When we consider how difficult it is to reconstruct a monument like the Axis of the Sky, on which we have a considerable amount of evidence and which, after all, was not very big, we may understand how difficult it would be to reconstruct other huge monuments about which we know very little indeed. This is the case, for instance, with the *tiantang*. I have collected and discussed all the material I was able to find in my book of 1988,<sup>20</sup> which I sent soon after its publication to Bai Xianchang (in charge of the Supervising Board for the Protection of Cultural Properties in Luoyang) and personally offered to several scholars and archeologists in Luoyang during my visit in November 1989. Now I am certain that it would be extremely arduous to reconstruct the *tiantang*, not only because of its extraordinarily large dimensions, but also because we do not yet know very essential information regarding its real height, the measures of the base, etc.

It is certainly a sign of Luoyang's great vitality to conceive of such projects and I am sure that they will greatly stimulate historical research and awareness of the historical past among the people. However, concerned scholars and authorities should be very careful before deciding to proceed with the reconstructions, especially when they appear inspired by a sort of megalomania

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<sup>20</sup> *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock: The Tower, Statue and Armillary Sphere Constructed by Empress Wu*, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (Serie Orientale Roma, Vol. LIX), École Française d'Extrême-Orient (Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Vol. CXLV), Rome and Paris, 1988.

as in the case of the great tycoon from Hong Kong who intends to finance the reconstruction of the Tang Luoyang imperial palace on the Mangshan hills north of Luoyang. Here again the fidelity of the ancient model would be very difficult indeed to achieve. Besides, the Mangshan hills are a rich archeological site and a scenic spot which should be protected from highly questionable enterprises.

My impression is that both the Supervising Board for the Protection of Cultural Properties in Luoyang and the Longmen Research Institute as well as many excellent scholars from the Luoyang area and other parts of China are fighting a hard battle against those interested in new development projects. Coming back to the caves, Wen Yucheng, of the Longmen Research Institute, one of the best specialists in Longmen studies, from the pages of the weekly *Zhongguo wenwu bao* [Journal of Chinese Cultural Properties], which devoted to the 1500th anniversary of Longmen the whole third page of its issue of September 5th, 1993 (the day before the beginning of the symposium), implicitly denounced the danger to Longmen coming from the “veneration for money” in China during the eighties and the nineties.<sup>21</sup>

Let us hope that reason will prevail. In the meanwhile, let us do our best in order to help our colleagues in China win their hard struggle against myopia and insensitivity.

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<sup>21</sup> See his, “Sishi nian de yanjiu chengguo” [The Result of Forty Years of Research], *Zhongguo wenwu bao*, September 5th, 1993, p. 3.