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# Multiple-Text Manuscripts in Medieval China

**Abstract:** One of the striking features of Chinese manuscripts from Dunhuang is that often texts from originally distinct sources are gathered together into one manuscript. Some of the components are assembled from pieces of older manuscripts written by different persons at different times, producing a composite item with an amalgam of codicological features. But there are also physically homogeneous manuscripts with distinct texts copied together into a new collection. This paper examines such physically homogeneous multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) and attempts to shed light on the circumstances of their production. As a case study, I analyse the codicological characteristics and the textual composition of manuscripts S.5531 and P.3932, both of which are codices with a series of shorter Buddhist texts written in succession.

The Dunhuang manuscripts represent the largest body of manuscripts that survive from China's medieval period. The material was discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century in a hidden library cave, which had been sealed around 1006, possibly in order to safeguard its predominantly Buddhist contents from the advancing Islamic forces.<sup>1</sup> The cave contained a vast amount of written material in a dozen and a half languages and scripts, demonstrating the cosmopolitan nature of local society of the period. Manuscripts written in Chinese were by far the most numerous, numbering in the tens of thousands.<sup>2</sup> During the medieval period Dunhuang was a thriving oasis city at the western end of the Gansu corridor which connected China with Central Asia and regions farther west, and thus it was the first Chinese city when coming from the West. The rich collection of manuscripts provides an ideal opportunity to study medieval Chinese manuscript culture in a way that would not be possible using the considerably smaller

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1 This is merely one of several competing explanations for the reasons behind the sealing of the Dunhuang library cave, advocated in Rong 2000. For an overview of different opinions, see van Schaik / Galambos 2012, 18–28.

2 According to most recent counts, the number of catalogued items from the Dunhuang library cave is beyond 80,000. This, however, includes a large number of smaller fragments with one or only a few characters, and thus should by no means be taken as a reliable manuscript count. But it would probably not be an exaggeration to say that the number of Chinese manuscripts in the library cave exceeded 40,000.

body of material that survives in China proper. From the point of view of their physical form, a conspicuous characteristic of the manuscripts is their diversity. There are all sorts of book forms ranging from single sheets and scrolls to pothi leaves and Western-style codices, as well as a variety of combinations, many of which did not survive elsewhere or are attested only from later periods.

One of the striking features of Chinese manuscripts from Dunhuang is that texts from originally distinct sources are often gathered together to form part of the same manuscript. Some of the components are assembled from pieces of older manuscripts written by different persons at different times.<sup>3</sup> In such cases the final product is a composite item in which codicological features such as handwriting, orthography and even colophons cannot be taken as being representative of the entire manuscript. But there are also physically homogeneous manuscripts with distinct texts copied together into a new collection. This paper examines such physically homogeneous multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) and attempts to shed light on the circumstances of their production. As a case study, I analyse the codicological characteristics and the textual composition of manuscripts S.5531 from the British Library and P.3932 from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), both of which are codices with a series of shorter Buddhist texts written in succession.<sup>4</sup>

The texts in these two manuscripts have already been studied by scholars of Chinese Buddhism as liturgical texts and as examples of apocryphal Buddhist literature.<sup>5</sup> This paper attempts to look at them from a codicological point of view and see what such an analysis may reveal. Among the findings is that while paid scribes copied most of the texts in this type of manuscripts, the last text was probably written by the donor himself who through his personal involvement in the transcription process triggered the manuscript's religious efficacy.

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3 For a study of such a case of composite manuscript assembled from physically separate pieces of older manuscripts, see Galambos 2016.

4 The pressmarks of manuscripts from the BnF and the British Library are used in an abbreviated form. Thus the full shelfmark of S.5531 should be Or.8210/S.5531, and this prefix is part of other British Library manuscripts cited in this paper as beginning with 'S.' Similarly, P.3932 stands for 'Pelliot chinois 3932,' which is an abbreviation used here consistently.

5 See, for example, Teiser 1994 and Kuo 2000.

# 1 Manuscripts and texts

The primary form of paper manuscripts in China before about the end of the eighth century was the scroll, which had been in use since the first centuries of the common era. The beginnings of the scroll can be tied to the use of paper as writing material and the spread of Buddhist literature. A concrete example of an early paper scroll is a fragment of Dharmarakṣa's Chinese translation of the *Zhufo yaoji jing* 諸佛要集經 (Buddhasaṃgīti sūtra), acquired at Toyoq near Turfan by a Japanese expedition organized by Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1876–1948). The fragment includes a colophon dated to the sixth year of the Yuankang 元康 era (296 CE) of the Western Jin 西晉 dynasty (265–316 CE), which makes it the earliest Chinese Buddhist manuscript with a date known to us today.<sup>6</sup> The time range of the manuscripts found at Dunhuang ranges from the late fourth century until the early eleventh, and thus they include a considerable number of scrolls. Yet from about the late eighth, and especially the ninth centuries, new book forms come to the foreground and start being used for writing Chinese manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> The changes were probably due to the influence of Tibetan, Uighur and other Central Asian manuscript cultures. Manuscripts from this period reveal other innovations, such as the use of a hard pen instead of the Chinese brush, a different type of paper and sporadic examples of writing in a left-to-right direction.<sup>8</sup> In the background of these codicological developments is a series of major changes that swept across Central and East Asia and reshaped the geo-political landscape of the entire region. Dunhuang was caught in the middle and, as the Tang Empire lost its western territories, the Gansu Corridor first fell under Tibetan control and later established itself as an independent state nominally under the sovereignty of the Tang court.

