

REMARKS ON CHINESE SOURCES CONCERNING DIVĀKARA (613-688)

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Chronologically Divākara 地婆訶羅 was the first outstanding importer and translator of Buddhist sacred texts from Sanskrit into Chinese after Xuānzang 玄奘 (d. 664) and before a remarkable group of late seventh and early eighth century translators whose major representatives were the Indian Bodhiruci (d. 727), the Khotanese Śikṣānanda (652-710) and Yijing 義淨 (635-713).

Given the position he came to occupy, Divākara had to play a role that I would like to try to understand. Here, however, I will not be able to deal with all the aspects of Divākara's role and activities, and instead I will focus on three points. I will first (a) introduce the available sources on his biography, discussing their respective value in order to try to reconstruct as much as possible correct biographical information on Divākara. Next (b) I will summarize the biographical information that these sources afford us, without entering into a discussion of how the information itself was selected. There are many problematic points in trying to understand Divākara's position and contribution to East Asian Buddhism. For example, is his doctrinal position to be situated more in the Yogācāra sphere or in the Abhidharma or Avataṃsaka one? And why did his biographers insist that he was an expert in *dhāraṇī*? Relevant to this point is the most intriguing question we face when dealing with Divākara, (c) the attribution to him of two or three versions of the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the High Victory of the Buddha's Sinciput* (*Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經, Sk. *Buddhoṣṇīśa vijaya dhāraṇī sūtra*) and his alleged direct involvement even in Buddhapālita's 佛陀波利 version. It is in this connection that Divākara's role appears most problematic. How far the relevant material is reliable and why he should have been so deeply implicated in the diffusion of a text that he did not bring from India and did not introduce to China and which was, instead, as explicitly stated, brought from the so-called Jibin 犧賓 by Buddhapālita?

(a) Available sources on Divakara's biography

Concerning biographical evidence on Divākara, we can only rely on a certain number of literary sources that, in some cases, are based on at least one epigraphical source. As to the original funerary inscription that must have been engraved for his tomb at Longmen 龍門, eleven kilometers south of Luoyang 洛

陽, in 688, at the time of his funeral, there is no trace of it, nor is it ever mentioned in any of our sources. There is evidence, instead, of the inscription carved between 690 and 705, whose text might have been written by Wu Sansi 武三思 (d. u.), a nephew of Wu Zhao 武曌 (d. 705), who was the promoter of the construction of the Xiangshansi 香山寺 monastery around the octagonal pagoda containing the remains of Divākara at Longmen (see p.80), or by some person related to him.

The inscription was perhaps still extant in 988 when Zanning 賛寧 (919-1001) published a short biography on Divākara, for which he likely availed himself of the information contained in the inscription (see below). My hypothesis is based on Zanning's choice of title for the biography in question, and it is all the more likely because he attests, at his time, to existence of Divākara's stupa, where, I believe, the inscription must have been placed.

Earlier than the text of this inscription, which is no longer extant today but was supposedly used by Zanning, the undoubtedly earliest extant biography on Divākara had been written. It is found in the *Huayan jing zhuanji* 華嚴經傳記 (Records of the *Avataṃsaka sūtra* Tradition) that Fazang 法藏 (643-712) probably wrote in 690, but updated later, including in it the biography of Śikṣānanda (652-710) (Shichantanuo 實叉難陀 or Shiqichantanuo 施乞叉難陀).¹ The biography of Divākara must have been written before 16 October 690, still during the Tang dynasty, as indicated both by the way the Chinese translation of Divākara's name is given (地婆訶羅, 唐言日照: "Divākara, in Tang called Rizhao")² and by the fact that the titles and terms he used in this biography are consistent with those in use before the foundation of the Zhou dynasty on 16 October 690. The biography contains, however, a final addition which is later because it mentions the founding of the monastery built around Divākara's stupa—which, in my opinion, must have taken place during the Zhou 周 dynasty (690-705) (see p.80), before 696. This biography, besides being the earliest extant account on Divākara, is also comparatively the most detailed among the extant biographies, and it is my intention to discuss and comment on it fully on another occasion. Fazang certainly knew much more of Divākara's life than he put in writing in this biography and therefore we can only regret that, after all, he was so stingy with information he provided. But it is also true that he did not intend to write a detailed biography on Divākara in this work. It must be added that the information on Divākara afforded by Fazang is not only in this biography. Further information is, in fact, found both in other parts of the same *Huayan jing zhuanji* and in some of Fazang's exegetical works. In general, then, we may consider ourselves lucky that Fazang, who was a very attentive observer and precise in his descriptions of what he saw, besides being a collaborator of Divākara, has left us a remarkable amount of information on this Indian master

