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## **Wú Dào Zī and Beiyuemiao**

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### The Wú Dào zī Project

It may have become politically incorrect to indulge in hero worship, but the name of Wú Dào zī (Wú Dào xuán), prince of painters, ‘Painting’s Sage’ (huàshèng), can hardly be ignored in the history of Chinese painting. Critical acclaim from his lifetime in mid-Táng (fl. c. 740) to the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been universal. The problem is that none of his authenticated work is believed to survive. We can discern the shadow of the man, but not alas! view his work directly. The same is true for most if not all of the early ‘greats’ of Táng and pre-Táng painting. Wars, religious persecution, especially the wholesale destruction of Buddhist temples in 845, and the passage of time has eroded the traces, leaving us with flowery literary notices, copies, engravings and stylistic influences. Archaeology has helped fill out the background. Tomb and cave-shrine murals, especially the amazing cave library of Dunhuáng, shed light on the heyday of Táng art, confirming the accuracy of models transmitted to Japan, where they were religiously conserved. It is often forgotten that, despite the ravages of millennial invasions and rebellions, central China still retains temples of Táng foundation, and walls bearing murals whose secrets have not been divulged. A case in point is the Northern Range Temple, Bēiyuèmiào of Hébēi.

China is world famous for its unmatched tradition of landscape painting, its literati painting within which poetry and painting fuse, where man recedes and vanishes among misty peaks and rivers. Such is the great tradition: what need then to search out a semi-legendary obsolete painter from a period before landscape had come into its own? This may be the question and reproof in the minds of post-modern art critics. They may smile at the naivety of pioneering efforts at the British Museum by W. Anderson (1886), or Laurence Binyon and Arthur Waley in the early twentieth century, who strove to establish appreciation of Chinese painting in Britain. These pioneers, under the influence of Japanese collectors, paid particular heed to China’s figure painting tradition, and its ubiquitous, almost mandatory, attributions to ‘Wú Dào zī’ (Go Dòshi).

Recently, thanks to the efforts of James Cahill, Roderick Whitfield and others, that ‘western’ fashion has radically changed in the direction of the traditional Chinese painter-poet. Wú Dào zī is now virtually *persona non grata* at the feast. It is time now to commence a deconstructive re-assessment of the Wú Dào zī myth, and a recovery of its essential values. In practical terms, just what does the name Wú Dào zī represent? What were his lasting contributions? In what did he fall short?

Wú lived and worked through the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, the apogee of Táng culture, enjoying the patronage of doomed art-lover Emperor Míng huáng (r. 713-755). It is precisely at this moment that landscape painting comes into its own. Poet-painter Wáng Wéi (699-759) paints his villa amongst Wāngchuan mountain scenery, reputedly in monochrome. General Lǐ Sixùn and Wú Dào zī at imperial command paint the torrential Jiálíng river of Sichuan, the former in painstaking detail, probably in the popular ‘blue and green’ (qínglǜ cf. jīnbì) style, blue mountains and green waters; the latter wielding a broad brush with long and powerful strokes. Wú is related to have once studied cursive calligraphy and assuredly was a master of the flowing brush-stroke.

Yet, though unlaboured in his draftmanship, Wú was a representationalist. Wú’s paintings demonstrated a technical virtuosity that would ultimately and silently condemn him as a ‘professional’ in the eyes of scholar amateurs who came increasingly to dominate the field in later centuries. The bulk of Wú’s output was figurative, in the service of temples. Records show he painted primarily Buddhist and secondly Daoist iconography. Confucius home temple at Qufù held engravings of portraits of Confucius alone, and with disciples, attributed to Wú Dào zī.

It is surely wrong then to think of Wú Dào zī simply as a virtuoso of spectacular brush-sweeps. His paintings are said to have conveyed uniquely a sense of roundness and space. In order to enhance this three-dimensional quality, a rival Yáng Zhì huì is said to have actually turned to sculpture, a development rare in the history of Chinese painting. Surviving Wú Dào zī figure painting attributions often do give such a sense of close-up depth and quasi-perspective, qualities otherwise hardly found in the history of Chinese painting. He seems to have excelled at painting close-up figures in groups of extraordinary dynamism. Wú’s style may be summed up as the classic heroic model.

Examples of this in the palpably Wú Dào zī style are surely the *Nirvāna of the Buddha*, where the Shakyamuni lies on a bier surrounded by weeping disciples and heavenly deities. This painting, attested by Su Dongpo as a mural by Wú Dào zī as one of the eight sights of (Shānxī) Fèngxiáng, apparently proved an inspiration for centuries of artists in Japan. Another example is the group portrait of the Buddha preaching in the Jetavana garden paved with non-recessive gold tiles. It was reproduced in the earliest illustrated printed ‘book’, 838, the British Library’s *Diamond Sūtra* from Dunhuáng. It is recorded that Wú Dào zī used the *Diamond Sūtra*, chosen scripture of Huìnéng’s contemporary Chán school, for meditation. This and the frontispiece of the *Suramgama Sūtra* of 705, printed under Jin, give every appearance of reproducing a temple mural. They are revolutionary in their depiction of the Buddha in a relaxed and informal pose, oblique and asymmetrical, with a curious reverse perspective.

