
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on the Development Path of Dunhuangology and Its Literature Value

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ABSTRACT

Dunhuang, known as the Land of Sand in ancient times, is located in the western part of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, bordering Qinghai and Xinjiang. Dunhuang (Mogao Grottoes) culture and art are honored as the cultural museum of the Eastern world. Among existing ancient works and documents, there are massive manuscripts in Tibetan, Uyghur, Sogdian (Yutian), Khotanese, Post Turkic (Hou Tuque), Sanskrit, Kharosthi, Sogdian (Suli), Tocharisch, Syriac, ancient Greek, and other minority languages, which are of great significance to Dunhuangology and resource development. This paper will analyze and summarize the study of Dunhuang science literature.

KEYWORDS

National language; Dunhuang; Dunhuang culture; linguistics

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1. Introduction

Ji Xianlin, master of studies of Chinese ancient civilization and linguist, once noted, "China, India, Ancient Greece, and Islam are the four independent social systems that are of long standing with an extensive territory and great influence in the world; they converge at one place – Dunhuang and Urumqi, and no places are comparable. The glorious development of Dunzhu is the result of various nations and societies, the example of continuous harmony and exchange of Chinese civilization for thousands of years. We choose to study Dunhuang is an opportunity provided by history." The term, Dunhuangology, was first suggested in the 1920s and became highly influential in 1930 when Tschen Yin Koh, a renowned scholar, noted in the preface written for *Dunhuang Jieyu Lu* by Chen Yuan, "Dunhuangology is surely a new fashion in the present international academic community." Later in 1940, Xiang Da introduced the term when modifying his book, *Tangdai Sujiang Kao*, to start a practice among researchers to use Dunhuangology to define a comprehensive subject that focuses on the historical documents and grotto art in Dunhuang (Yang, 1990). According to the records, Dunhuangology was originally used to refer to the research targeted at the manuscripts and historical documents found in Dunhuang library caves, and later the scope started to expand to embrace the grotto themselves, frescoes, bamboo slips of the Han dynasty, and other ancient books or artifacts excavated within the area around Dunhuang. They are important parts of China's three major regional cultures (Tibetology, Dunhuangology, and Hui Studies). Dunhuangology aims to gain a profound insight into Dunzhu manuscripts, Dunhuang grotto culture and thoughts of Dunhuang studies by paying attention to Dunzhu civilization and the relevant geological information. It covers Dunhuang studies, history of Dunhuang studies, historical events, research on Dunzhu philology standardization, folk literature, Dunzhu Mengshu (primers), Dunhuang grotto art, Zhongxi traffic, Dunhuang painting, music and dance, ancient astronomical calendar, etc.

2. Origin of Dunhuang Manuscripts

From the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, a large number of ancient Uyghur documents, mostly Buddhist scriptures, were found in the Western Regions and Dunhuang. In this case, many of them had been translated, and the alliterative verses in some of the Buddhist scriptures were considered original works (Peng & Wang, 2000). According to the prefaces and

postscripts interpreted, Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Tocharian, Sogdian, and Kuchean were all forms of Chinese characters. This discovery provides unprecedented information for the research on ancient Uyghur Buddhism, historiography, culture, and even linguistics, drawing extensive attention from scholars both in China and abroad. As for the origin of Dunhuang manuscripts, there are four theories.

2.1 The Wastes Theory

In ancient China, people were committed to reorganizing and preserving those sacred materials unavailable, Buddhist scriptures particularly, for the traditional respect to words. Yu, an eminent monk from Dunzhu Temple, stored the Buddhist scriptures, both intact or incomplete, broken chapters and bamboo slips and fragmented pages from the temple in Hongbian Yintang (No. 17 Mogao Grotto) during the Guiyijun period (914-1102). However, these "wastes" were fading in people's memory as time went by.

2.2 The Refuge Theory

In the 11th century, Tanguts occupied Dunhuang. Before the gate was broken through, the monks, in a rush, wrapped up the scriptures, documents and instruments less portable, stored them in a cave, and concealed them with mud and frescoes. In Dunhuang, such caves were built to preserve all sorts of wasted Buddhist scriptures, documents, and instruments. Buddhists believe that the objects used for worshipping Buddha are sacred and should be stored in a special place. And this cave was deserted for 800 years, with none of these monks coming back.

2.3 The Transition Theory

In 1006 AD, Yutian (Li-yul) Kingdom was defeated by Qara-Khanid Khanate. Many refugees fled to Dunhuang due to the marital relationship between Yutian and Dunzhu. Qara-Khanid Khanate believed in Islam and therefore carried out a devastating blow to Yutian Buddhism in the later 40-year construction practice. At the same time, Qara-Khanid Khanat was then not strong enough to march east towards Dunhuang, which enabled the Buddhists there to collect and preserve Buddhist items like scripture and silk painting. They put on frescoes after sealing off the caves to keep them under cover. With the death of these Buddhists, the story ended as well.