¹ On the date suggested for this Fazang's work, see Forte, *A Jewel in Indra's Net*, 2000, p. 56.

² If the biography had been written during the Zhou we would expect that Fazang write: 地婆訶羅, 周言日照, "Divākara, in Zhou called Rizhao."

about whom India itself, as far as I am aware from my poor knowledge of this country, seems to have not conserved the slightest trace.

Forty years later, in 730, two records on Divākara were published by the Buddhist monk Zhisheng 智昇 (d. after 730) in his two works, *Xu Gujin yijing tu ji* 續古今譯經圖紀 (Continuation of the Illustrated Chronicle of [the Masters] who translated texts past and present)³ and *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (Kaiyuan Era Catalogue of the Śākyā Teaching). Unfortunately, these two records are both very meagre, besides being substantially identical. However, in addition to helping us to establish Divākara's date of arrival in China, which for some reason had been neglected by Fazang, these works are important because both of them list the translations of Divākara included in the canon in 730. The *Kaiyuan Catalogue*, in particular, often furnishes the date and the place of the translations. Concerning the translations and the circumstances surrounding the completion of some of them, however, Zhisheng is not our only source of our information. We can often rely on coeval documents, which I will examine separately on another occasion.

Next we have the biographical record found in the *Song Gao seng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Song Lives of Eminent Monks), by Zanning 賢寧 (919-1001). Although chronologically this record is much later than the ones mentioned so far, it is probably based on a very early source. Zanning does not explicitly quote the inscription of 690-705 mentioned above, but we may infer that his record must have been based on such an inscription. It would have been rather peculiar, in fact, if in the tenth century, when he published his work, Zanning had decided to entitle his record on Divākara as follows:

周西京廣福寺日照傳.⁴

Biography of Rizhao of the Guangfu Monastery 廣福寺 in Xijing (Western Capital) of the Zhou.

Zhou 周 here certainly indicates the dynasty founded by Wu Zhao 武曌 (d. 705)⁵ in 690, which replaced the Tang dynasty until 705 when the latter was restored. The fact that here the Zhou dynasty is mentioned, although, as we shall see, Divākara died in 688, when the Tang dynasty was still in power, is very relevant because it shows, in my opinion, that the source for Zanning's record was a document, likely a stone inscription on Divākara of the so-called *taming* 塔銘 (stupa epitaph) type, of the period of the Zhou dynasty. And it is remarkable that Zanning maintained the above title for the biography, although he knew, as

³ *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 9.570a3-571a3; *Xu Gujin yijing tuji*, pp. 371a15-c23.

⁴ *Song gaoseng zhuan* 2.719a18.

⁵ The new form Zhao 曜 of the personal name of the empress took the place of Zhao 照 on 18 December 689. See Forte, "Scrittura e ideologia in cina" (to appear).

clearly stated in the biography itself, that Divākara worked until the end of the Chuigong era, and although he was even able to specify Divākara's age at his death. It is true that Zanning does not state when Divākara died, but I presume that he knew that the Indian monk died during the Tang. Besides, the records ends with the information that Divākara was buried at Longmen and that his "stupa is extant" (塔見存焉). This suggests that Zanning (or his source) might have based himself precisely on the stupa inscription. As to the reason why during the Zhou dynasty an epigraph containing Divākara's biographical information should have been carved, one might suggest that it was erected on the occasion of the foundation of the Xiangshansi monastery. As a matter of fact, we may deduce from Fazang's final addition to Divākara's biography that the monastery was founded during the Zhou dynasty (see below). This explains why, then, the record by Zanning explicitly refers to the Zhou. As for the name Guangfusi 廣福寺 by which Divākara's monastery is indicated in the Zanning's record, Hongfusi 弘福寺 must be intended, as I will show on another occasion.

