

# Manichean Manuscripts in Xiapu and Their Significance

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## Abstract

Since October 2008, a large number of Manichaean documents have been discovered around Xiapu County in Fujian Province. These include the classic *Mani the Buddha of Light* (摩尼光佛) and various ritual texts such as *Leshantang Divine Record* (乐山堂神), *Xingfu Ancestral Celebration Text* (兴福祖庆诞科), *Manichean Sect's Initial Transmission Request to the Master* (明门初传请本师), *Volume of the Commentary and Record of Reports, Applications, and Official Documents* (奏申牒疏科册), *Volume of the Record of Seven-level Candle Lighting Rituals* (点灯七层科册), as well as many other historical relics. It is clear from these discoveries that Manichaeism has been propagated in Xiapu for a millennium and has adapted to changing circumstances, moving away from its original canonical frameworks and towards a more practical and secular direction. The newly discovered Manichaean texts in Xiapu are not only rich in content but also comparable in importance to those discovered in Dunhuang, Turfan, and other places, making them a primary source for the study of Manichaean history in China after the Song and Yuan dynasties.

**Keywords:** Manichaean texts, Xiapu, Dunhuang, Turfan.

## 1. Introduction of the New Discovery in Xiapu

Since October 2008, a large number of Manichaean manuscripts, relics, and ancient ruins have been discovered around Shangwan Village in Baiyang Township, Xiapu County, Fujian Province. Thanks to the kindness of the discoverer, Mr. Lin Jun, the 29th descendant of the Manichaean hierarch Lin Deng (1003-1059), almost all of the existing materials have been handed over to me for research. The list of materials includes:

1. *Mani the Buddha of Light* (摩尼光佛), 83 pages, handwritten copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng 陈培生 in Shangwan Village, Xiapu County. The book cover is heavily worn, with the title “Chen Peisheng’s collection and repairment of Mani the Buddha of Light” written later, as opposed to the original

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- handwriting. It contains sub-titles such as “Praising the Heavenly King” and “Four Silence Praises,” presumably written by Lin Deng’s descendants.
2. Xingfu Ancestral Celebrative Ritual Text (兴福祖庆诞科) (edition A, copy of Qing Dynasty), 34 pages, handwritten copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  3. Xingfu Ancestral Celebrative Ritual Text (New copy, B edition), 30 pages, handwritten copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  4. The High and Vast Text (高广文), four pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  5. Text on Requesting Buddha for Happiness in the Underworld (冥福请佛文), 14 pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  6. Leshan Hall Divine Record (乐山堂神记), ten pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  7. Manichean Sect’s Initial Transmission Request to the Master (明门初传请本师), 17 pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  8. Text on Borrowing the Khakkhara (借锡杖文), four pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  9. Text on Borrowing the Beads (借珠文), three pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  10. Verse on Paying for the Khakkhara (付锡杖偈), one page, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  11. Four Silence Praises (四寂赞), two pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  12. Praise for Sending the Buddha (送佛赞), three pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  13. Text on Sending the Buddha (送佛文), eight pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  14. Viewing the Propitious Brightness Sutra in the Face of Misfortune (凶看贞明经毕用此文), four pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  15. Text on Sending the Divinity of the Three Realms (送三界神文), four pages, Qing copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng. Items 4-15 in this list were bound together into a book without a title, named “Compilation of Rituals Texts on Inviting Divinities” by the author.
  16. Commentary on the Prayer for Rain (祷雨疏), 71 pages, passed down by Master Xie Daolian in Baoyang Village, Xiapu County. It records a complete set of rain-praying rituals.
  17. Secret of Praying for Rain (求雨秘诀), 12 pages, handwritten copy, passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
  18. Volume of the Commentary and Record of Reports, Applications, and Official Documents (奏申牒疏科册), Qing copy, 65 pages, written in two different fonts by different calligraphers, passed down by Master Xie Daolian.

19. Volume of the Seven-level Candle Lighting Rituals (点灯七层科册), also known as “Merit Dedication Memorial List,” a 26-page handwritten copy passed down by Master Xie Daolian.
20. The Gate Text of the Auspicious Liberation Rite (吉祥道场门书), handwritten copy passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
21. The Memorial Letter of Auspicious Liberation Rite (吉祥道场申函牒), handwritten copy passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
22. Menyíngkeyuán (门迎科苑), handwritten copy passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
23. The Manichean Arcane Method of Food Offering (摩尼施食秘法), handwritten copy passed down by Master Chen Peisheng.
24. Unnamed Ritual Texts (无名科文), multiple handwritten copies, the longest of which is 165 pages, with separate transmissions by Master Chen Peisheng and Master Xie Daolian.
25. The Ritual Text of Righteousness and Brightness (贞明开正文科), 44-page, Qing copy, transmitted in Jianglong Village, Pingnan County, Fujian Province.
26. The Second Time Text (第二时科), Qing copy, transmitted in Jianglong Village.
27. The Report of Righteousness and Brightness (贞明开正奏), Qing copy, transmitted in Jianglong Village.
28. Genealogy of the Sun Family of Fuchun (富春孙氏族谱), handwritten copy kept in Chanyang Village, Baiyang Township, Xiapu County.
29. Catalogue of the Genealogy of the Lin Family of Gai Zhu and Shan Wan (济南郡林氏宗谱·盖竹上万林氏宗谱世次目图), a copy from the eleventh year of the Qing Dynasty’s Tongzhi era, kept in Shangwan Village, Gai Zhu Township, Xiapu County.