Perhaps because of the size of the Dunhuang corpus, even manuscripts belonging to the same book form (e.g. scroll, concertina, codex) vary greatly in size, length, or degree of completeness. For one thing, a significant portion of

<sup>6</sup> A photograph of the manuscript was initially published in the large two-volume illustrated catalogue of the archaeological results of the expeditions (Kagawa 1915, v. 2, 1). Following the publication the fragment went missing and its whereabouts are still unknown. Many decades later researchers from Ryūkoku University discovered additional fragments from this same manuscript (although not the lost part) in the collection of Lüshun Museum 旅順博物館, where part of the original Ōtani collection had been kept since WWII. See Mitani 2006.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of various book forms, see the section 'Formes et formats' in Drège / Moretti 2014, 345–380.

<sup>8</sup> For non-Chinese influences in Chinese manuscripts of the medieval period, see Galambos 2012.

the collection consists of incomplete manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> We cannot attribute this to their antiquity or the damaging effect of time, as the contents of the library cave had been sealed in the early eleventh century. It is clear that the manuscripts were already incomplete at the time when they were deposited inside the cave. In other words, the original collection, whether it belonged to a monastic library or came into being another way, already contained a multitude of such truncated and fragmentary manuscripts. Some of them pre-date the sealing of the library cave by centuries and therefore it is a reasonable assumption that time and subsequent use played a role in their damage. But other manuscripts were merely a few decades old when placed inside the cave, and thus they are less likely to have been damaged due to extensive use. Instead, it appears that incomplete manuscripts were common in medieval collections and libraries and we should not necessarily see them as damaged goods that survived by accident. Manuscripts did not always move from an initial state of completeness towards that of gradual deterioration. Even if a fragment was a remnant of a once complete manuscript, it could at the same time also be a piece of a yet to be assembled manuscript.

Naturally, we cannot deny that incomplete manuscripts in many cases started out as complete ones. They used to have a beginning and end until they were torn and became damaged. But this did not mean the end of their circulation as they were preserved and at times went through additional stages of repair and recycling. Moreover, there is evidence that many of the manuscripts were in fact never finished but the text had been interrupted midline, never to be resumed again. We are not always aware of the reasons for abruptly suspending the process of copying and there may be different explanations for different cases.<sup>10</sup> It is clear, however, that some texts were from the start copied only partially without

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<sup>9</sup> By using the word ‘incomplete’ I am primarily referring here to the physical (i.e. codicological) condition of manuscripts. Naturally, in many cases this also meant that the textual units on them were not complete either. In either case, our main criterion for judging the incompleteness of a manuscript is our familiarity with a larger pool of similar manuscripts, some of which are intact items. In this sense, completeness is a typological category which depends on a comparison with other manuscripts.

<sup>10</sup> An example of an interrupted manuscript is P.2710, a single sheet of paper with 28 lines of the primer *Mengqiu* 蒙求. The copying was suspended mid-line two characters before the end of the sheet, which suggests that it was not meant to be continued and that the surviving sheet was by itself already when the existing 28 lines were copied. Whoever copied the text probably knew from the beginning that they would only transcribe one sheet of it. Since this particular manuscript contains a primer, it is quite likely that the text was copied as a writing exercise.

an intent to create a full copy.<sup>11</sup> In any case, medieval collections did not consist of methodically arranged groups of complete manuscripts. While such items were undoubtedly also present, there were many more incomplete items, representing various stages of composition or decomposition in the life of books.

In a similar way, the texts in the manuscripts do not always form a neatly organized system and their relationship to the physical manuscript can appear haphazard. Once again, there are examples of carefully executed manuscripts with a full copy of a text or a chapter of a longer one. Such texts normally have a title at the beginning and a title at the end, which explicitly identify the text and mark its boundaries. Examples of such manuscripts are Buddhist scriptures copied as part of official sutra copying projects, and sent to Dunhuang and other parts of the empire as a means of disseminating particular scriptures and teachings.<sup>12</sup> As the highly regular layout and calligraphy of such manuscripts shows, the projects represented normative efforts and did not reflect how ordinary manuscripts were produced. In a sense, they provided a standard that illustrated how texts and manuscripts should ideally be created, but the surviving manuscripts attest that this was quite different from how they were usually produced under less controlled settings and, just as importantly, within the constraints of a modest budget.

The connection of text and its physical carrier is at the core of using manuscripts, as the manuscript is a first-hand witness of the circumstances that triggered the formation of that particular instantiation of the text. Like any archaeological object, it contains clues which may enhance or modify our understanding of both the text and the social conditions under which it was written or copied. Yet there is a tendency in modern scholarship to make the text the singular focus of enquiry, especially if it can be matched with a known version of the same text. Such an approach reduces the manuscript to a mere textual witness, the sole value of which is to provide yet another version of a text, and thereby contribute data for textual criticism. But if we make an effort to understand how a particular manuscript came into being, we will see that this line of enquiry in most cases is able to offer additional information that leads us beyond the text itself and helps to reconstruct the people and the context that initiated the production of the manuscript. The details learned in the course of such an enquiry in turn may very well have implications for reading the text itself.