Zanning had little to add to what both Fazang and Zhisheng had already written, also probably because he does not quote the whole text of the inscription but limits himself to summarizing it. However, the little he added is important in order to establish several crucial points of Divākara's life (his date of birth, the date of his request to translate the Sanskrit texts into Chinese, his presence in Luoyang at the time, his subsequent official status as Trepitaka of the Hongfusi in Chang'an) that had been left unanswered by all the other sources. This is because, if I am correct, Zanning's record was based on the stone inscription of the late seventh century placed at Divākara's stupa at Longmen.

Some random information is given by Zhipan 志磐 in his much later (13th century) *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (A General Chronicle on Buddha and Patriarchs), but his information has to be well pondered before being accepted.

Finally, we have to consider that the historian of Buddhism Juean 覺岸 (b. in 1286 - d. after 1355) in his *Shishi jigu lüe* 釋氏稽古略 (Compendium of Search for the Past of the Śākyā Clan), completed in 1355, following his very short entry⁶ on Divākara supplies the name of his source as a *ben zhuan* 本傳 ("main biography" or "his biography"). The entry is so short that it is impossible to establish what kind of source it was. One might think that he referred to Divākara's biography in Zanning's *Song gaoseng zhuan*, but Zanning does not specify that Divākara arrived in China "at the beginning of Yifeng" (儀鳳初), as Juean states instead. From this it might be surmised that here *ben zhuan* 本傳 refers to some other unknown source.

Besides these sources written after Divākara's death, we may rely on some sources of the time when Divākara was still alive, like Yancong's preface of 682 and Empress Wu's preface of 685, for first hand information. They will be discussed in due course.

(b) A summary of biographical information on Divākara

Divākara was born in 613 in a Brahman family of the region referred to by the Chinese sources as Central India, and entered the monastic life as an adolescent. He resided at the Mahābodhi and Nālandā monasteries. It is possible that at the Nālandā Monastery, when he was almost thirty or even before, he met Xuānzang. In any case Divākara knew about Xuānzang while in India, and was influenced by his example both in the pursuit of his own studies and in his positive perception of China. We also know that he travelled in what the Chinese sources call “south India” at some point in his life.

Having come to know of the favorable attitude of the Chinese court towards Buddhism, he decided to go to China. It is possible that it was Yījīng, who was in India from March 673, who invited him to go to China. Divākara must have left India in late 675 or early 676 and, likely travelling along the sea route, arrived in Luoyang, presumably through Canton, in 676 or early 677, in any case, after that the court had left Luoyang for Chang'an on 10 May 676.

In Luoyang he presumably stayed at the Taiyuan Monastery 太原寺, which had recently (in 675 or early 676) been founded by Empress Wu for the posthumous well-being (*zhuiifu* 追福) of her mother. The monk Chūyī 處一 (fl. 670-693), a friend of Yījīng, who is attested to as *duweina* 都維那 of this monastery in 693, was perhaps already living there at the time Divākara reached Luoyang. The Indian monk waited for the return of the court to Luoyang, which occurred in early April 679, and between 14 June and 12 July 679 (Yifeng 4.5) he officially requested permission to translate into Chinese the texts he had brought from India. Permission was accorded, and four translations, dated from the first year of Yonglong, that is, between 6 February 680 and 24 January 681, were carried out at the Taiyuan Monastery in Luoyang. These four translations were probably completed by February or March 680, considering that in April of the same year he was no more in Luoyang but in Chang'an.