In addition, there are parts of the Lin family genealogy, information on “Que Xia Lin” from Shangwan village, records of the Sun family genealogy, and related photographs of cultural relics. Upon receiving the photographs of these documents, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of excitement, as if witnessing a miraculous event. It has been over a century since significant discoveries of Manichaeism literature have been made. The few that have been found were primarily recorded in languages such as Uighur, Sogdian, Middle Persian, and Parthian, with scarce instances in Chinese. Thus, the discovery of an extensive collection of ancient Chinese Manichaean manuscripts was truly awe-inspiring.

## 2. Past Discoveries in Turfan and Dunhuang

The comprehension of Manichaeism before the twentieth century was limited and primarily dependent on indirect sources, such as accounts from Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists who opposed the faith, along with sporadic descriptions in Chinese historical texts. Furthermore, due to persecution, Manichaeism did not leave behind many classic texts

or materials. It was not until the early twentieth century, with successive archaeological discoveries in Dunhuang and Turfan, that this situation began to change.

The new Manichaean materials were initially uncovered in Turfan, Xinjiang. From 1902 to 1914, Germany dispatched four "Turfan Expeditions" to Xinjiang and amassed piles of ancient manuscripts from sites such as the Qočo ruin and Bezeklik Grottoes. These manuscripts, written in 24 languages and 17 scripts, primarily contained religious content, including a substantial amount of Manichaean texts and mural fragments. According to Le Coq, local farmers informed him that five years earlier, they had discovered cartloads of manuscripts when they were demolishing an abandoned temple and threw them all into the river. Le Coq deduced from the farmers' description of the manuscripts' style that they were Manichaean texts (Le Coq 1928, 58-59). He also discovered a library of Manichaean scriptures at the K site of the Qočo ruin, where manuscript drafts were piled up to a thickness of about two feet on the ground but unfortunately had been soaked in mud and water, and were rotten and illegible (Le Coq 1928, 61). Most of the unearthed Manichaean manuscripts in Turfan were written in the Uighur script, and the known number of these manuscripts has exceeded 300. Additionally, some of the texts were inscribed in three Middle Iranian languages - Middle Persian, Parthian, and Sogdian - while a small number were written in Chinese and Bactrian.

During the same period as the significant discovery in Turfan, important manuscripts pertaining to the Manichaeism were found in the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. Although the number of manuscripts found in Dunhuang are smaller than that of Turfan, they are much more well-preserved. Among the Manichaean texts discovered in Dunhuang, seven were written in Uighur and three in the Chinese language.

Compared to the vast amount of Buddhist literature, the number of Manichaean texts discovered in Turfan and Dunhuang was not very large, but they were considered particularly precious because of the extreme rarity of surviving Manichaean relics. Among these, the *Xwāstwānīft*, found in both Dunhuang and Turfan, was considered the most significant.

The *Xwāstwānīft* in Dunhuang was discovered by Aurel Stein in 1907 in the Mogao Caves and is currently housed in the British Library in London, where it is numbered Or. 8212/178 (formerly Ch. 0015). The scroll contains 338 lines, written in elegant and clear Manichaean script in the Uighur language. It includes 15 specific confessional contents; only the beginning part is missing. It is the best-preserved Uighur *Xwāstwānīft* in existence (Le Coq 1911, 277-314). In 1908, another copy of *Xwāstwānīft* was discovered in Astana, Turfan, by the Russian explorer Diakonoff. This manuscript, now preserved in St. Petersburg, has 160 lines written in Uighur script (Radloff 1911, 867-896). More manuscripts of the *Xwāstwānīft* are preserved in Berlin, with over 20 different copies, some written in Uighur script and others in Manichaean script. When these three versions are combined, the complete text of *Xwāstwānīft* can be reconstructed (Дмитриева 1963, 14-232).