The analysis of MTMs offered here demonstrates how the examination of the codicological makeup of a manuscript at times offer additional insights into its

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<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon is closely related to the purpose of copying, which typically happened within the context of a specific social practice, rather than with the aim of perpetuating the text.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of Tang dynasty sutras copied in the capital Chang'an 長安, see Fujieda 1961.

production and use. While the texts themselves may be interesting in their own right, their combination and physical appearance may allow us to identify some of the reasons and actors responsible for the creation of the manuscript. At the start, we should state that MTMs are not uncommon in the Dunhuang corpus. Quite to the contrary, there are many surviving examples and these attest to the versatility of medieval book culture. It is extremely common for scrolls to have a longer text on one side and several other ones on the other. In many cases it is clear that the side with the longer text was written first and should be considered the recto, whereas the shorter bits on the reverse were added later, thereby making that side the verso. But there are also times when the temporal sequence is not straightforward and there are no discernible connection between the disjointed pieces of the text. There are also manuscripts with text written in two or three languages and the multilingual bits of text can in no way be joined together to form a coherent *text* but, instead, their complex relationship reflects the ways in which the manuscript had once been used, and re-used, during its life cycle.

## 2 Manuscript S.5531

As a case study of Chinese MTMs, this paper examines manuscript S.5531 from the Stein collection at the British Library. This is a small codex, 12 cm × 7.5 cm in size, with dimensions approximately those of a passport, only slightly narrower. It consists of a total of 4 quires sewn together into a volume with each quire made up of 16 bifolia. It is thus clearly a Western-style codex, representing a book form that is attested in Dunhuang during the ninth-tenth centuries, and may reflect the influence of Manichaean book culture.<sup>13</sup> Except for the two last pages, the paper is ruled throughout the manuscript, delineating four vertical columns on each page. The top and bottom margins are about 0.5–0.8 cm wide, the side ones slightly wider. The consistency of the layout indicates that the entire book was designed from the start as an MTM for a specific occasion. As is typical for Chinese manuscripts from this period, it is written not with a brush but a hard pen.<sup>14</sup> The back of the codex is darker in colour, which must be the

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<sup>13</sup> Drège 2014.

<sup>14</sup> According to Fujieda Akira 1969, 19–22, the shift to using a hard pen for Chinese manuscripts instead of the traditional brush occurred at the end of the eighth century as a result of the Tibetans gaining control over Dunhuang and cutting it off from China proper. See also Fujieda 1968. I suspect that the move to a new technology was a result of a cultural preference, rather than the inability to import Chinese-style brushes from Central China; see Galambos 2012, 74–75.

result of wear, as its other side (i.e. the last page in the book) has the same colour as the other pages, and so does the other half of this bifolio. On the back of the book are the titles of three scriptures which partially match the contents of the manuscript and thereby can be assumed to be a sort of table of contents.

The inside of the back cover, which is also the last inscribed page, has the date ‘the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the *gengchen* year’ 庚辰年十二月廿日, which may correspond to January 31, 921, as suggested by Lionel Giles who first catalogued the Stein collection.<sup>15</sup> Because the year is given in the hexadecimal cyclical signs without a concrete reign title, it theoretically could also refer to 861 or 981, both of which are within the general time range from when manuscripts with this book form and hand type are attested. But they are much more common towards the middle of this range, hence the conjecture that the year is 921 is probably accurate. The practice of dating colophons with cyclical signs without reign titles is also typical of this period. In his collection of colophons in Chinese manuscripts, the Japanese scholar Ikeda On 池田温 accepts this dating, although he identifies the *gengchen* year as 920, which was true for the larger part of the year but the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month would have, according to the Gregorian calendar, been in January of the following year.<sup>16</sup>

The beginning of the book is missing, and in its current form the text begins on the very first page in mid-sentence. Based on the surviving portion of the first text, we can calculate that the missing part amounts to about 25 pages. The titles listed on the back cover are as follows:

1. *Molizhitian jing* 摩力支天經 (< *Molizhitian jing* 摩利支天經; Sutra of the great Mārīcī)
2. *Dizhuang pusa jing* 地莊菩薩經 (< *Dizang pusa jing* 地藏菩薩經; Sutra of Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha)
3. *Foshuo xuming jing* 佛說續命經 (Sutra of extending life)

The first thing that we immediately notice is that the two first titles contain relatively crude phonetic mistakes. In the first title this is in the name of Mārīcī, in which the second syllable is written as 力 (LMC: *liǎk*, Y: *li*) instead of 利 (LMC: *lì*, Y: *lì*).<sup>17</sup> The Late Middle Chinese pronunciation of these two characters was different but by the Mongol period they would have become identical in Northern China, just as they are in modern Mandarin. Although in this case we are still in the early part of the tenth century, the phonetic substitution is no doubt due to the complex linguistic situation

<sup>15</sup> Giles 1957, 85.

<sup>16</sup> Ikeda 1990, 464.