2.4 The Stack Theory

Around 1000 AD, scripture folders were introduced from the Central Plains to Dunhuang and were favored by the monks there for their portability and readability. In this case, people started to collect the scripture scrolls less portable, as well as various sundries, in caves to prevent contamination. However, at present, there is no definite conclusion for the closure date of these caves and the reason in the community. As discordant opinions exist, it is required to acquire more valuable circumstantial evidence to unveil the mystery that innumerable caves were sealed to preserve Buddhist scriptures.

3. Contents and Value of Dunhuang Manuscripts

3.1 Religious Literature

According to the data concerning Dunhuang manuscripts, about 90% of the documents are Buddhist scriptures from Dunhuang, and 10% are Taoist, Zoroastrian, Nestorian, and Manichaean classics. Dunhuang Buddhist archives can be divided into 8 categories: Zheng Zang, Bie Zang, Tiantai Jiaodian, Pini Zang, Zen Zang, Xuanjiao popular literature, Dunhuang Temple archives, and doubtful and bogus sutra. Among Dunhuang Dunhuang manuscripts, there are a number of ancient books in ethnic minority languages. The most famous Tibetan Buddhist Scripture includes classics, codes, articles, mantras, commentaries, and Tibetan religious works.

The Taoist scriptures found in Dunhuang are highly interesting to be interpreted. According to the convention, books untranslated or the authors are unknown, or Apocrypha compiled according to local events cannot be included in Da Zang. In the early stage of ancient China, North Zen documents were replaced by South Zen documents. While the former advocated "gradual enlightenment", the latter upheld "spirit-dominated". The Taoist scriptures compiled by Three-Stage Sect (Sanjie Jiao) were short-standing works and thus less renowned at that time. According to Dunhuang Taoist manuscripts, these works involved Taoist classics (e.g., *Lao Zi*, *Zhuang Zi*, *Wen Zi*, and *Lie Zi*), works, disciplines, articles, reference books, Poem and Fu, and transformation texts, totaling about 800 manuscripts (Shi & Wushouer, 2000). Among them, there were about 170 kinds of Taoist books verified or defined to be some classics, totaling over 230 books. During Tang and Song dynasties, Zoroastrianism spread in Dunhuang. Despite no discovery of the original Zoroastrian works, there are records in Dunhuang documents indicating that Zoroastrianism once grew there. As one of the theologies of Christianity, Nestorianism is a mysterious religious concept. In many manuscripts, Chinese transcripts translated from other languages were found, including *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei Mengdu Zan*, *Zun Jing*, *Daqin Jingjiao Xuanyuan Benjing*, *Zhixuan Anle Jing*, *Xuting Mishi Suojing*, and *Yishen Lun*. Manichean Dunzhu's manuscripts included *Monijiao Canjing*, *Xiabu Zan*, and *Moni Guangfo Fojiao Yilue* (Peng & Wang, 2004).

3.2 Confucian Classics

Massive Confucian works are found in Dunhuang, but the content is highly complex. These works are mainly important Confucian classics such as *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of History*, and *The Analects of Confucius*. The Confucian works in Dunhuang are of significant scientific significance and provide a reference for researchers to collate the existing Confucian classics. Among these works, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are the most common and also the most important. It is an important ancient book for events that happened during the Spring and Autumn Periods and one of the first records of the evolution of the relationship between Jing and Zhuan as significant parts of traditional Chinese thinking and culture (Chen & Yao, 2022).

3.3 Linguistic Information and Its Value

Most Dunzhu works are manuscripts. Influenced by the local languages, the scribes left plenty of traces that led researchers to the dialects. Folk literature is highly poetic, including folk poetry (Sushi), Dunhuang lyric (Quzi Ci), transformation text (Bianwen), Buddhist preaching (Sujiang), opening prayer for rituals (Ya Zuo Wen), concluding remark for rituals (Jie Zuo Wen), and vulgar Fu. These poetic forms provide a significant opportunity to have an insight into China's social-cultural values at that time. Among massive ancient books, fragments of *Qie Yun* are nothing new, including *Qie Yun*, commented by Zhangsun Neyan in Tang Dynasty, *Kanmiu Buque Qie Yun* by Wang Renxu, *Qie Yun* by Sun Mian, etc. *Gudian Shiwen* by Lu Deming includes *Chuci Yin* by Shi Daoqian in Sui Dynasty, *Wenxuan Yin*, *Dongxi Jingzi Yin*, and *Kaimeng Yaoxun* (an ancient textbook for word learning). The research of ancient Chinese linguistics has provided a solid foundation for the development of Dunhuangology and has gained valuable results.