In addition, the discovery of other important Manichaean manuscripts in Turfan, including *The Record of Bögü Qaghan's Conversion to Manichaeism* (牟羽可汗入教记), an Ancient Uighur Official Decree Issued to a Manichaean Monastery and the Middle Persian text *Šābuhragān* (written by Mani himself), as well as Parthian and Uighur versions of *Manichaean Hymns*, has drawn much attention from the international scholarship. However, for the study of Manichaeism in China, the three Tang dynasty Manichaean manuscripts written in Chinese discovered in Dunhuang have the greatest significance.

The first manuscript is the *Incomplete scripture of Manichaeism* (摩尼教残经) (BD00256), which consists of 17 pages and 345 lines, with the beginning missing but the end intact. Because the first part of the scripture is lost, its title is unknown. Due to its content relating to the “light” and “dark” aspects of Iranian religions, it has been named the “Incomplete scripture of Manichaeism.” The scripture is presented in a question-and-answer format between a master and his disciples, elaborating on Mani’s teaching about the coexistence of the “light” and “dark” aspects within human beings. Its style is similar to that of Buddhist scriptures, and it is of great reference value for the study of the basic doctrines of Manichaeism and its evolution in China.

Another manuscript is *The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light* (摩尼光佛教法仪略) (S. 3969+P. 3884), which is fragmented into two pieces. S. 3969, made up of three pages and eighty-two lines, is housed in the British Library in London, while P. 3884, consisting of only one sheet and 29 lines, is stored in the National Library of France in Paris. The two pieces can be joined together perfectly. The existing fragment contains over 1,540 characters in six chapters, mainly introducing the origin of Manichaeism, the founder Mani’s major works, the organization of the religious group, the system of monasteries, and the core doctrines of the religion. It is crucial to the study of Manichaeism in both Central Asia and Central China.

The third manuscript is the *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll* (下部赞) (S. 2659), housed in the British Library in London. The manuscript contains 423 lines of text, with only the beginning slightly damaged and occasional missing characters elsewhere. It is a hymn of praise used by Chinese Manichaeans in religious rituals. Although incomplete, it is the most complete and richly detailed surviving hymn of praise in all the existing Manichaean texts in various languages.

In the Chinese documents unearthed in Turfan, there are five Manichaean documents, including Ch. 3218v and Ch. 3138v (T II T D 132), which correspond to lines 86-88 and 105-109 of the *Incomplete scripture of Manichaeism*. The content of Ch. 258r/v (T II T 1319) is complex, with some parts corresponding to lines 147-149 and 167-169 of S. 2659 *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll*, another part resembling lines 161-163 of the *Hymn Scroll*, and the other part has no corresponding text found. Ch.174 r/v (T II 1917) is an unnamed Manichaean document. All four of the above documents were

unearthed in the Toyuk Grottoes. Another one, Ch. 1363, discovered in the Yarkhoto, is an unnamed Manichaean document with only nine characters remaining. In the Otani collection in Japan, a small fragment of the *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll* (Ot. Ry. 4982A) has recently been discovered, with only a few dozen characters remaining, and the content is identical to lines 161-162 of the corresponding Dunhuang manuscript. The provenance of this piece of Otani document is unknown, but based on the general information of the Otani Expeditions and the locations of other Manichaean documents, it can be inferred that they were from Turfan (Wang 2005, 51-57). Unfortunately, these Turfan documents are too damaged to provide any significant help in restoring the missing parts of the Dunhuang documents.

Since then, no other new Manichaean documents have been found in China, except for a few relics found in places like Jinjiang and Putian in Fujian province, until the discovery of new Manichaean documents in Xiapu in 2009.

### 3. The Manichean Tradition in Xiapu

The discovery of Manichaean documents in Xiapu is remarkable in terms of its scale. As of today, based on the gathered and compiled statistics, there are over 500 relatively complete paper pages. Some of these documents contain extensive sections, such as the *Mani the Buddha of Light* with 83 pages, which is essentially intact, comprising 660 lines of text. The *Unnamed Ritual Texts* has an even more expansive section, spanning 163 pages, with each page consisting of 6 lines, resulting in a total of more than 970 lines. This single document alone is almost equivalent in length to the combined sum of all Chinese Manichaean documents found in Dunhuang (879 lines) and Turfan (mostly small fragments). Moreover, discoveries in Xiapu continue to emerge, making it an eagerly anticipated site. With this fact alone, the new materials in Xiapu can be considered as standing alongside the Manichaean documents found in Dunhuang and Turfan, and can be regarded as the two most significant discoveries of ancient Chinese Manichaean documents since modern times.