<sup>17</sup> The Late Middle Chinese (LMC) and Yuan (Y) pronunciations used here are based on Pulleyblank 1991.

of the Gansu corridor, including Dunhuang. As other manuscripts and later inscriptions testify, using the character 力 to write the second syllable was an accepted way of transcribing the name of Mārīci in Chinese.<sup>18</sup> The second mistake is in the second title, in which the second syllable of the name of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva is written with the character *zhuang* 莊 (LMC: *tʂa:ŋ*, Y: *tʂwan*) instead of *zang* 藏 (LMC: *tʂianʅ*, Y: *tsaŋ*). In a way, this is a more significant problem because the Chinese name of the bodhisattva is originally not a phonetic transcription but a translation of the concept of ‘earth-store’ and thus the semantic value of the second character is significant. Nevertheless, similar phonetic mistakes of writing even the names of bodhisattvas and other members of the Buddhist pantheon are sometimes met with in Dunhuang, especially on cartouche inscriptions attached to images on murals and silk paintings.<sup>19</sup>

All three texts listed on the back cover of the codex are sutras found in Dunhuang in multiple copies, often not as single-text manuscripts but, similar to the situation in S.5331, copied onto the same manuscript along with other short sutras.<sup>20</sup> Even though on the back of S.5331 the three titles unquestionably reference the contents of the codex, in reality the manuscript contains quite a few other texts. Most of these are explicitly identified by a title which tells us that they were not considered part of a new composite text but were indeed seen as separate textual entities, even if presented as part of the same manuscript. Moving through the booklet from the beginning, we find the following ten titles:<sup>21</sup>

**18** For example, the *Quan Liao wen* 全遼文 (Chen 1982, 248) records an inscription dated to 1096 from a stūpa in Jizhou 薊州 (modern-day Tianjin 天津), which mentions obtaining some relics of the Buddha at a place called Molizhitian Cliffs 摩力支天佛崖, with the name of Molizhitian written the same way as in our manuscript.

**19** A similar type of phonetic mistake in writing the name of a bodhisattva is seen in painting MG.23079 from the Musée Guimet. In this painting a cartouche next to the image names Bukong juansuo pusa 不空羂索菩薩 (Bodhisattva Amoghapasa, i.e. Unerring Lasso) as Bokong juansuo kusa 伯空卷索苦薩, with an obvious disregard to the meaning of Chinese characters in the name. The date of the painting is 950, which is quite close in time to the codex examined here.

**20** See relevant entries in Shi et al. 2000. For a study specifically on the *Foshuo xuming jing*, see Li 2010.

**21** The titles listed here are written the way they appear in the manuscript.



1. *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (Sutra of the lotus of the wonderful dharma)
2. *Foshuo jie baisheng yuanjia tuoluoni jing* 佛說解百生怨家陀羅尼經 (Dhāraṇī sutra spoken by the Buddha for dispelling hatred accumulated in the course of a hundred lifetimes)
3. ®*Foshuo Dizang pusa jing* 佛說地藏菩薩經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha)
4. *Foshuo tianqingwen jing* 佛說天請問經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on questions asked by a deity)
5. ®*Foshuo xuming jing* 佛說續命 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on extending life)
6. ®*Molizhitian jing* 摩利支天經 (Sutra of the great Mārīci)
7. *Foshuo yan shouming jing* 佛說延壽命經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on prolonging one's life-span)
8. [Untitled. Questions and answers related to Buddhist doctrine]
9. *Foshuo Yanluo wang jing* 佛說閻羅王經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on King Yama)<sup>22</sup>
10. *Bore boluomiduo xinjing* 般若波羅蜜多心經 (Sutra of the heart of the perfection of wisdom)

As seen from the list, the codex contains ten different texts and all of these, except No. 8, are marked with a title. The ten titles also include the three listed on the back cover (marked here with the sign ®) but their order is different, perhaps because it was inconsequential. Moreover, both titles miswritten on the back cover appear inside the book in their correct form. The list also shows that item No. 8 is untitled and cannot be identified with a known text. Instead, this is a short collection of questions and answers related to doctrinal issues. It comes immediately after item No. 7 and neither its beginning nor end is marked. All other items in the list are well-known texts and appropriately carry a title.

Item No. 1 is the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lotus sutra* in Kumārajīva's translation, which was extremely popular in the medieval period both in Dunhuang and elsewhere. This chapter, titled *The universal gateway of Bodhisattva Guanshiyin* 觀世音菩薩普門品, often circulated as an independent text either as a separate manuscript or as part of similar collections of shorter texts. This was one of the most popular Buddhist texts and it survives in over a hundred manuscripts, some with colourful illustrations.<sup>23</sup> As a result of its immense popularity and independent circulation, the chapter was also often referred to by a stand-alone title *Guanyin jing* 觀音經 (Sutra of Guanyin) or *Guanshiyin jing* 觀世音經 (Sutra of Guanshiyin), further emphasizing its self-contained status.<sup>24</sup> In S.5331 the sutra begins halfway through the text because the codex in its current form is incom-

<sup>22</sup> This is the short title that appears at the end of the text. The head title is quite a bit longer and more cumbersome: *Foshuo Yanluo wang shouji sizhong nixiu sheng qizhai gongde wangsheng jingtu jing* 佛說閻羅王授記四眾逆修 生七齋功德往生淨土經. For a detailed study of this scripture and its role in the lives of ordinary people in Dunhuang and in medieval China in general, see Teiser 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Yü 1994, 152.

<sup>24</sup> For a brief overview of the *Guanyin jing* in Dunhuang, see Fang 1997, 225–227.

plete. It is easy to calculate the missing portion which, including the title, would have amounted to 1,119 characters. The extant pages of the sutra in the codex have about 45 characters per page, which means that the missing portion would have taken up about 25 pages.