It may be that we can only glimpse Wú’s originality paradoxically from copies. It is still more ironic that Wú himself is reputed to have excelled at copying. Wú Dào zī’s copy of maestro Gù Kāizhī is alleged to have deceived even Sòng Emperor, and collector extraordinaire, Huizong. The British Museum Chinese painting collection’s pride is by chance thought to be a Táng copy of none other than Gù Kāizhī’s *Admonitions of the Instructress* (Nǚshī Zhen). Gù was a master figure painter who also painted a Vimalakīrti mural for a Buddhist temple. It has been generally stated by art historians that the last of Xiè Hè’s celebrated *Six Canons* of painting is the copying and transmission of models (chuánmuó, yíxiē cf. zhūānyí ‘adapt/vary’ and muóxiē ‘copy’). I would argue that this translation is too narrow, and should be widened to include

transposition and interpretive variation. Creative 're-visiting' of models has always been the artist's path. In the case of Wú Dàozi, it brings us to cartoon 'pouncing' of wall painters, stone engraving and rubbings, acknowledged 'after, in the style of', and outright forgery and deliberate false documentation. Most accessible, effortless, and reliable, if uncreative, are printed and photographic reproduction.

## **Personal Note**

As a student in the 1960s, I first became aware, from histories of Chinese painting, of the herculean reputation enjoyed by Wú Dào'zī (c. 690-c.760). In particular, I was struck by the rubbing from an engraving of the vigorous Hengshan demon, thought to reflect his authentic style. It was not until August 2001 that I was finally able to visit Hengshan, near Dàtóng in Shanxi. Yet on reaching its temple, I was unable to obtain any information on the subject of my search. After my return home, I realised that there are two Hengshan. The Hengshan, near Quyáng in Héběi, is the place where the ancient North Range Temple (Bēiyuèmiào) was located. I read further that before the war it had contained murals. Was it possible that, after a further half century of war and revolution, anything had survived?

In August 2002 and 2003, I was able finally to reach the little visited site, and found to my astonishment that not only did it still contain two antique stone engravings of Wú Dào'zī's demon, built into a wall, but also huge ancient wall paintings which included the same subject. If scholars considered that the engraving was significant evidence for the work of Wú Dào'zī, I wondered, why have not the murals, from which the engravings derived, been reproduced and made available for study and appreciation of China's most renowned painter? I was privileged briefly to make the acquaintance of retired Bēiyuèmiào curator Xuè Zengfú, and of engineer Wáng Hui of Shíjiāzhuāng Cultural Artefacts Bureau, whom I would like to thank for meeting me. I would also like to record my gratitude to Dr Middendorf of Heidelberg University for her assistance in researching Wú Dào'zī materials, and especially for the lead on the attribution in Líng'úsì, Nánjīng..

My first objective has been to identify and collate works that may preserve elements of the style or actual work of Tang maestro painter Wú Dào'zī (c. 720-760). He is known not only as the supremely dynamic figure painter in Chinese history, but also as a pioneer of highly expressive landscape painting. His characteristic epithet is 'Wú streamers in the wind' (Wúdài dangfeng), since his figures are said to be impelled by an inner motion that dramatically hoists their draperies as if in a gale. Su Dongpo and others as late as North Sòng continue to marvel over the few surviving fragments of Wú Dào'zī's work.

Yet while the name of Wú Dào'zī remains a legend, it seems there was little of visual substance in later centuries to sustain it. No scholar to date appears to have published a monograph of visual materials relevant to a comprehensive study of evidence for the possible impact of Wú Dào'zī on succeeding painters. A major advance is I. Larsen's master thesis (Michigan 1986) on the style of Wú Dào'zī and the great scroll Cháoyuán Xiánzhàng in the C.C. Wang Museum (NY), attributed to Wú Zongyuán of North Sòng, and a related version entitled *Eighty-seven Immortals* in the Xú Beihóng Memorial Hall (Běijīng). Further work of this nature remains to be done in connection with other Wú Zongyuán attributions in museums worldwide, which hold also rubbings and engravings of alleged Wú Zongyuán originals. Above all there are the giant murals attributed to Wú Zongyuán, on the North Range Temple of Quyáng, Héběi. They are iconographic masterpieces showing all the assured ease and sense of lively movement that literature credits to Wú Zongyuán. They remain still unpublished, except for the brief guide by Xuè Zengfú and Wáng Lìmín 2000.

It is hoped that this present paper may help attract worldwide attention to this treasure of Chinese mediaeval wall painting and so stimulate funding for conservation projects on it,

and further research into its place in the history of Chinese painting.

### **Wú Dàozi – ‘Painting’s Sage’**

Wú Dàozi (c.690-c.760), the most celebrated painter in Chinese history, was reportedly born of poor parentage in Yángdí, Hénán. If so, it is not clear how the young Wú acquired the motivation and funds to study calligraphy with wild cursive ‘grass-style’ master Zhang Xù and Hè Zhizhang (659-744). No specimen of Wú’s calligraphy is known, since surviving attributions are unsigned, unless his portrait of Confucius signature: “Táng; Wú Dàozi brush”, with seal, be accepted as genuine. Temple murals have customarily been unsigned. In Sòng dynasty murals the names of divinities may be attached as labels (as reflected in the scroll copy *Eighty-seven Immortals Procession*, deduced to be after Wú Dàozi). This is believed to be a copy of a temple mural. The scroll is approximately one foot high by six foot long. Assuming a height of ten feet, this would cover sixty feet of temple wall, perhaps a panorama of three sides, say 15-30-15 feet.