The Manichaean documents discovered in Xiapu are rich in content, among which the grandiose work *Mani the Buddha of Light* was the main scripture revered by the Manichaean believers. Upon examination of its content, many passages can be found in the Tang Dynasty Chinese Manichaean manuscripts from Dunhuang, such as lines 380-385 of the document:

First, the Buddha of the Supreme Light. Second, the Shanmu Buddha of wisdom. Third, the Xianyi Buddha of constant victory. Fourth, the Buddha of joy and five brightnesses. Fifth, the Leming Buddha of diligent cultivation. Sixth, the Buddha of true creation and reality. Seventh, the Pure Wind Buddha of inner faith. Eighth, the Sunlight Buddha of endurance. Ninth, the Cana Buddha of direct intention. Tenth, Jesus the Buddha of knowing grace. Eleventh, the Dianguang

Buddha of unanimous mind. Twelfth, the Huiming Buddha of solemnity. (一者无上光明佛，二者智慧善母佛，三者常胜先意佛，四者欢喜五明佛，五者勤修乐明佛，六者真实造相佛，七者信心净风佛，八者忍辱日光佛，九者直意舍那佛，十者知恩夷数佛，十一者齐心电光佛，十二者庄严惠明佛。) (Bao and Yang 2020, 72-73)

In the *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll*, Dunhuang manuscript S. 2659, a section entitled “Verse of Receiving Food Offering,” contains content strikingly similar to that found in the Xiapu document, with only slight differences in wording. For example, the ninth Buddha in the Xiapu document is “the Cana Buddha of direct intention,” whereas in the Dunhuang manuscript S. 2659 it is “Vairocana of direct intention.” Likewise, the twelfth Buddha in both versions differs only in word order. Given the existence of over ten instances with nearly identical content, it is evident that the two versions have a profound connection.

Even in the ritual manuals, one can find content identical to the Dunhuang manuscript. For example, in the *Unnamed Ritual Text and Volume of the Seven-level Candle Lighting Rituals* (lines 20-21), it is written that “The great saint himself is the auspicious moment, shining upon us all with our bright nature; the wonderful color has no comparison in the world, and [his] magical powers are as numerous as they are varied. (大圣自是吉祥时，普曜我等诸明性；妙色世间无有比，神通变现复如是)” (Yang 2020, 499). This line is exactly the same as the record in Dunhuang manuscript S. 2659, *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll*, section “Text of Praising Jesus.” In *Xingfu Ancestral Celebration Text*, “Text of Purifying the Altar,” lines 48-29, it says “May [we] offer precepts, incense, liberation water, twelve precious crowns, robes, and ornaments; may the realm be cleansed and free from dust, and strictly keeping the mouth clean to appear dignified (愿施戒香解脱水，十二宝冠衣璎珞；洒除坛界息尘埃，严洁净口令端正)” (Yang 2020, 522-23). And again in S. 2659 *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll*, section “Text of Praising Jesus,” we find almost identical lines. The only difference is that the second couplet becomes “may we cleanse our wonderful nature and be free from dust, and fully cover our pure bodies to appear dignified (洗我妙性离尘埃，严饰净体令端正).” These similarities suggest a close relationship between the Xiapu and Dunhuang versions, with only minor variations.

Manichaeism in Xiapu inherited the tradition of Manichaeism while also making changes and developments based on the local conditions at the time. For example, in *Volume of the Commentary and Record of Reports, Applications, and Official Document*, “Appealing to Haotian 奏昊天,” lines 141-149, it is written:

The world of brightness illuminates the troubled souls and sins of the deceased during their lives. If they are restrained, then they will not be able to transcend. Now, [we] are building a good relationship and making special recommendations. However, as a humble servant of the true doctrine, I dare

not act arbitrarily. I respectfully offer these words and kowtow a hundred times to present them to you: Yellow Stick.<sup>3</sup>

明界切照亡灵众魂生前过悞，歿后愆尤，倘拘执时，未获超升。今建良缘，特伸荐拔。但臣亾忝掌真科，未敢擅便，录词百拜上奏：黄签。Haotian, the Supreme Jade Emperor of the Jade Heaven, is known for his great virtues and profound achievements in rescuing the dead and is the highest of the Heavenly Emperors, who reigns over ten heavens. His grace extends to the eight regions, saving the suffering souls in hell. May he please guide us and grant our sincere prayer, and issue a decree that will spread throughout the underworld, commanding the ghosts and spirits to be free from all kinds of bonds, hoping for the pardon of the original sentence, praying for the release from the exemption, and allowing the souls to return to their former residences and be recommended for rebirth. We humbly ask for the mercy of the heavenly beings, and we hope to meet again soon. We pray that all the true lords of the three realms will follow your imperial majesty, come down to the liberation rite, demonstrate their reverence and devotion, and rescue the deceased to ascend to the [realm] of the truth, benefit the living, and obtain blessings. Your humble servant is sincerely fearful and prostrates himself, offering these words and waiting for your mercy.