For the most part, the texts in the codex are clearly marked with a so-called 'head title' (*shouti* 首題) appearing at the beginning and a closing 'end title' (*weiti* 尾題). This was a typical way of marking the beginning and end of texts in Chinese manuscripts, whether they consisted of one or more texts. The two titles did not necessarily match as the head title normally represented the text's official and more complete title, whereas the end title could be an abbreviated or unofficial way of referring to the same text. Since the beginning of the manuscript is missing, we do not know what the head title of the first text (i.e. 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lotus sutra*) was but the end title says *Miaofa lianhua jing yi juan* 妙法蓮華經一卷 (*Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma, in one scroll*). This is an unusual way of calling the text and is technically incorrect, as it only comprises one specific chapter of this sutra. In terms of the layout, the end title appears in a new column and is followed by an empty one, dividing the text visually from the one that comes after it.

The next text is the *Foshuo jie baisheng yuanjia tuoluoni jing*, an apocryphal collection of magical spells. It begins with a full title in a separate line but the end title is absent. Instead, the text concludes with a short spell placed on its own in an indented line.<sup>25</sup> In this case there is no empty line to mark the division between the two adjacent texts but the indentation of the final line with the spell and the empty space following the head title of the next text unambiguously mark the boundary between texts. In the later part of the codex the titles do not always occupy a separate line but there is always enough indentation or empty space left to indicate the boundary. The very last text in the booklet is the *Bore boluomiduo xin jing* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya sūtra*), more commonly known as the *Xin jing* 心經 (*Heart sūtra*). The title at the beginning appears in full form but surprisingly the word *juan* 卷 ('scroll') is omitted from the expression *yi juan* 一卷 ('in one scroll'). This is written correctly in the end title but the word *Prajñāpāramitā* is abbreviated to its last syllable *duo* 多 (i.e. *Duo xin jing yi juan* 多心經一卷).<sup>26</sup>

Since the beginning of the manuscript is missing, we do not know whether the entire volume had a title. The texts themselves are known from transmitted literature and are also well attested in other manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries. The versions in the codex have some discrepancies with the standard versions we are familiar with but these in most cases can be attributed to copying errors. Supporting this assumption is a series of corrections, ranging from common correction marks to insertions of longer strings of text accidentally omitted while copying. Even though comparable collections of

25 A similar spell on a separate indented line appears at the beginning of the text after the head title.

26 This abbreviation is in fact common among the Dunhuang manuscripts.

similar texts are known from Dunhuang, none of these has the same combination and sequence of the ten texts, which suggests that the booklet was an *ad hoc* selection of texts intended for personal use. Judging from its content, this was a book meant to be used in a liturgical context similar to how volumes with multiple texts—including the same 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lotus sutra*—are still used in Buddhist temples throughout East Asia.

Structurally, the manuscript consists of 32 bifolia, folded and arranged into four separate quires of equal size. Each quire has 8 bifolia sewn together with a white thread using four roughly evenly spaced holes along the centre of the folded bifolia.<sup>27</sup> The thread also keeps the quires together and it is likely that the missing part from the beginning of the manuscript formed a separate quire which became detached when the thread broke. Since the missing part amounts to about 25 pages, that is a bit over 6 bifolia, it is possible that the first quire was slightly smaller than the remaining ones, each of which consists of 8 bifolia. It is also possible that the text of the sutra was preceded by a series of spells or a picture and the first quire was the same size as the surviving four in the manuscript.

Table 1 displays the relationship between the codicological vs. textual structure of the codex, using thumbnails of the original images of the manuscript. Following the right-to-left direction of the text in Chinese books, the first image is in the top right corner and the last one is the bottom left. The wide white gaps mark the boundaries of the quires and the narrower black ones, those between texts. The number of each text is signified by the white number placed at its start. As the table shows, the text boundaries never overlap with those of the quires, which means that the codicological structure of the codex was essentially irrelevant for the person copying the texts. In fact, the fourth text begins half a page into the second quire yet there is no trace of an effort to adhere to the physical division of the volume.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, once sewn together, the bifolia were seen as parts of an indivisible whole.

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<sup>27</sup> It is also possible to see remnants of some red, blue and green threads in the second and third quires, although it is not clear whether the colours have any function.






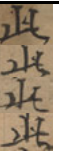








<sup>28</sup> The disregard for the boundaries of codicological units within the manuscript was also common in scrolls. Once the separate sheets of paper were glued together to form a longer continuous writing surface, scribes made no attempt to observe the physical boundaries of the sheets in the scroll.

Tab. 1: The codicological vs. textual structure of manuscript S.5531.

														
00.jpg	02.jpg	03.jpg	04.jpg	05.jpg	06.jpg	07.jpg	08.jpg	09.jpg	10.jpg	11.jpg	22.jpg	33.jpg	44.jpg	55.jpg
														
12.jpg	13.jpg	14.jpg	15.jpg	16.jpg	17.jpg	18.jpg	19.jpg	20.jpg	21.jpg	23.jpg	24.jpg	25.jpg	26.jpg	27.jpg
														
28.jpg	29.jpg	30.jpg	31.jpg	32.jpg	34.jpg	35.jpg	36.jpg	37.jpg	38.jpg	39.jpg	40.jpg	41.jpg	42.jpg	43.jpg
														
45.jpg	46.jpg	47.jpg	48.jpg	49.jpg	50.jpg	51.jpg	52.jpg	53.jpg	54.jpg	56.jpg	57.jpg	58.jpg	59.jpg	60.jpg
														
61.jpg	62.jpg	63.jpg	64.jpg	65.jpg	66.jpg	67.jpg	68.jpg	69.jpg	70.jpg	71.jpg	72.jpg	73.jpg	74.jpg	75.jpg