In Chang'an, during 681 and 682, Divākara translated three works at the Hongfusi 弘福寺, the same monastery where Xuānzang lived and worked upon his return to China in 645. Then, in the years 683-685, he translated ten works at the Taiyuansi 太原寺 in Chang'an, a monastery that had been founded by Empress Wu in 670 for the posthumous well being of her mother. Empress Wu wrote a preface to these ten translations between 6 August and 3 September 685, in Luoyang, where the court had transferred from October 684. The preface is still extant and Divākara is expressly mentioned under his Indian name. At the time the preface was written, Divākara was probably already back in Luoyang. There, sometime later, he presented his request to the throne to go back to India in order to see his aged mother. The request underwent the customary three-time refusal. Meanwhile, Divākara was involved in a further Chinese version of the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the High Victory of the Buddha's Sinciput* to which we will turn our attention below.

Eventually, permission to leave China in order to return to India was accorded, and, with imperial gifts, including a “divine bell” (*shenzhong* 神鐘), it was presumably decided that he should be accompanied by an escort and an official mission. Suddenly, however, on 4 February 688 (Chuigong 3.12.27), at the age of seventy-four, he died at the same Luoyang monastery where he had previously carried out his first translations and where presumably he had lived since his return from Chang'an in 685.

His funeral was perhaps not a state funeral, but we are told that the empress donated a thousand pieces of silk in order to cover the fees for it. We are also told that a great number of people attended it. The empress also ordered that he be buried on Xiangshan 香山 at Longmen 龍門. His disciples erected a stupa for his remains. Later, between 690 and 705, Wu Sansi 武三思, a nephew of Empress Wu, promoted the construction of a full-fledged monastery on the same site, and the stupa of Divākara became the nucleus of the Xiangshansi 香山寺, a monastery that later became well known because of its association with the famous Tang poet Bo Juyi 白居易 (772-846).

These are, in brief, the basic facts that the Chinese sources allow us to know about Divākara's life. There are, unfortunately, many points that remain altogether ignored by these sources. Almost nothing is known about the period previous to his arrival in China, and, for example, we do not even know his place of birth, his family background and, above all, his masters and his intellectual connections at the two Mahābodhi and Nālandā monasteries where he lived. We have to content ourselves, then, with the little information we have about his Indian years, which represent most of his life. Concerning the eleven years he passed in the two Chinese capitals of Luoyang and Chang'an, although we have comparatively much more information on him, there are many obscure points on his actual involvement in events that took place while he was in China. From a philosophical point of view, the most delicate question concerns his personal position in terms of Abhidharma, Yogācāra and Avataṃsaka doctrines then current in China. Was he a Yogācāra adept or a follower of the Avataṃsaka as Fazang would have us to believe? We know of the tremendous importance of Yogācāra doctrines at Nālandā. To what extent were Avataṃsaka doctrines important there?

I will discuss these questions on another occasion. Here I would like to question Divākara's role in the diffusion in China of a text that may very well be considered the most important religious product of this period, also in terms of its long-lasting success and popularity. I mean the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the High Victory of the Buddha's Sinciput*, a text that was also very important for the affirmation of Mañjuśrī's cult on Mount Wutai. This is in fact one of the most intriguing ideological and religious tangles of Chinese Buddhism.

(c) The attribution to Divākara of two or three versions of the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the High Victory of the Buddha's Sinciput* (*Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經)

Around the same time (or perhaps slightly later) that Divākara reached Luoyang, presumably travelling along the sea route from the north-eastern coast of India to the southern China harbour of Canton, another monk, travelling along the land route, reached the main capital Chang'an from the north-western part (Kashmir or Uddiyāna) of the Indian cultural area. This monk, usually known by the name of Buddhapālita, although this was not necessarily his real name, seems to have brought with him a text entitled *Buddhoṣṇīśa vijaya dhāraṇī sūtra*. I say “seems” because it is not at all clear whether or not he really introduced this text to China. Even admitting that he did, there is much confusion about the time when this would have taken place. What is clear is that by 20 February 679 a Chinese version of a text by this name was completed. It was done by two court officials, Du Xingyi 杜行顥 and Dupo 度婆 in obedience to an imperial order. If the two officials worked on the text introduced by Buddhapālita, it might be deduced that Buddhapālita presented it to the court around 677, while the court was in Chang'an. At this time, in fact, Buddhapālita's presence in Chang'an is attested to thanks to an interview that has come down to us. It must be noted, however, that in Yancong's 彥悰 (fl. 650-688) detailed account, dated 3 July 682, of the circumstances leading to this version, he never states that the Sanskrit original for that version was introduced by Buddhapālita. In any case, the same Yancong tells us that, when Du Xingyi and Dupo presented the Chinese version on 20 February 679, the emperor expressed his regret that it contained an unusual Buddhist terminology, due to the care taken by the two translators to avoid the current dynastic taboo terms. He expressed, then, the wish that the taboo terms should not be observed in it and asked them to use, instead, the usual terms.