On [ ] Year, [ ] month, [ ] day, the official, your humble servant, presents this humble statement and offers a hundred bows.

昊天至尊玉皇上帝玉陛下，恭惟好生德大，度死功深，位统十天，为天帝之至尊；恩超八地，济地狱之苦魂。愿垂昭鉴，特允虔祈，乞颁圣旨，遍行阴司，勅谕幽扃，毋拘系罪，冀赦原籍，祈除豁释，魂归故址，领荐生方。恭望天慈，愿与亾夜至期，奏请伏乞遍宣三界，一切真宰咸随上御，同降道场，证明修奉，度亡者以登真，利存家而获福。臣亾诚惶诚恐，稽首顿首再拜，虔具奏闻，伏候恩命之至。年 月 日主事臣亾百拜谨 状 (Yang 2020, 604-605).

Evidently, the crux of this passage is to appeal to the Jade Emperor of Heaven to show mercy and issue a decree to pardon the sins of the spirits dwelling in the underworld (Ma 2010, 128). Similarly, in another section, “Appealing to the Three Pure Ones 奏三清” (lines 537-40), it is written:

May Jesus the Buddha of the Vast and Bright Heaven, the Dianguangwang Buddha of the Luminous and Grand Heaven, Mani the Buddha of Light of the Supreme True Heaven, look upon us with compassion, accept our plea, issue a decree to the Three Realms, the Eastern Summit, the Underworld, and the City Gods, and all the gods in the area should, at this time, come

3. Kau Chim is a fortune-telling practice that originated in China in which a person poses questions and interprets answers from flat sticks inscribed with text or numerals. Here, the Yellow Stick supposedly belongs to the instrument for such practice.

down to the altar and prove our devotion, protect the crops' prosperity and pray for abundant harvests of the five grains, eliminate pests and vermin, and grant peace and fortune to the people of our villages and towns, etc.

广明上天夷数和佛，灵明大天电光王佛，太上真天摩尼光佛，恭望佛慈，允俞奏恳，乞颁勅旨，行上、中、下三界，东岳、地府、城隍，当境一切神祇，尅应是时，光降坛墀，证明修奉，保禾苗而秀实，祈五谷以丰登，灭除蝼蚁而绝迹，蝗虫鼠耗以潜消，仍庇乡闾永吉人物云云 (Yang 2020, 638).

By appealing to Jesus the Buddha, Dianguangwang Buddha, and Mani the Buddha, the people hoped that all the deities would protect the crops, ensure a bountiful harvest, prevent natural disasters, and ensure safety (Ma and We 2010, 28). This syncretic practice, not found in the original scriptures of the Dunhuang Manichaeism tradition, attests to the adaptability and practicality of Manichaeism as it spread throughout Xiapu. Indeed, the deepening of local beliefs not only indicates the popularization of Manichaeism in Xiapu, but also highlights the distinctive evolution and transformations it underwent in this area. Despite the disappearance of orthodox Manichaeism over a millennium ago, the flexible and inclusive attitude of the tradition has enabled its continued existence in Xiapu. Indeed, the presence of Manichaean certificates issued over twenty years ago, as well as regular gatherings of believers in villages such as Shangwan, Baiyang, and Tahou, testify to the enduring vitality of the tradition in the region.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of this vitality is the array of religious ceremonies that take place in Xiapu. For example, each year, a one-week ceremony is dedicated to Master Lin Deng, beginning on the 12th day of the second lunar month and featuring drumming that commences at the so-called "esoteric time" of the 12th day after 11 p.m. Similarly, on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, Manichaean believers from Shangwan Village gather at the Leshan Hall to perform a religious ceremony in which a priest recites ritual texts aimed at saving the souls of the deceased. While such activities are not entirely consistent with the original doctrine of Manichaeism, they reflect the prevailing public sentiment and offer solace to both the bereaved and the departed, thereby becoming some of the most significant religious practices in the region (Ma & Wu 2010, 45-46). The survival of Manichaeism in Xiapu is further bolstered by the enduring transmission of local Manichaean classics and ritual books, passed down from generation to generation. All of these factors combine to demonstrate the remarkable resilience of Manichaeism in Xiapu, which serves as a living testament to the blending of ancient Iranian and Chinese cultures.

