Introduction to the Chinese Buddhist Canonical Attributions database (CBC@)

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The Chinese Buddhist Canonical Attributions database (CBC@) is a user-contributor database of summaries of *scholarly arguments and evidence about problematic ascriptions for Chinese Buddhist texts* (see further below). Its purpose is to provide a one-stop shop that will keep scholars informed of problems with ascriptions for these texts—and often, therefore, with dates—and thereby ensure that scholarly arguments are built on a more critically aware foundation than that provided by blind trust in received ascriptions (as embodied, for instance, in Taishō bylines).

By any sober and informed estimate, the Chinese Buddhist canon is rife with problems of possible probable misattribution. Good examples of this phenomenon include the *Mahāyāna Awakening of Faith* 大乘起信論 T1666 (which few believe was by Paramārtha 真諦, and many scholars now think was composed in China), or two versions of the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* ascribed to *Lokakṣema 支婁迦讖 (無量清淨平等覺經 T361) and Zhi Qian 支謙 (阿彌陀三耶三佛薩樓佛檀過度人道經 T362), for which Paul Harrison has established the correct attributions are actually the reverse (Harrison 1998: 556-557 and n. 16-18; Harrison, Hartmann and Matsuda 2002; Nattier 2008: 86-87).

It is difficult, in the current state of our knowledge, to estimate the full extent of this problem. I once made a miscarried attempt to survey texts for which such problems are already known in scholarship. The task proved logistically overwhelming (and perhaps foolhardy), and I did not complete it—but that was the inception of the present project. Though I cannot substantiate this assertion here, I estimated even on the basis of that incomplete work that at least an eighth (12.5%) of texts presented in the tradition as "translations" (T1-1692, T2030-2049, T2865-2920) have already been identified as possibly problematic. For some portions of the canon, and the corpora of some translators, the ratio is far higher: over 40% of the Āgamas, for example, or over 50% of works before 280.

At the same time, the canon contains thousands of texts, and it is difficult (if not impossible) for individual scholars to keep fully abreast of consideration of such problems in traditional and modern scholarship. CBC@ aims to fulfil this need.

For the period prior to ca. 280 C.E. (roughly, prior to the work of Dharmarakṣa), we now have Nattier (2008). This work is not only invaluable as a reference for the period and texts in question. It also provides us with a model for a type of reference work that is sorely needed for other periods and texts. However, it is almost certainly impossible for a single scholar to extend Nattier-like coverage to the rest of the canon. Moreover, a print resource starts going out of date as soon as it is published. If CBC@ is to extend Nattier's model to cover all texts—not just the Taishō, but the *Zokuzōkyō,* other paracanonical literatures, Dunhuang texts, etc.—then it must be collaborative, web-based, and open-ended (a perpetual work in progress).

This document aims to give prospective users a guided tour of the database, and persuade them to use it and contribute to it.

Focus

As stated above, the purpose of CBC@ is to record (1) *scholarly arguments and evidence* about (2) *problematic ascriptions* for (3) *Chinese Buddhist texts.* Users of the database, and contributors to it, should be aware of this focus, and of the corresponding limits of CBC@. It is most logical to review the three elements of this definition in reverse order.

(3) First, the object of attention in CBC@ is *Chinese Buddhist texts.*

The most important proviso that follows here applies to translation texts, for which we naturally posit two separate versions of the work: an Indic original, and the Chinese translation. Generally speaking, CBC@ is interested in recording information about the ascription of the Chinese translated version of the text, but not of the Indic original. For example, if a scholarly argument or evidence challenges the ascription of the Chinese translation of the **Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā/Sūtrālaṃkāra* 大莊嚴論經 T201 to Kumārajīva, CBC@ would want to record that argument or evidence. But if an argument or evidence challenges the ascription of the Indic original to Aśvaghoṣa 馬鳴, that would ordinarily not be a matter for record in CBC@.

The main exception to this general principle would occur, as always, when information about the Indic version of the text might have implications for the ascription of the Chinese version. For instance, suppose an Indic text ascribed to Sthiramati and translated by Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (?-527). If a scholarly source argues that Sthiramati's *fluorit* was after 527, or argues that the Indic text is in fact by a later Indic figure, that would imply that the ascription of the Chinese version to Bodhiruci might be problematic. That would constitute good reason to record the information as a CBC@ assertion.

For the purposes of this definition, "Chinese Buddhist texts" is interpreted liberally. It includes not only translation texts, but also commentaries, histories, catalogues, encyclopaedias, lexicons, etc., that is, texts explicitly authored in China; not only canonical texts collected in the Taishō, but also paracanonical texts in the *Zokuzōkyō* and other similar collections; not only extant texts, but also lost texts; not only texts transmitted in modern and historical printed editions, but also texts extant only in manuscript or other formats; not only texts treated in the Taishō or equivalent as "whole" texts or single units, but parts of texts (such as the famous "Five Evils section" in some Chinese versions of the *Suhkāvatīvyūha-sūtra*), and collections of multiple texts (such as the *Ratnakūṭa,* taken as a whole); and documents transmitted or preserved only in other texts or collections, such as colophons, prefaces, postfaces, or the texts collected in the *Hong ming ji* 弘明集 T2102.