Until the latter date (20 February 679), Divākara was not involved with this text. However, in June or July 679 he officially became the Trepitaka⁷ responsible for the Chinese versions of the Sanskrit texts. From this moment until his death in early 688, he was consequently involved in some way or other in the complicated vicissitudes of the Chinese editions of this *Dhāraṇī sūtra*. The problem for us is: in which way and to what extent was he actually involved? A puzzling point related to this question is the fact that, while the *Great Zhou Catalogue* 大周錄 of 695 credited Divākara with only one version of the *Buddhoṣṇīśa vijaya dhāraṇī sūtra*, dated the first year Yonglong 永隆 (680), the *Kaiyuan Catalogue* 開元祿 of 730 denied that this version was by Divākara (stating that it was by Du Xingyi who presented it on 20 February 679) and attributed him, instead, two other versions (of 682 and 687) that, in the opinion

⁷ On the title Trepitaka, “one who is familiar with the three *piṭakas*,” applied to monks (to be distinguished from the term *Tripitaka* to refer to the three *piṭakas* themselves, that is, the Buddhist canon), see Forte 1990, pp. 247-248, note 7.

of its author Zhisheng, had been forgotten by the authors of the *Great Zhou Catalogue*. Concerning the issue of the so-called Divākara's version of 680, I think that both the *Great Zhou Catalogue* and the *Kaiyuan Catalogue* are in a sense correct. Since Divākara was considered the authority, in his new position as Trepitaka legitimator of new works, there is nothing strange that he should have legitimated Du Xingyi's version of 679. In this sense the *Great Zhou Catalogue* might be considered correct. The *Kaiyuan Catalogue* too is correct if the work in question was really the one translated by Du Xingyi. As to the two versions of 682 and 687, even accepting that Divākara had some role in their translation, it is clear that he did not work on a manuscript that he had brought himself from India. It seems even that, at least for the version of 687, admitting that he was the so-called translator, he did not have any Sanskrit text at all at his disposal. In other words, Divākara's connection with this work appears as something imposed by the circumstances or by the requirements related to his function as Trepitaka or by the requests to which at best he might have consented; the connection was not due to his own interest in this work nor to his initiative.

According to Zhisheng and Zanning, Divākara was an expert in *dhāraṇīs*. This might be true, although Fazang is silent about this aspect, and, indeed, there would be nothing strange if he were such an expert. I wonder, however, whether Zhisheng's and Zanning's information was not based on the role they credited Divākara concerning his alleged translations of the *Buddhoṣṇīśa vijaya dhāraṇī sūtra*. Considering that the only certain *dhāraṇī* text that he translated was the *Qijudi fo daxin Chunti tuoluoni jing* 七俱胝佛大心准提陀羅尼經 (*Saptakoṭī buddha Cundī dhāraṇī*), a text that he must have brought himself from India, I would be very cautious about Zhisheng's (and Zanning's) consideration of Divākara as an expert in *dhāraṇīs*, especially if they based their statement on Divākara's involvement in the history of the various versions of the *Dhāraṇī sūtra* introduced by Buddhapālita.

In view of the tremendous importance that the *Buddhoṣṇīśa vijaya dhāraṇī sūtra* was attributed from late seventh century on, one might even suspect that Divākara had no connection at all with it and that he was involved in its Chinese alleged vicissitudes only after his death. In other words, Divākara was made an instrument, either during his life or after his death, of a falsification concocted for ideological reasons by the Buddhist leaders politically engaged in state Buddhism.