#### 4. Comparison of Manichaeism in Xiapu and Dunhuang

Comparing the Dunhuang documents with the new documents from Xiapu, the similarities and differences are apparent. The Dunhuang Manichaean documents have a classical origin, such as the *Incomplete scripture of Manichaeism* 摩尼教残经 kept in National

Library of China in Beijing (No. BD00256), whose title is unknown, but its content has many similarities with the Parthian original *Mnwhmyd rwn wyfr* and chapter 38 of the Coptic *Kephalaia* (Bryder 1985, 38). Some believe that this fragment is a Chinese translation of the *Pragmateia*, one of the seven works authored by Mani listed in the Dunhuang manuscript S. 3969+P. 3884, *The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light* (Lin 1983, 89-100). Others believe it is an adaptation of *The Book of the Giants* (大力士经), another of the seven works by Mani (Lieu 1998, 61-62). In any case, this document is rooted in Manichean classics. The other two documents also have the characteristics of official or formal Manichaean documents. S. 3969+P. 3884, *The Compendium*, is an explanatory document written by a Manichaean missionary in China under the imperial edict, while S. 2659, *Chinese Manichaean Hymn Scroll*, is a hymn sung by Chinese Manichaean believers during religious ceremonies. The Xiapu Manichaean documents, on the other hand, are quite different. Apart from *Mani the Buddha of Light*, most of the other documents are ritual books and table texts used for fasting, sacrifice, blessing, disaster relief, and soul liberation, infused with a rich tapestry of folkloric practices. For example, in *Xingfu Ancestral Celebrative Ritual Text*, “Text of Summoning Prophetic Officials,” lines 80-85, it reads as follows:

In order to welcome the ancestors and saints’ visitation, we have prepared a birthday feast and a ritual altar. We must rely on the spiritual officers to communicate and respectfully invite them; come to the altar to burn three sticks of incense and pray with a sincere heart. Today, at this moment in the Xingfu palace, as an envoy of communication, we humbly request blessings from the Thunder God of Xingfu, Lady Shunyi, the two great marshals Ma and Zhao, and other gods inside and outside the celebration. We dare to report this with great respect.

伏以寿筵弘开，法坛整备，欲迎神祖列圣光临。须仗灵官通达，只就筵前祠中焚香三炷，请一心奉请：当年当月今日今时直兴福之宫庭，作通达之使者，冀为传香叩请兴福雷使、顺懿夫人、马赵二大元帅、内外庆会神祇，敢劳电足，通口状以奏闻。(Yang 2020, 527)

The Thunder God of Xingfu and Lady Shunyi mentioned in the document are local deities worshipped by the Xiapu people, and are clearly absent in the original Manichaean scriptures. Setting up birthday feasts, preparing the ritual altars, and burning three sticks of incense in front of the altar are evidently folk practices that were not part of the original Manichaean doctrine either. In Manichaeism in Xiapu, there are even contents related to Confucianism. For example, in *Requesting Buddha for Happiness in the Underworld*, the gods of Manichaeism and Buddhism are first invited, followed by the deities of Daoism’s ritual for the deceased in the underworld. At the same time, they also invite “Confucius, the Lord of Culture, Ultimate Sage and Great Accomplisher, [with] vice-Saints Yan and Meng, the three thousand disciples of Confucianism, and the seventy-two wise men 孔子学中，

大成至圣文宣圣王，颜孟亚圣，孔门卫道三千徒弟，七十二贤人” (lines 77-79) (Yang 2020, 492-493). Confucius was granted the posthumous title “Lord of Culture, Ultimate Sage and Great Accomplisher” in the 11th year of the Dade era of Yuan Dynasty (1307), indicating that the document was written during the late Yuan or Ming dynasty. This is a specific manifestation of Xiapu’s Manichaean followers attaching importance to Confucianism. All the evidence shows that the Manichaean documents of Xiapu and Dunhuang represent distinctive cultural identities.

After the introduction of Manichaeism to China, it underwent changes to adapt to the local culture. However, due to limited information, research on its “Sinicization” has been chiefly confined to a general overview. The *Leshan Hall Divine Record* provides first-hand material for us to gain a deeper understanding of this issue:

Great Master and Founder of this Religion, Mani the Buddha of Light; Dianguangwang 电光王 Buddha; Jesus the Buddha; Pure Wind; Xianyi 先意 (MPers. *handēsišn naxwistēn*) Buddha; the embodiment of Heaven and Earth, Vairocana Buddha; Zhenwu 真武 Bodhisattva, the Guardian of the North; Huiming 惠明 Buddha with Dharma-appearances; Nine Heavens’ Righteous Great Sage; Master Pu’an 普庵; Two Main Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. The Supreme Emperors of the Three Realms, Three Ranks, the Three Divine Officials: the first-rank heavenly officer of the Upper Realm, the fortune-granting Lord Zi Wei of the Northern Polar; the second-rank earthly officer of the Middle Realm, the sin-pardoning Emperor Qingxu 清虚; the third-rank watery officer of the Lower Realm, the suffer-releasing Emperor Dongyin 洞阴. The Master of the Three Heavens, the Great Perfected Person Mr. Zhang; The Master of the Three Systems, the Heavenly Lord of Spiritual Treasures; and Empress Yuanjun 元君, the Guardian of the Nation granted with imperial edicts, etc. 太上本师教主摩尼光佛、电光王佛、夷数如来、净风、先意如来、天地化身卢舍那佛、北方镇天真武菩萨、法相惠明如来、九天贞明大圣、普庵祖师、观音、势至二大菩萨、太上三元三品三官大帝：上元一品天官锡福紫微大帝、中元二品地官赦罪清虚大帝、下元三品水官解厄洞阴大帝，三天教主张大真人、三衡教主灵宝天尊、敕封护国太后元君。 (Yang 2020, 325-26)