Wú evidently early abandoned any ambition to become a calligrapher, but he evidently used such training to forge a vibrant graphic line of indomitable strength and suppleness. He quickly established a reputation in painting and was patronised by culture-loving Emperor Mínghuáng (r.713-755). Restrospectively, Zhang Yànyuán, in *Succeeding Ages’ Famous Paintings* (prefaced 845), dubs Wú Dàozi ‘painting’s Sage’ (huàshèng), and acclaims him as the only painter who excelled in all six categories of painting. While Wú is known primarily as a peerless figure painter, the development of landscape, the painting of ‘mountains and waters’, into an independently recognised art-form is also attributed to him.

It is surely no exaggeration to say that the place of Wú Dàozi, also known as Dào xuán ‘Way Mysterious’, in the history of Chinese painting is comparable to that of Michelangelo in Europe, or of Hokusai in Japan. Like these perhaps, Wú inspired many later imitators, but was never equalled or surpassed. Wú Dàozi’s output was prolific. He is reported to have painted murals for three hundred temples, and worked rapidly, on a grand scale, without mechanical aids. His command of line, both of spatial proportions and natural movement, was said to be unequalled. he excelled at the human figure, but was a master of plant and animal forms, mythological beings, including dragons. Above all Wú Dàozi was famed for ability to convey movement, as in the flow and surging of waters, or of the wind, as expressed through freely fluttering draperies. (‘Wúdài dangfeng’)

The particular characteristic of the Wú style is defined by Zhang Yànyuán as his use of the broken line: “While all the others took pains to join the ends of their strokes, Wu Tao-tzu for his part broke up and left spaces between his dots and strokes.”<sup>1</sup> While this statement is literally true of the more dynamic and martial of the Wú attributions, their most consistently impressive aspect, particularly amongst endless folds of drapery, is in their controlled interweaving of continuous lines, which never seem to lose their way, and thereby generate without the aid of perspective an illusion of three-dimensional space. It is in this aspect that Wú Dàozi and his school remains truly outstanding.

It is also through Wú's infinitely sinuous curves that a lively sense of movement is sustained even in subjects that are static or moving at the frozen pace of court ceremonial. Wú had little need of splashing ink play (pomù) to heighten tension or hold attention. He seems less a striver after special effects, notwithstanding the dramatic impact on viewers of all classes that his novel brand of supra-realism reportedly created, than the effortless wielder of an inner power derived from his absolute command of the structured but steadily unwinding continuum of space-time, as in a moving picture scroll.

This quality that makes the tradition of Wú Dàozi an enduring enigma to this day. It may endow his sensational break-throughs with a relevance for the future, if we do not lose his now tenuously suspended thread, but rather firmly grasp and carry it forward as an ever evolving art. It is Wú's art which so excited 20<sup>th</sup> century masters Xú Beihóng and Qí Báishí when they inscribed their colophons on the *Eighty-seven Immortals* scroll.

The enduring nature of the Wú Dàozi legend, with little in the way of visible masterpieces to support it, may inspire scepticism. Wú's larger than life status appears to conform to mythic archetypes. In popular imagination he easily becomes a folk-hero with super-natural powers. Attributions of surviving works, even in the form of painted copies or engravings and rubbings must be rigorously scrutinised. There may possibly remain not a single original from the master's own brush. Yet there are fulsome literary testimonials to Wú Dàozi's achievement, both from his contemporaries, and from eye-witnesses to his masterpieces, certified by experts as authentic in the succeeding half millennium.

Over the last century, new sources have emerged from the ground to shed light on the actuality of high Táng art. These are above all the Buddhist cave shrines in the Dunhuáng oasis to the west, preserving Táng paintings and sculptures, with their clearly Indian and Central Asian influences, and the painted tombs excavated in particular around the Táng capital of Cháng'an (Xi'an). These bear silent witness to the unadulterated styles of thirteen hundred years ago, styles which often bear closer resemblance to works of art preserved in Japan, than to those familiar in China. Perhaps the most striking of Dunhuáng murals, in reflecting the recorded descriptions of Wú Dàozi's portraiture, is that of the sage Vimalakirti, caught in the midst of philosophical debate, on a wall of Cave 103.<sup>2</sup>

The outstanding qualities of Wú Dàozi's work are directly attested by a detailed poetic description of his contemporary, leading poet Dù Fū (712-770), who was overwhelmed by his murals of the Daoist supreme deity near Luòyáng in 741:<sup>3</sup>

The Five Sages  
    range their dragon robes  
The thousand officers  
    are like wild geese in flight.  
When painters consider  
    the men who went before them  
Then Master Wu  
    is master of the field.

Yet destruction of temples in 845 by government suppression, and the ravaging of both east and west capitals, Luòyáng and Cháng'an in 880 by rebel Huáng Cháo, resulted in the loss of Wú's greatest monumental works within little over a century of his death. Nonetheless, scattered survivals of Wú Dàozi's work, while they lasted, continued to compel virtually universal admiration, among leading critics and independent scholars with first-hand experience of them.