The handwriting in the manuscript is relatively uniform, although we can discern several distinct hands. Without trying to do a detailed palaeographic analysis, Table 2 compares the way the characters *ci* 此 ('this') and *wu* 無 ('there is no; have no') appear across the ten different texts in the codex. The examples show that there is a marked consistency between how the same character is written within the same text and, at the same time, differs from the way it looks in some others. Allowing for the possibility that the handwriting of the same person may somewhat vary depending on his mood, the amount of available time, his ability to focus or other factors, the examples in the table probably represent the work of at least four or five different hands. Looking at the character 此, for example, I would say that text 1 represented one hand, texts 2 and 3 another one, text 5 another one, text 7 another one, and text 9 yet another. As for the character 無, there are again obvious dissimilarities across different texts. The forms in texts 6 and 9 seem the most compatible with each other, whereas the form in text 4 is a completely different orthographic structure. Finally the forms in the last text are distinct from those in all other text. In sum, we can conclude that the texts in the codex are written in several hands, even though the general writing style is similar throughout the manuscript.

**Tab. 2:** Comparison of the characters 此 and 無 in the ten different texts in manuscript S.5531.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
此										
無										

In terms of the overall consistency of handwriting, the last text stands out. Written in considerably larger characters, it has about 8–9 characters per line instead of the 10–13 seen in the rest of the book (Fig. 1). In addition to obviously being written by a different hand, the larger character size sets it apart from the rest of the book. While the differences in the quality or size of the characters may seem

like a trivial observation, in this case they may be of significance for understanding the function of the entire manuscript, as well as the process of its creation. As I will argue below, this final part of the manuscript was probably written by the donor who paid for the codex, whereas the other nine texts were executed prior to this by hired hands.

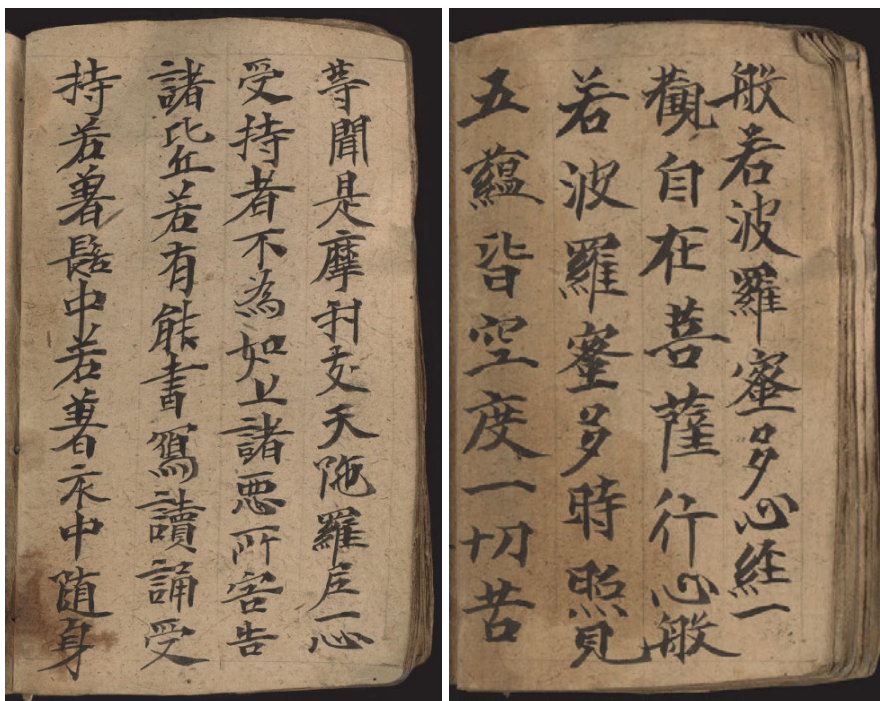


Fig. 1: Comparison of handwriting and character size in text 6 on p. 30 (left) in manuscript S.5531 with text 10 on p. 60 (right).

### 3 Manuscript P.3932

Although, as discussed above, S.5331 appears to be an occasional compilation, there are other comparable booklets among the Dunhuang manuscripts. One of the more similar ones is P.3932 from the Pelliot collection at the BnF. This manuscript is a small codex with dimensions matching those of S.5331 (i.e. 12 cm × 7.5

cm). Naturally, the identical book form and the unusual size point to a connection between the two items.<sup>29</sup> Fortunately, this manuscript is complete, so we need not guess the amount of pages missing. It comprises a total of 92 pages, that is, 46 folia, not counting the relatively hard front and back covers which, unlike in some other Chinese codices from Dunhuang, are not part of the quire structure. The booklet consists of six quires, each of which has four bifolia.<sup>30</sup> The leaves are sewn together, using six holes, with a red and a white thread, which still hold the codex together tightly. The manuscript is carefully ruled from the first page to the last, dividing the pages into four vertical columns with 0.5–0.8 cm margins at the top and bottom, similar to manuscript S.5531 above. The side margins are, however, narrower, only about 0.2–0.3 cm in width.

The ruling begins on the very first page which has no writing save for the character *fo* 佛 ('Buddha') in the top right corner, which very likely has a liturgical or notational significance here but is not part of the texts in the manuscript. This solitary character is written in a relatively unskilled hand in contrast with the practiced calligraphy of the following pages, and this is an indication that it was not part of the original manuscript but may have been added subsequently by a user or owner.