(2) CBC@ generally records arguments or evidence pertaining to *ascriptions* of Chinese Buddhist texts.

"Ascription" means any claim about the person or persons responsible for the production of a text. The person or persons in question might have worked in various roles—they might be translators, or authors, or compilers, or oral interpreters, or scribes, or revisers, and so on. As this implies, multiple persons, including whole translation workshops or groups, might be *ascribed* one role or another in the production of a texts. CBC@ is interested in recording information about all the participants in the production of the text as we received it, including, especially, oral interpreters (傳言, 度語 etc.) and scribes/amanuenses 筆受.

The most important point about this element of our focus is that it means there are many things about a text which are of genuine scholarly interest, but outside the purview of CBC@. The main criterion determining what is included, and what not, is relevance to questions of ascription (see further below).

(1) We record (a) *scholarly arguments* and (b) *evidence* pertaining to ascriptions of Chinese Buddhist texts.

"Scholarly arguments" may be both premodern and modern. We are just as interested in arguments mounted by figures like Zhisheng 智昇, Sugi 守其, or Kehong 可洪 as we are in those of Demiéville, Nattier or Mizuno 水野.

In the case of modern scholarship, "scholarly arguments" means arguments presented in published, professional scholarship in the field. Generally, it does not include original, unpublished arguments expressed directly in CBC@ by the entry author or contributor. (Exceptions may be made to this rule at the editor's discretion for individual arguments or contributors.) The most important criterion here is whether the argument has been published. Authors can certainly contribute summaries of arguments that they have presented in published work, and are encouraged to do so.

"Evidence" means any information that is shown to have a possible bearing on the ascription of a text. For example, evidence implying a certain *date* for a text might be worth recording, if it implies a problem with the received ascription—if a text ascribed to a figure or group in the eighth century is quoted in another work known to date from the seventh century, we need to know.

Similarly, the *content* of a text might be relevant, if it implies that the received attribution might be problematic. For instance, if a text ascribed to a figure in the third century mentions a concept, or contains language, otherwise thought to first occur in the fifth century, that could mean the received ascription is wrong, and CBC@ should therefore record it.

One very frequently recurring case of evidence that implies a problem with received ascriptions is that of supposed translation texts, in which content is found suggesting that the text was in fact composed in China (e.g. mention of Chinese realia, historical figures, etc.; types of language; or clear debts to earlier Chinese texts). A text composed in China is not a translation. By contrast, a translation text is usually, by definition, always ascribed to a translator (even if "the translator" is unknown, and the ascription is "anonymous"). Evidence of Chinese composition of supposed

translation texts therefore usually implies a problem for the received ascription, and CBC@ should record it.

In all cases, once more, the criterion by which we decide whether an item or body of evidence is worth recording is its relevance to the central question of attribution.

"Assertions"
The basic unit of content in CBC@ is the "assertion", that is, a record of an argument or evidence in a classical or modern "source" which problematises or defends the received ascription of one or more texts.

For example, on an "assertion" based upon this article:

> Nattier, Jan. "Re-evaluating Zhu Fonian's *Shizhu duanjie jing* (T309): Translation or Forgery?" *Annual Report of The International Research Insitute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 13 (2010): 256.

and pertaining to the *Shizhu duanjie jing* 十住斷結經 (a.k.a. 最勝問菩薩十住除垢斷結經) T309, reads as follows:

> Nattier shows that Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 composed 最勝問菩薩十住除垢斷結經 T309 on the basis of Chinese materials, rather than translating it from an Indic source. This makes the text a relatively unusual case of an "apocryphon" for which we can identify the author by name, and an "apocryphon" composed by an author who is also known to have engaged in genuine translation work. From a small sample of this large text, Nattier identifies three passages featuring extensive verbatim borrowing or paraphrases from already existing texts. Nattier terms Fonian's method here as "creative appropriation", meaning that rather than "plagiarising" outright, Fonian has arranged passages borrowed from a variety of earlier Chinese texts into an original composition."

CBC@ also records assertions based upon classical scholarly sources. For example, an assertion based upon Zhisheng's 智昇 *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 T2154, relating to the *Lu mu jing* 鹿母經 T182a/b, reads as follows:

> The ascription of the *Lu zi jing/Lu mu jing* to Zhi Qian was overturned by Zhisheng in KYL: 鹿子經一卷: 右一經。與鹿母經文同名異。據其文義合從母立名。長房錄云。鹿子經吳代優婆塞支謙譯者謬也, T2154 (LV) 664b6-9 (cf. also T2154 [LV] 604b22-23). This led to the ascription of T182a/b to Dharmarakṣa, as currently carried in the Taishō.