Chief amongst these is 'universal genius' Su Dongpo, himself a noted calligrapher and painter. Su Dongpo, with younger brother Su Zhé (Zíyóu), not only collected and appraised surviving paintings of Wú Dàozi, but strove to conserve and protect them for future generations. (see Appendix i) Other leading scholars of Sòng who left detailed laudatory evaluations of Wú Dàozi's legacy include poet calligrapher Huáng Tíngjian, natural scientist Shēn Gua, philosopher Zhu Xi, and antiquarian Dōng You who defines the property of Wú Dàozi's painting as 'sculptural.' Indeed Dōng links the three-dimensional quality of Wú's graphics to Yáng Huìzhi, Wú's contemporary and rival whose speciality was sculpture in the round.<sup>4</sup>

It is recorded that ink-outline reduced-size copy scrolls of Wú Dàozi murals were prevalent among wealthy families during North Sòng. Surviving examples of these scrolls are attributed to figure-painter Wú Zongyuán, classified as a follower of the Wú Dàozi 'school', and later to Lǐ Gonglín (1049-1106) who adapted it to a freer manner. These painters adopted the style of mural 'cartoon' (fēnbēn), painting monochrome outline without adding colour. Mǐ Fèi (1051-1107) paid written tribute to the importance of Wú's stylistic contributions, though he personally rejected the Wú calligraphic line in order to develop his own 'boneless' style of landscape.

The origin of these monochrome cartoon sketches is closely related to the 'soot sheets' fēnbēn used by professional muralists. Reduced-scale sketches are first extended to the required scale, before multiple pin-pricks are used to mark out the course of the lines. Finally the sheets are hung against the blank prepared plaster and soot is blown through the holes to trace the outlines of the figures to be painted on the walls. This process, technically known as 'pouncing' in English, guarantees accuracy of proportion, is shared by traditional murals from East Asia to Europe. The production of cartoons facilitated transfer of the design in the correct proportions to the wall to be painted, and doubtless facilitated restoration work, copying and engraving. In the Sòng dynasty cartoon painting was popularised of its own sake by monochrome artists like Wú Zongyuán and Lǐ Gonglín in the Wú Dàozi school. This no doubt stimulated the development of black and white aesthetics with the famous liúbái technique 'leaving blank' for which Far Eastern art became famous..

Ironically, Wú Dàozi the master who applied the power of calligraphic line to figure painting, and whose example helped establish landscape painting as an art in its own right, unwittingly helped to toll the death knell of his own grandiose art. In place of heroic figures in a landscape of dynamic lines and vibrant colours, there developed an amateur tradition of monochrome landscape scrolls, of ink pale washes, abstract in design with little or no human participation. Under Emperor Mínghuáng of Táng, Wáng Wéi was a scholar-poet who also painted Buddhist murals; Wú Dàozi an artisan who was honoured as an academician.

The two could meet on essential middle ground. Su Dongpo admired both but finally inclined towards the subtle restraint in the style of his fellow scholar. It seemed just as the lofty constructs of doctrinal Buddhism were being supplanted by the simple directness of Chán, so the lavish artistic patronage of great temples was being exchanged by private collectors and scholar poet-painters. It seems that, broadly speaking, what the individual gained, society and popular culture lost.

### ***North Range Temple God***

Quyáng belongs to the district of Dìngzhou, famous for its brilliant white marble, renowned for porcelain and sculpture, and is close to Shíjiāzhuāng, provincial capital and military centre, in southern Héběi province. Standing north of the Yellow River, near the southeast end of the Tàiháng mountain range which divides Shanxi from Héběi, Quyáng has long been recognised as an area of strategic importance.<sup>5</sup> Its great temple, to the god of Hengshan in the North massif, has been popularly dubbed ‘King Dòu’s Hall’ after rebel-leader and local hero Dòu Jiàndé, who, during the anarchy at the end of the Suí Dynasty (589-618), just before the founding of Táng. Yet history does not support the idea that he had any connection with the temple.

The deity of Hengshan (also known as Chángshan due to a Hàn Emperor Wén’s personal name taboo BC 179-157) was revered as guardian of the North quadrant of the world. Of the four directions plus centre, the north represents Water among the five elemental ‘virtues’ or ‘actions’. This probably represents a cosmology, rooted in prehistory. It is thus held responsible in particular for rain. Two ancient temples, in neighbouring Shanxi, the Jìncí and Guāngshènsì, are famous likewise for their association with water and rain.<sup>6</sup> Water was adopted by imperial Qín, and retained by early Hàn, as holy dynastic mascot. First Emperor of Qín, Qín Shíhuáng, accordingly renamed the Yellow River ‘Virtue Water’ and established Mt Heng as the official shrine of the North Range (Bēiyuèmiào). I use the word ‘range’ for yuè, in preference to ‘peak’, since its underlying concept appears wider than that of particular peak. Hàn historian Simâ Qian records simply that Qín Shíhuáng passed by Mt Heng in BC 220, the second year of his empire.<sup>7</sup>

In late Hàn, a Daoist named Yú Jí of Lángyè claimed that in the reign of Shùndì (122-144) he entered mountains to pick herbs and above Quyáng’s spring waters obtained a divine book, entitled the *Grand Peace Blue Lapel Way* which could cure diseases. Yú acquired a following in the southern kingdom of Wú, distributing charmed water (fúshuǐ). He was accused of rabble rousing and association with the subversive Yellow Turban movement by ‘Little Hegemon King’ Sun Cè, who ordered him to pray for rain to alleviate the drought, on pain of being burned at the stake. Despite success in procuring a heavy downpour, Sun Cè had Yú beheaded and burned his hermitage, but his spirit allegedly haunted Sun Cè, driving him to death.<sup>8</sup>

A temple stele erected by the official Wéi Xuxin is dated 721.3.26, early in the reign of Emperor Míngguáng of Táng, a fervent Daoist believer. Its inscription mentions resplendent paintings, and informs us that this god was then formally enfeoffed as ‘Pacifier of Heaven’s King’ Antianwáng. This promotion followed a traveller’s reported sighting, before the temple, of two celestial envoys, one clad in white and one in purple. They said:

We are the Five Ranges great envoys, despatching troops and horses, six hundred thousand, on behalf of the nation, to arraign bandits. The Five Range Great Gods, on the ninth month's third day, all come to this mountain for a great celebration.