Turning to the next page, we find a two-page line drawing of Bodhisattva Guanyin with two donors. The bodhisattva sits on a lotus throne in a half-lotus position, whereas the donors, presumably husband and wife, kneel in front of him on a mat, hands joined together in a sign of worship. More or less contemporary scenes depicting donors in the act of worship (*gongyang* 供養) are known from other manuscripts and especially silk paintings.<sup>31</sup> Appearing at the beginning of the codex unmistakably shows that it is they who sponsored the production of the manuscript by paying for the copying. The picture of the bodhisattva and the donors is executed with considerable skill, confirming that it was done by a trained artist and was clearly part of the job paid for by the donors. The custom of hiring someone to copy Buddhist texts is attested in colophons among the Dunhuang manuscripts. For example, manuscript P.2893 contains *juan* 4 of

<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Nathalie Monnet of the BnF for verifying that the binding of P.3932 seen in the digital images is in fact the original one.

<sup>30</sup> A description of the manuscript, including its codicological features is available in vol. 4 of the catalogue of the French collection; see Soyumié et al. 1991, 423–424.

<sup>31</sup> An example of a manuscript with a donor image is P.3136 where a donor named Li Shunzi 李順子 is depicted with clasped hands at the end of a copy of the same *Molizhitian jing* seen in S.5531. An amusing example is Stein manuscript 209 (Ch.00213) from the British Museum, where a clumsy picture of a donor worshipping Guanyin precedes a copy of the *Foshuo xuming jing* (also included in S.5531).



the apocryphal sutra *Foshuo baoen jing* 佛說報恩經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on requiting kindness) and a colophon at the end states that it was copied by a hand hired by the monks Xingkong 性空 and Daoyuan 道圓.<sup>32</sup> While this colophon is in a way exceptional in referring to the act of employing someone so explicitly, in other cases this may be the case even if not stated specifically.

In his catalogue of the dated manuscripts from the Stein collection, Lionel Giles argues that the verb *zao* 造 ('to create') should be understood in the colophons in the sense that a manuscript was 'caused to be made or copied,' and therefore indicated paying someone else for the copying of a text. He also adds that in the context of the colophons even the verb *xie* 寫 ('to copy, write') is to be generally understood as causing someone to copy, rather than copying by oneself.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, Giles's translations of some of the colophons interpret the verb used for the act of copying in this causative sense. An example of such a colophon from a tenth century is manuscript S.6230, which contains the *Yanluo wang jing* seen in codex S.5531 above. The colophon dates to 926, only five years later than the date of S.5531, suggesting that the two manuscripts may have been produced and used under similar circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

奉為慈母病患，速得詮嗟（痊差），免授（受）地獄，壹為在生父母作福，二為自身，及合家內外親因（姻）等。無知口長，病患不侵，常保安樂，書寫次（此）經，免其□□（地獄？）業報。 同光肆年丙戌歲六月六日寫記之耳。

On behalf of my gracious mother, now afflicted with illness, that she may be speedily cured and escape the apportionment of hell [in the next reincarnation]; firstly, to produce happiness [resulting from merit acquired] for my living parents, and secondly for myself and my whole family and kinsmen by blood or by marriage [...] that we may not be attacked by disease but may constantly preserve our health and happiness, I have caused this sutra to be copied out, so that all of them would escape the karmic retribution [of the underworld?]. Copying recorded on the 6<sup>th</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup> moon of the *bingxu* year, the 4<sup>th</sup> of Tongguang.

The colophon demonstrates that the motivation for paying for the copying of the text was to accrue karmic merits for the donor and his extended family. Even though the colophon is ambiguous regarding the person who actually copied the text, Giles is probably right in interpreting the statement as a reference to a

<sup>32</sup> See van Schaik / Galambos 2012, 104–105.

<sup>33</sup> Giles 1939, 1031. In support of this argument, Giles cites a colophon that mentions cutting down expenses to be able to afford paying for the copying of a section of a sutra. Another example involves an empress 'causing' the copying of a larger group of sutras which she would not have been able to copy by herself.

<sup>34</sup> Translation adapted from Giles 1940, 329–330.



commissioned production of a manuscript. This would probably also mean that in contrast with the main text, the colophon was written by the donor who paid for the copying. When the copying is not hired out but done by someone in person, this may be expressed using the expression ‘with one’s own hand’ 自手, as it is seen in the colophons of manuscripts S.4601 (986) and S.4307 (987).

Coming back to manuscript P.3932, the first text beginning on the page following the picture is the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lotus sutra*, just as it was the case with codex S.5531. Since the book is complete, we have a head title, which is the standard title of the text: *Sutra of the lotus of the wonderful dharma, Chapter 25: The universal gateway of Bodhisattva Guanshiyin* 妙法蓮華經觀世音菩薩普門品第廿五. In contrast with this, the end title for the same text says *Guanyin jing yi juan* 觀音經一卷 (Sutra of Guanyin in one scroll). The text takes up about two-thirds of the whole book and is written in a skilled and confident hand, which seems to confirm the assumption that it was produced by a professional scribe. We have no information whether this person was a scribe, a monk or just someone with good handwriting who offered such service in exchange for a payment. The donors, in turn, would have accrued karmic merits through the act of sponsoring the production of the manuscript.