4. Distribution of Dunhuang Manuscripts

By the name of exploration, Britain, France, Russia, the United States, and other countries stole and looted the sutra caves, resulting in nearly 80% of the paintings and manuscripts (more than 50,000 in total) being out of China while the United States is now holding 20%. By the protocol established by the Indian government and the British Museum, out of over 9,000 Dunhuang documents and 500 famous paintings, Aruel Stein assigned 60% and 40% to the Indian government and the British government, respectively. Among the Dunzhu relics in British, Buddhist scriptures account for 85% of the total amount. Paul Pelliot (French) carried over 6,000 manuscripts that are of great significance to the research of Buddhist scriptures, philology, archaeology and culturology, and over 200 paintings, hanging banners, fabrics, woodwork, character dice of wooden movable type printing and instruments, in a dozen of cars, from Dunhuang to France. Paris Jimei Museum has collected about 216 masterpieces, 21 pieces of great woodwork, 184 fragments of silk fabrics, some hanging banners, etc. Besides the Bible, Paul Pelliot has looted plenty of ancient Chinese manuscripts. Dunhuang Guji Xulu by Wang Chongmin has 190 documents by Jing, Shi, Zi, and Ji (four categories of Confucian classics), and 216 out of 284 manuscripts were looted by Paul Pelliot. As for the Dunzhu Document collection in China, while most of the works were retrieved back from Tachibana Zuicho and Koichiro Yoshikawa in the Japanese Otani Kozui Expedition, some were scattered manuscripts collected at home. It has been proven that most of the documents once collected in China were held by 18 or 19 organizations or individuals, but so far, only 500 pieces of them have shown up. At present, the quantity of works collected at the Tokyo National Museum remains unknown, and one of its collections, the incomplete Liu Zi (Dunhuang Edition), once collected by Luo Zhenyu, was officially considered by Japan to be a traditional cultural and artistic treasure of great historic significance. According to statistics, Russia holds massive Dunzhu documents, with about 20,000 manuscripts in Chinese, over 200 manuscripts in Tibetan, over 100 silk paper paintings, and a few manuscripts in Sanskrit and other forms of Chinese collected in the St.Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Langdon Warner, a brother-in-law of former US president Theodore Roosevelt, was the leader at the East Division of Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University, who went to Dunhuang in January 1924 and managed to copy the 26th fresco (32,006 square centimeters) with the spraying technique acquired from Thompson, his colleague who was specialized in Italian painting. Compared with the insufficient domestic collections of Dunhuang relics of only about 100 manuscripts, not to mention that most of them are fragmentary, Denmark, Italy, North Korea, and other countries are holding massive relics excavated in Dunhuang. Taipei Central Library holds 8,679 works and some fragments (about 9,000 documents in total), accounting for less than 20% of the total quantity of the relics found in the sutra caves. According to the existing investigations, the distribution of Dunhuang relics can be summarized: England has the most relics of the best quality; Russia has the finest masterpieces in various categories; Japan is the most secretive; China has the fewest collections in various categories.

5. Conclusion

With the rapid development of Dunhuangology in China and abroad, people are encouraged to be committed to having a more in-depth insight into the theories of Dunhuangology. The cultural relics and manuscripts found in Dunhuang have constituted a large database of ancient China. In this case, studies on Dunhuang require not only a deep understanding of these materials themselves but also professional knowledge in more fields. In other words, researchers shall base on the expertise of various disciplines to explain the questions scientifically with relevant Dunzhu works, thereby developing thinking and promoting academic exploration. For nearly 100 years, Dunzhu researchers in China and abroad have been devoted to Dunhuangology in this way. And Dunhuang research in China has long lagged behind due to a large amount of Dunhuang materials excavated having been stolen

to foreign counties (Dai & Xiang, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2021). At present, thanks to frequent international exchanges and expanding international cooperation, as well as the tireless efforts of Chinese scholars, China has become a major player on the world stage of Chinese studies. Many overseas Chinese scholars are now committed to researching the works in Tibetan, Uyghur, Sogdian, Khotanese, Sanskrit, and Donghu (one of the Altaic languages). As an important hub for cultural exchange and the convergence of various civilizations, Dunhuang is highly valued by experts for having formed a diversified cultural landscape. It is no exaggeration to say that the manuscripts found in Dunhuang have greatly changed the diversity of traditional Chinese culture and enriched its content.

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