During the same reign, in 746 and 748, two further great stele were erected. Honours and works continued to accumulate over succeeding dynasties. The culminating title 'North Range, Pacifier of Heaven, Prime Sage Emperor' was bestowed by third Sòng Emperor Zhenzong in 1016. Su Dongpo's collected writings preserve his prayer to the North Range god for rain here, in his capacity as prefect of the military district Dingzhou, during drought in 1094. The practice was continued by the Jurchen Jin who conquered North Sòng in 1126. For example, Jin Emperor Shìzhong sent Wáng Jìng, Head Secretary of the Ministry of Rites, to pray for rain here in 1164 5<sup>th</sup> month. Zhangzong sent Zhang Wèi, Head Secretary of the Ministry of Rites, to pray for rain here in 1196 4<sup>th</sup> month. In 1202 12<sup>th</sup> month he sent to give thanks here for the birth of an heir, and in 1204 2<sup>nd</sup> month ordered special prayers for rain at both East (Tàishan) and North Range Temples.<sup>9</sup>

Restorations and prayers were continued under the Yuán and Míng dynasties. Yet, with the transfer by Jin and subsequent dynasties of China's capital to Bèijīng, near the 40<sup>th</sup> parallel, the anomalous situation arose in which the North Range temple was well south of it, just below the 39<sup>th</sup> parallel. This prompted dissent during the Míng dynasty. Eventually in 1660, the first Qing emperor officially transferred the 'North Range Temple' (Bèiyuèmiào) at Húnyuán in Shanxi, near Dàtong, just south of the Great Wall, at close to the latitude of Bèijīng. The old Mt Heng (1870m), north of Quyáng, is now known as Mt. Dàmòu or Shénjian.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Murals of the Virtuous Tranquility Hall***

The North Range Temple's Virtuous Tranquility Hall (*Déníng diàn*) boasts the only surviving murals which could begin to reflect the stature attributed to Wú Dàozi, the prince of painters personally honoured by Emperor Mínghuáng, symbol of the apex of Chinese culture. They are quite literally huge. East and west walls, testified by local records to be the handiwork of Wú Dàozi himself, are each covered with just one mural. Each mural measures eight metres (c. 27 feet) in height and eighteen metres in length (c. 60 feet). The figures of the mountain gods themselves are three metres (c. 10 feet) tall. The god emperor on the north wall, who appears to me Míng dynasty in style, is even larger, sitting at six metres (c. 20 feet) high.<sup>11</sup>

Yet it is by no means only their amazing size that distinguishes these murals. Despite their faded colours and gloom of the great hall, lighted only by the great south entrance door and grid-panel windows, one begins to discern wonderful beings, emerging to life from the neglect of centuries, strong and self-assured, amidst the most unusual mix of yellows, blues and greens. Above them, and below the ceiling, runs a band of flowing water pattern. The lines of the figures are strong but not obtrusive, their postures at ease and life-like, the proportions sculptural and realistic, filled with interactive breath-energy. Draperies swirl and pennants float freely in a northerly breeze. 'Steel wire' (*tìxiàn*) brushwork draftsmanship underlies all, varying from hard to soft, thick to thin, coarse to fine lines. Folded up or flying forth, they express in turn the masculine strength or feminine grace of up to one hundred figures.

Nor is this all. The inner halves of the walls merge into pristine landscape scenes of rocks and trees, clouds and bubbling waters in what appears to be a totally new style. To the east's centre, a great five clawed, bewiskered curling with glistening scales, descends from on high without need of wings. To the west opposite, the demonic muscle-bound warrior, halberd-spear over his shoulder, exposing a full mouth of teeth and curling tongue, strains gazing out of a gale, his body and long hair stretched out at an alarming forty-five degree line, on the look-out for evil doers below. He recalls the Thousand-Mile Eyes (qianlîyân) demon, accompanied by Along-Wind Ears (Shùnfeng'êr), which often flank the deity of Daoist temples. *Zhìlì Dìngzhou* gazetteer terms him the 'Fying Heaven God' (Feitianshén).<sup>12</sup> It was this individual that brought Quyáng fame, as the old rhyme attests: 'Quyáng's demon, Zhàozhou's waters' (Quyáng guí, Zhàozhou shuî). This saying links the Quyáng mural with another masterpiece attributed to Wú Dàoî: the great surging water mural of Bólínsì 'Cypress Forest' Chán temple, long destroyed, at nearby Zhàozhou with its world-remowned 6<sup>th</sup> century single-span marble bridge.