Twelve of the gods listed in this passage can be found in the unearthed documents in Dunhuang and Turfan. As a general rule, those deities found in the Dunhuang and Turfan documents are considered to belong to the original pantheon of Manichaeism before the Tang dynasty. Conversely, those absent from the Dunhuang and Turfan documents, besides some whose absence can be attributed to the limitations of the available documents, are deemed additions following Manichaeism’s arrival in Fujian. These deities are thus a product of localization.

Notably, Xiapu Manichaeism diverged from its Tang Dynasty counterpart by incorporating a multitude of deities. Many of these newly added gods were drawn from Daoism, including the Supreme Emperors of the Three Realms, Three Ranks, and Three Official Positions, the Great Perfected Person Mr. Zhang, the Heavenly Lord of Spiritual Treasures, and Empress Yuanjun 元君, among others. In contrast, Buddhism was represented by only one figure, the locally revered Master Pu'an 普庵, who was mentioned only twice in Manichaean texts - once in the *Leshan Hall Divine Record* 乐山堂神记 and again in the *Unnamed Ritual Texts*. This is a far cry from the conventional belief that Manichaeism historically emphasized Buddhism over Daoism.

During the Tang Dynasty, the “Daoismization” of Manichaean tradition began to emerge. In line 5 to 15 of the *The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light* (S. 3969+P. 3884), it is stated: “Mani the Buddha of light ... illuminates both the inner and outer world with light, is supremely wise and surpasses both humans and celestial beings, is unsurpassed in position and respect, and is the Lord of doctors who uses medicine to spread the Dharma. As Laozi conceived the fetus, the sunbeam flowed its essence; when Śakyamuni was conceived, the sun’s rays formed its appearance. The nature of wisdom is inherent in all three saints; the nature of enlightenment is inherent in all.” The passage draws a parallel between the conception of Mani, Śakyamuni Buddha, and Laozi 老子 (the main figure in Daoism), suggesting that they are of the same origin and nature.

However, during the Tang Dynasty, the influence of Daoismization on Manichaeism remained limited, as the Chinese copies of Manichaean texts were primarily imbued with Buddhist terminology, with Daoist terms being relatively scarce. However, by the Song Dynasty, the Daoist aspect of the Manichaean tradition had undergone significant development, to the point where its texts were included in the Daoist Canon. The *Leshan Hall Divine Records* indicate that the Manichaean tradition in Xiapu displayed distinct Daoist characteristics that surpassed Buddhism’s. This transformation can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the Destruction of Religions in Huichang era (843-845), which targeted foreign religions. Unlike Buddhism and Manichaeism, Daoism, having originated in Central China, enjoyed state protection and was not subjected to persecution during the Song Dynasty.

Before the Huichang Persecution, the Manichaean tradition had been protected mainly by the Uighurs and had experienced rapid growth within Tang territory. Following the collapse of the Uighur Empire in 840, Manichaeism was banned by the Tang Dynasty and later severely suppressed by the Huichang Persecution, nearly disappearing altogether. It was then secretly introduced into Fujian by the Uighur monk Master Uluy 呼禄法师 and remained underground from the Tang to the Song Dynasty (Yang 2013; Lin 2011, 109-117; Yang & Xiong 2022, 137-144). In order to survive, the Manichaean tradition turned to Daoism, as its former reliance on Buddhism had proven untenable due to the latter’s negative attitude towards it (Lin 2011, 81-107). For example, in the Song Dynasty, Zanning

赞宁 wrote in the *Abbreviated History of Monastics Written in the Song* 大宋僧史略 that Manichaeism “seduces the common people and mixes with obscenity...this method leads people straight to hell, so be careful.” In volume 39 of *A Chronicle of Buddhism in China*, Manichaeism is even referred to as the “demon’s religion.” The Buddhist scriptures vehemently criticized the Manichaean tradition, which undoubtedly greatly squeezed the space for the Manichaean tradition to survive by relying on Buddhism.