The manuscript continues with the *Heart sutra* and several additional texts in succession, just as it was the case with the ten texts that were copied one after the other in S.5531. In fact, the first five texts in the Pelliot manuscript are all included in S.5531. Thus manuscript P.3932 contains the following texts:

1. *Miaofa lianhua jing Guanshiyin pusa pumen pin di nianwu* 妙法蓮華經觀世音菩薩普門品第廿五 (Sutra of the lotus of the wonderful Dharma, Chapter 25: The universal gateway of Bodhisattva Guanshiyin)
2. *Bore boluomiduo xinjing* 般若波羅蜜多心經 (Sutra of the heart of the perfection of wisdom)
3. *Foshuo xuming jing* 佛說續命經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on extending life)
4. *Foshuo Dizang pusa jing* 佛說地藏菩薩經 (Sutra spoken by the Buddha on Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha)
5. *Foshuo jie baisheng yuanjia tuoni jing* 佛說解百生怨家陀尼經 (Dhāraṇī sutra spoken by the Buddha for dispelling hatred accumulated in the course of a hundred lifetimes)<sup>35</sup>
6. *Cishi zhenyan* 慈氏真言 (Mantra of Maitreya) and *Jingkouye zhenyan* 淨口業真言 (Mantra for the purification of speech).

The two mantras at the end are listed here as a single item because they are written continuously without any visible break, by the same unskilled hand. These

<sup>35</sup> This title omits the second syllable from the word *tuoluoni* 陀羅尼經 (dhāraṇī) which may be simply a mistake.

two mantras are also the only content that does not occur in S.5531, while all other texts are shared between the two codices.

There is a difference in the sequence of texts, probably because it was inconsequential, and there was a certain degree of flexibility with regards to which texts should be included in such a manuscript. In either case, the two manuscripts are analogous not only in their physical appearance and size but also in their content, which naturally signifies a similarity in their method of production and use. There are, in fact, quite a few similar MTM volumes (e.g. S.5450, S.5531, S.5585), which contain various combinations of the same few short texts.<sup>36</sup>

From a palaeographic point of view, the two mantras at the end of P.3932 exhibit a disparity from the rest of the manuscript in that they are written in a noticeably less skilled hand. The other texts are also written in more than one hand, some more competent than others, but the two mantras at the end stand out with their clumsy handwriting.<sup>37</sup> Considering the picture of donors at the beginning of the manuscript and the skilled hands used for writing the first five texts, it is very likely that the two mantras are in the hand of one of the donors, whereas the rest of the texts represent hired hands. Adding the last text in one's own hand must have ensured the efficacy of the manuscript, a final step that helped to take complete possession of the merits generated by the act of copying.

## 4 Conclusions

This contribution looked at two Chinese codices from Dunhuang as examples of MTMs. Both of them consist of a series of Buddhist texts assembled into a single volume that was probably used by local people for liturgical purposes. The manuscripts were of identical size and similar physical form, and their content overlapped to a considerable extent. This points to a link between them, making it likely that they were produced under similar circumstances and probably close to each other in time. Accordingly, the date 921 seen at the end of manuscript S.5531 could be close to the time when P.3932 was commissioned. At the same time, the discrepancy between the order of texts in the two booklets and the texts only appearing in one of them indicate that there was a certain degree of arbitrariness in such collections and that their composition was not stable.

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<sup>36</sup> Teiser 1994, 273–274, Kuo 2000, 694–695.

<sup>37</sup> Zhang Zong (2001, 95) is of the opinion that the first three texts in P.3932 are in one hand and the last two in another one.

In both manuscripts the last text exhibited some calligraphic differences from the rest of the texts in the volume. In the case of S.5531 the last text appeared in much larger characters, which in turn affected the layout, such as the number of characters per line. In P.3932 the last text was written in a considerably less skilled hand in comparison with the rest of the codex. Since the manuscript began with a line drawing of a donor couple kneeling in front of Bodhisattva Guanyin, we can assume that the last text was copied by one of them, whereas the other texts were executed by hired hands. This type of division of labour probably also held true for S.5531, as well as other manuscripts belonging to this group. As seen from the example of codex P.3932, the commissioned manuscripts were also professionally bound, and this must have happened before being handed over to the donors. It is possible that such manuscripts were sold at monasteries or other public places as premade codices, with empty pages left for buyers to copy the last text in their own hand. This model of appropriating purchased or commissioned items may also hold true for paintings where the inscriptions in cartouches are often of markedly inferior quality than the paintings themselves.

We should also acknowledge that donors did not always have inexperienced handwriting and so the text they copied would not necessarily appear inferior to those executed by hired hands. Similarly, the calligraphic skills of scribes hired for producing such manuscripts may not necessarily have been significantly better than those of the average literate person and thus may not be of noticeably different quality from the hand of the donor. Yet even if the handwriting and layout of the last text does not differ perceptibly from the other texts in the manuscript, volumes with analogous content and format were likely produced in a similar manner. Indeed, it is the handful of manuscripts in which such a discrepancy is detectable that allow us to demonstrate the presence of the donor's hand and help us to deduce their potential role in the production of similar manuscripts.

This paper analysed only two manuscripts as examples of MTM structure, approaching them from the point of view of their physical form. A more comprehensive study would have to include all identifiable manuscripts of this type, as these would almost certainly provide additional details that may be relevant for the entire group. It is merely a modest attempt to demonstrate how the scrutiny of the physical form of manuscripts may lead to insights regarding the social and religious background of a community.

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