During late Míng, a movement began to urge a shift of the North Range Temple to Shanxi. Perhaps in response to this threat, the Quyáng temple developed a cult around the demon. An official named Hú Wénxuè engraved a stele to copy "Wú Dàoî painted image" of 'Heng Range's Cherished Spirit, the Demon Baron' (Hengyuè Zhonglíng Guíbó). A second copy was engraved under Qíng. Popular tradition tells a tale of a traveller who was rescued from shipwreck by a superman from Quyáng who leapt into the water to overcome a water sprite. Returning to Quyáng to find his benefactor, the traveller spotted the man's exact likeness on the wall: he had been saved by the Quyáng demon. This Demon Baron was popularly identified with supreme protector and demon-catcher Zhong Kuí, whose portrait Wú Dàoî is credited as having first painted, at the urgent request of Emperor Mínghuáng. To judge from the image itself, with right-hand shading bulging eyes, the demon most resembles Heaven's spying observer, 'Thousand Lî Eyes', companion of Heaven's eavesdropping listener 'Along the Wind Ears'. Their paired statues customarily patrol from City-moat God Temples.

The following detailed analysis of the content of the three great Bèiyuèmiào murals, follows the account of Xuè Zengfú and Wáng Lìmín 2000. They also reproduce part of a mural of 'The Heavenly King sees off his son' (Tianwáng sòngzî tú). It is not stated where this scene is depicted.<sup>13</sup>

- a) East Wall mural '*Clouds progress, Rain bestowing*' has 39 deities.
- (i) At bottom right are 18 deities. The two largest figures, according with Five Elements theory, wear green robes for Eastern Range, and yellow robes for Central Range. There are three immortal officials, bright-eyed and sleek, each looking in different directions, between them.
  - (ii) At top right are 7 deities. Its chief figure wears a five bridged crown and royal robes with large sleeves, red face, hands clasping wooden tablet, flying down, followed by two intercrossed round fans. On his left is a white robed scholar; to his rear upper left is a beast-faced man, upper body naked, carrying on his back a coral vase; to lower right are two beast-men in red and green robes, with cord belts, holding wooden tablets, blue faced and fanged, beards and hair flying.

- Vajrapâni strongmen, with serving girls, follow the king, scurrying and bent forwards.
- (iii) At top left are 14 deities, from the Thunder Bureau and Twenty-four Heavenly Rulers. Various gods, under Five-Blessings Grand Unity (Wûfú Tàiyî), treading five-coloured clouds, roam the four directions. Thunder Father rumbles, Lightning Mother flashes, Wind Uncle blows, Rain God pours, ready to produce rain.
  - (iv) In the centre is a 6.4m long giant dragon, powerfully writhing and rolling in black clouds and mists, head down toward a rapid stream, breathing fog and dropping dew on the human world. The painting's left side is a landscape with clouds, 6.23m high, and 8.58m wide, with precipices and crags, wind-swept pines, showers of rain, splashing springs and waterfalls.
- b) West Wall mural '*Myriad States share in tranquility*' has 37 figures, of which the Flying-Heaven God (i.e. Quyang Demon) is the star.
- (i) At bottom left are 12 deities. The chief figure is North Range's Mt Heng (God Bîeyuè Hengshan) God, Cui Yíng, 3m in height, wearing a 'nine layered piercing-heaven crown' and black brocade robe, face like cauldron base, red beard, jade belt, holding wooden tablet. Western and Southern Range gods are on left and right, warriors, followers and serving girls crowd behind, each carry weapons, flags, parasols, lotus flowers and treasures.
  - (ii) In the centre of the painting is the Flying-Heaven God, eyes fierce, muscles and tendons tough, sweeping his halberd-spear, looking down in flight, as if spying out good and evil, dispelling devils and destroying pests.
  - (iii) On his left are 14 figures. In their midst is an old man wearing a 'piercing-heaven' crown, in blue tasseled robe, white skirt, red shoes, leading 6 jiâ and 6 ding [male and female messengers], roaming the four quarters. To the right are various different figures, all smiling and rejoicing in the universal peace and prosperity.
  - (iv) On his right, is beautiful mountains and rivers, waters trickling, and myriad phenomena flourishing.
- c) North Wall mural, unlike those of East and West Wall, is not mentioned in any known records. It had been masked by a purple-red paint coating, which was cleaned off in the 1984 restorations. I conjecture overpainting may have been applied in 1660 on the North Range temple's 'decommissioning'. It was acclaimed a masterpiece and designated by its discoverers as '*North Range Mt Heng God's inspection tour picture*' (*Bîeyuè Hengshanshén chuxún tú*). The god emperor is six metres (20 feet) high and well proportioned. He wears a crown and robes, seated below a parasol in a carriage surrounded by golden youths and jade girls, with other followers.<sup>14</sup> During two visits, I was unable to discern even its barest outline within the darkness of the north wall.

## Dating

In 1094 Su Dongpo, aged fifty-seven, presided here, as prefect of Dìngzhou, at official prayers for rain. Despite a life-long interest in Wú Dàozi, manifested in his poems and inscriptions, he makes no mention of the murals here. (*Appendix i*) It is noticeable that Su Dongpo, a committed Buddhist, makes mention in his transmitted writings only of Wú's Buddhist masterpieces. It may be that Su interest in Wú Dàozi, and his ultimate preference for Chán Buddhist painter-poet Wáng Wéi, was influenced by personal religious adherence, which evidently became stronger with age..

Documentary evidence, from before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, on the Déníng Hall murals and their authorship, appears to be lacking. Xuè Zengfú and Wáng Límín 2000 cite a recent work, *China's Mural Art (Zhongguó Bihuà Yìshù)*, which includes the Quyáng murals among Wú Dàozi's three hundred paintings, as mentioning that Wú Dàozi had been to Quyáng.. They also quote, from an unidentified source, that in 722, Wú Dàozi's student Liú Bóróng had painted murals in the North Range Temple's East Zhaofú gate.<sup>15</sup> I have not yet had an opportunity to verify this. Given Emperor Mínghuáng interest at this time in Wú Dàozi, Daoism, and in the North Range Temple in particular, the circumstantial evidence for involvement of the prolific Wú Dàozi is strong.