Since the end of the Tang Dynasty, Manichaeism has been active underground and has the characteristics of secrecy, with tightly organized gathering halls. These halls were based on the Longshou Monastery 龙首寺, established in the fourth year of the Qiande era (966 AD). The formation and evolution of the temple are recorded in the *Genealogy of the Sun Family*, compiled by the residents of Baiyang Township in 1932:

Sir Sun Mian, also known as Sun Chunshan, was from Chanyang and initially studied in the Longxi area of Yuyang. He was a disciple of the master Xishuang and sat under the tutelage of Master Chen at the Cheng’an Temple. In the fourth year of the Qian De era (966 AD), this gathering hall was established on a purchased site and started to flourish, with [Sun Mian] as the first-generation founder and master. It was originally named the Longshou Monastery and was later renamed the Leshan Hall during the Yuan Dynasty, located in Shangwan.

公，孙姓，讳绵，字春山，禅洋人，初礼四都（本都）渔洋龙溪。西爽大师门徒诚庵陈公座下，宋太祖乾德四年（966年）丙寅肇初本堂，买置基址而始兴焉，诚为本堂一代开山之师祖也。本堂初名龙首寺，元时改乐山堂，在上万。

This record shows that Leshan Hall has a long history, it was originally called Longshou Monastery but later changed to its current name. It is generally believed that the name “Leshan Hall” was taken from the saying “The Virtuous Love Mountains and the Wise Love Waters” in the *Analects of Confucius* (Ma 2009, 83-84). However, considering the Manichaean nature of Leshan Hall, it seems more convincing to relate it to the Middle Persian word *Rōšan* or *Rōšn*, which means “light” and can be transliterated as “Leshan” (MacKenzie 1971, 72). This aligns with the Manichaean worship of light. Therefore, “Leshan Hall” is actually a hidden term for “Hall of Light.” Scholars typically classify Leshan Hall as a Manichaean monastery established during the early Northern Song Dynasty (Chen & Lin 2010, 367). However, I argue that it is more plausible to regard it as a religious gathering hall. Monasteries typically choose secluded areas to facilitate monks’ practices. The four known Manichaean temples, Chongshou Palace in Siming (Ningbo, Zhejiang), Mani Temple on Daoshi Mountain in Quanzhou, Cao’an on Huabiao Mountain in Quanzhou, and Qianguang Monastery in Pingyang, Wenzhou, are all located deep in the mountains, exemplifying this trend. Conversely, Leshan Hall was erected at the village entrance as an assembly spot for believers, a typical attribute of gathering halls.

Undoubtedly, Leshan Hall has undergone numerous renovations since its construction in the Northern Song Dynasty. Elderly locals' reminiscences reveal that it comprised several courtyards. The shed-style building featured in the photograph was erected during the late Cultural Revolution and served as a storage facility for farm implements and a shelter from rainfall. Whether this structure was restored in line with the original edifices remains unclear. Typically, monasteries are not solely dwelling places for monks but also serve as sites for daily religious practices. The dissemination of religious texts and other items is encouraged, and activities such as copying and chanting sutras were deemed meritorious and commonplace in ancient times. However, the religious artifacts in Leshan Hall are kept concealed and exhibited to the public only on special occasions. It is apparent that Leshan Hall does not possess the usual characteristics of a monastery but instead should be deemed a gathering hall. The term "Longshou Temple" evokes clear Buddhist associations, and changing it to the "Hall of Light" aligns more closely with its inherent attributes as a Manichaean architecture. This may have been the deeper reason for the temple's renaming during the Yuan Dynasty.

## 5. Conclusion

Established over a century before those in Wenzhou, Leshan Hall's profound influence resulted in the creation of more than forty gathering halls during the Xuanhe era (1119-1125) of the Northern Song Dynasty in the Wenzhou region. Unlike Buddhist and Daoist texts, local Manichaeans produced over ten distinct scriptures. The sect congregated on "esoteric" days, like Sundays, and convened at night, dispersing at dawn (Xu 1957, 6534-6535). As the abbot of Leshan Hall, Lin Deng held the position of the Manichaean leader. The "Shengmingjingbao 圣明净宝" seal preserved in Shangwan Village in Xiapu is proof of his status (Chen and Lin 2010, 361). Lin Deng is therefore revered as the "Manichean Commander of the Powerful and Manifested Spirits" (*Manichean Sect's Initial Transmission Request to the Master*, line 18) and as the one who "administers the thunder department and wields power, explains the law, and promotes the orthodoxy of Manichean sect" (*Xingfu Ancestral Celebrative Ritual Text*, lines 94-95) (Chen and Lin 2010, 361).

In essence, the recent finding of Manichaean manuscripts in Xiapu is a treasure trove of immense worth and profound importance. As an invaluable addition to the already extant corpus of Manichaean literature recovered from Dunhuang and Turfan in the early twentieth century, this discovery carries immense scholarly and literary significance.

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