The dress of the personages depicted and the overall content of the painting appears consistent with Táng date. Its unique depiction of all Five Range gods, in one narrative loosely linking east and west walls, strikes a resonance with the 721 stele, which records a sighting of the gods' messengers, and their divulgence of a heavenly durbar of all Five Range gods to be held on the premises. In my view, the style of painting, on east and west walls, can hardly be reconciled with any other known style or period in the history of Chinese art, beside than that of Wú Dàozi.

The earliest explicit written reference to the murals is in the *North Range Temple Plan*, engraved in 1547, in response to the controversy of its resiting. This stele avers that: "Déníng Hall's left and right walls have Wú Dàozi's painted images." Quyáng Demon engraving, from the (Míng) Wànlì reign (1573-1611), remarks: "Wú Dàozi's personal brushwork". Likewise, Qing dynasty *Quyáng District*, and *Zhìlì Dìngzhou* gazeteers, with the *Metropolitan Metal and Stone Appraisal (Jingji Jinshí Kào)*, all attest to Wú Dàozi figure painting in the hall.<sup>16</sup> Thus available writings, from the last four and a half centuries, are unanimous in their attribution.

Physical evidence from paints and the temple walls themselves will present the strongest possible means of verifying or overturning this verdict. Dìngzhou governor Yin Àn undertook a great reconstruction and expansion in 735. (see stele: (Táng): Zhèng Zíchun: *DàTáng Bēiyuèmiào-zhì bēi*). Since the eighth century, there have been many enlargements and restorations of the temple hall. Its present architectural form corresponds to the classic model of Sòng, who restored it in 1097 after burning by the Khitans, but details of its wooden beam construction coincide with those of the Yuán dynasty, which restored it in 1270, as seen in the Yōnglègong in Shanxi.<sup>17</sup>

## ***Conservation and Publication***

The North Range Temple murals may be said to have three salient characteristics: a) huge size, the largest painting on the north wall being 216sqm (8m x 27m); b) huge figures up to 6m, and 3.3m; c) immense energy. Its size has no equal in China, and few in the world.

The highest authorities in China have evidently recognised the significance of the murals. Zhang Ting, president of the Central Arts and Crafts Academy is quoted saying: “Wú Dào Zī in his life painted three hundred paintings. The only survival is at Bēiyuèmiào.”<sup>18</sup> The paintings were further appreciated by Wáng Dìnglí of China’s Painting Academy, and by Lù Hóngnián of the Central Arts Academy.<sup>19</sup>

In 1973 a specialist caretaker office was set up. Then in 1982 a state investment of RMB 1,160,000 was apportioned for restoration. A ‘Bēiyuèmiào Restoration Committee’ was established under leadership of provincial Cultural Relics Department and carried survey, mapping, photography, mural copying and reinforcement. It drew up a ‘Restoration of Bēiyuèmiào engineering survey design plan’, which was submitted for approval to National Cultural Relics Department. Their experts pointed out: “In the process of restoring Bēiyuèmiào, not only should attention be paid to preserving Déníng Hall’s Yuán dynasty architectural style, but, with regard to the murals in the hall, special care should be taken to conserve them, and not damage them in the slightest.”

Scaffolding was erected to restore the timber roof beams, leaving the walls untouched, and the murals were protected from sun and rain by injecting latex (báirùjiào) and paste (biāohú). Work on Déníng Hall started in September 1984 and was successfully concluded in October 1987.

To conserve the paintings, Héběi Province Cultural Relics Department invited over forty teachers and students from the Central Arts Academy under mural expert Wáng Dìnglí, who spent more than two months in copying and reproducing the East and West wall murals, and other murals. The mural copies are now kept by Héběi Province Cultural Relics Department.<sup>20</sup> Regretably, todate I understand they remain unpublished.

### **Appendix i: Su Dongpo (1036-1101)**

**1076** as prefect of Gaomì, wrote prayer for rain to Chángshan God (*SDPQJ* :16; *SDP-HJ xii* :391)

**1094**, as prefect of Dìngzhou, prayed for rain at Bèiyuèmiào. (*SDPQJ xvi* :632)

- a) **1061** (*Shânxi*) *Fèngxiáng's Eight Sights 3*) *Wáng Wéi* (701-761) and *Wú Dào Zī* *Paintings* describes [Kaiyuán Temple's East Pagoda (cf. WDZ at Pûmén 'Universal Gate') murals of] Buddha's Nirvana and mourners at Twin Forests, and *Wáng Wéi's* mural famous for 'ink-sketched bamboos' of Jetavana monastery, like his poetry, excelling in extra-representational suggestion; 4) *statue of Wáng Wéi* by *Yáng Huì*. (*SDP-OJ i* :45)
- b) undated: Reply to *Zīyóu* after seeing WDZ (at *Fèngxiáng*?) *Kaiyuánsì* mural of Buddha's Nirvana (*SDPQJ i* :43)
- c) undated: Buddha scroll painting re-mounted by *Xiányú Jùn* (*SDPQJ ix* :139-140): "in *Zhìgong* likeness, appear his scissors and ruler" *Zìgong fāngfú jiàn dao*chî. [cf. *Chán* Buddhist saint *Bâozhì*<sup>21</sup> (interred 514) portrait engraving, *Línggûsì*, *Nánjing*]
- d) **1066** Younger-brother *Su Zhé*, *Zīyóu* restored WDZ murals at *Lóngxingsì* 'Rising Dragon Temple', (*Hénán*) *Rûzhou*. (*SDP-HJ iv* :497 ) Again *Su Zhé* restored them in 1094. (*LC-HJ xxi*)
- e) **1068.10.26** *Four Bodhisattva Pavillion Record* *Táng* Emperor *Mínghuáng* (*Xuánzong* r.713-755) had a pavillion of eight panels, with bodhisattvas on the outside and heavenly kings on the inside, all painted by *Wú Dào Zī*. The pavillion was burnt down in the [*Huángcháo*?] rebellion of of 880, but a monk fled carrying four of the panels. *Su Dongpo* recently acquired them and presented them to emperor *Yingzong* Emperor (r. 1064-1067), who classed them in the premier category. His son *Jiân* established a pavillion to store them in the late Emperor's memory. (*SPD-QJ xxxi* :380)
- f) undated: *Replies to Bâoyuè the Great Master (3 items)*, presents damaged silk scroll by *Wú Dào Zī* of *Shakyamuni* to be mounted on a panel. "This painting, wiith the previous bodhisattvas and heavenly kings, is no different, but the figures are smaller and more numerous." (*SDP-XJ v* :161)
- g) **1083.7.10** *Colophon to WDZ: Hell's Transmogrifications* at *Qí'an*, *Lín'gaotíng*. (*Tíbá v*)
- h) undated: *Hell's Transmogrifications* at (*Sìchuan*) *Fengdu*. (*SDP-QJ xl* :458)
- i) **1085** inscription on re-mounted WDZ scroll human portraiture from every angle 'got [life-like] nature's proportions'. (*SDP-QJ xxiii* :306)

## Appendix ii: Dunhuáng Murals

These paintings from Dunhuáng, datable to the period c.700-1200, show possible stylistic affinities with Wú Dàozi which require analysis.

Fán Jīnshì □□□□□□ text, Wú Jiàn □□□□ photo. 2000, *Zhongguó Dunhuáng*, Jiangsu mèishù chubānshe, Shenzhen.

Illustrations:

:95 Yúlín cave 25, north wall, mid Táng Tianlóng Ba-bù ‘Heavenly Dragons’ Eight Departments’

:106-107 Dunhuáng cave 220, north wall, Yàoshi Jingbiàn ‘Medicine Master Sūtra Miracles’, early Táng.

:109 Yúlín cave 2, west wall north side, Shuīyuè Guanyin ‘Water Moon Avalokiteshvara’, Xixià (Tangut).

:108, 111 Yúlín cave 3, west wall north side Wénshu Biàn ‘Manjusri Miracles’, Pūxián Biàn ‘Samanta-bhadra Miracles’, Xixià (Tangut).

Wang Fànzhou □□□□□□ 2002, *Dunhuáng shíkū sēngshī jiàoshì*, Xianggāng Héping túshū, Hong Kong.

Illustrations:

:36 Mògāo cave 220, east wall south side, Vimalakirti.

:71 Mògāo cave 103, south side, mid Táng, Vimalakirti.

:144 Yúlín cave 3 west wall south side, Samanta-bhadra with landscape, Xixià (Tangut).

:189 Mògāo cave 103, east wall north side, mid Táng, Vimala-kirti Sūtra Miracles mid, Manjusri bodhisattva.

:233 Water and Moon Avalokiteshvara woodblock print, Xixià (Tangut).

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<sup>1</sup> Kuo 1984 :648-649.

<sup>2</sup> Kuo 1984 Figure 2.

<sup>3</sup> Acker, William 1954: Some T’ang and Pre-T’ang Texts on Chinese Painting, Leiden, E.J. Brill :364.

<sup>4</sup> Kuo 1984 :.

<sup>5</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000 :89-90.

<sup>6</sup> Jing, Anning 2002: *The Water God’s Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery: Cosmic Function of Art, Ritual and Theater*, Leiden, Brill. on (Shanxi) Guāngshèngsì.

<sup>7</sup> Simā Qian: *Shǐjì: xxviii Fēngshànshū*.

<sup>8</sup> *San-guó Yānyì xxix Xiāo Bàwáng nǚzhān Yú Jí. San-guó Zhì: Wú Zhì: Sun Cè zhuàn-zhù.*

<sup>9</sup> *Jin Shì: “Bēnjǐ” vi-xii.*

<sup>10</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :33-41. Wáng 2000.12 :.5-10.

<sup>12</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :41.

<sup>13</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :37.

<sup>14</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :37-40.

<sup>15</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :41.

<sup>16</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :40-41. Wáng 2000.12 :7-10.

<sup>17</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :22-23. cf. *Yǐngzào Fāshì xxxi.*

<sup>18</sup> Wáng 2000.12 :9.

<sup>19</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :41. Wáng 2000.12 :10.

<sup>20</sup> Xuè, Wáng 2000.4 :29-30.

<sup>21</sup> *Nánshì ‘Southern Histories’: Yīnyì zhuàn. Zhīyuelù ‘Pointing to the Moon Record’: ii Bāozhì.*