Users should note that CBC@ *records* assertions—it does not *endorse* them. **The fact that an assertion is recorded in CBC@ implies no judgement on the part of the author of the entry, or the CBC@ editor, that the argument recorded, or any ascription it defends, is correct.**

In the remainder of this document, I will give examples of the content and structure of the database by hyperlinking directly to the database itself (some links, which call up a large quantity of information, may take a few seconds to load).

As the above examples show, CBC@ contains entries created manually by human beings, who have read and summarised the scholarly sources in question. The database already contains over 1000 entries of this type. For the period 2017-2018, with the generous support of the Chiang Ching-kuo Research Foundation (RG003-P-16), a fulltime Research Assistant will be employed to add further content of this nature, based upon modern research publications written in Japanese.

In addition to manually created entries, as a baseline for comparison, CBC@ also contains over 4,000 assertions conveying basic data automatically extracted from the bylines in the CBETA XML corpus (though this extraction was imperfect, and we occasionally discover glitches). An example can be seen here, where it is the only information that CBC@ has on the text in question:

> http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/1361/

Users should note, again, that CBC@ merely *relays* the information embodied in the Taishō bylines—the entry based upon Taishō does not *endorse* that information, nor make any judgement about it. This includes cases in which information from the Taishō byline might happen to be *absent* from the corresponding CBC@ entry. Our aim, with these entries, has been to accurately and completely represent the information presented in the Taishō. **If part of a Taishō byline is missing in CBC@, it probably indicates a technical problem in the extraction of the data, not an editorial decision.** Readers who notice such cases should please bring them to our attention for correction.

An example of a Taishō text upon which CBC@ contains a mix of the above types of assertion may be seen here:

> http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/902/

In the above example, we see assertions summarising modern sources (Zürcher, Hayashiya), assertions summarising classical sources (Fei Changfang's 費長房 *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀 T2034, Sengyou's 僧祐 *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 T2145), and an assertion automatically extracted from the Taishō byline as seen in CBETA.

For another example of a text for which CBC@ contains relatively rich information, the "Consecration *Sūtra*" 灌頂經 T1331, see:

> http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/1129/

Searching
CBC@ allows search of the data it contains from a number of different directions. In the top left-hand corner of each screen, users see the following menu options:

CBC@ | Texts | Persons | Sources | Dates | Abbreviations

Clicking on "Texts" allows users to search for a text by title, number (Taishō, *Zokuzōkyō*, etc.) and so on. For example, a search for T0202 yields the following:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/2119/

Clicking on "Persons" allows users to search for all assertions pertaining to a given translator or figure. For example, a search for Faju yields the following list of texts associated with his name:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/person/9/

It is then possible to click through from such a screen (hyperlinks in light blue) to assertions about individual texts, e.g. clicking on

T0033; Heng shui jing 恒水經; 恒水經

leads you here:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/902/

Returning to the top left menu, clicking on "Sources" allows users to search for assertions based upon given scholarly sources. For example, searching for "Nattier" leads to the following list of works by Jan Nattier, which have all been used as the basis for information contained in the database:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/source/?q=Nattier&start_date=&end_date=&results_per_page=20

and clicking on a single item in that list, such as

Nattier, Jan. A *Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations: Texts from the Eastern Han* 東漢 *and Three Kingdoms* 三國 *Periods*. Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica X. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2008.

leads to a list of all assertions based on that source, like this one:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/source/3/

As mentioned above, CBC@ also contains assertions based upon classical sources. For example, a search under "Sources" for "Zhisheng" allows one to find and click through to the following list:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/source/115/

Two important sources already covered in the database are the landmark works of Hayashiya Tomojirō (1941, 1945), on which we have already done considerable work. See for example:

http://dazangthings.nz/cbc/source/9/

(may take some time to load).

Hayashiya's work is in some respects still unsurpassed, but nonetheless, is still consulted with insufficient frequency, especially in Western-language publications—a pattern that is perhaps understandable given the difficulty of his Japanese. We hope that CBC@ will change that, by making it easier for researchers to check whether his monumental works say something about a text of interest, and if so, where. (This phase of the work was largely achieved by Dr. Atsushi Iseki, working with the financial support of Victoria University of Wellington and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.)

Caveats
There is no intention that CBC@ itself should ever be used or cited as a direct source of information about texts or "assertions". Rather, it should be used like an annotated index: it points users to potentially useful scholarly sources regarding problems of attribution. Users might also think of it as a friendly service by means of which researchers share relatively informal notes about content of various sources relevant to the problem of ascription of Chinese Buddhist texts.

This means that when they find in the database information about a given text that promises to be useful to their research, **users should always follow up and engage directly with those sources themselves**, rather than relying exclusively upon CBC@. This frees contributors from onerous responsibility for excessive accuracy; only thus can such a user-contributor database be expected to reach and maintain relatively full coverage.

Put differently: The database is a venue for friendly sharing of informal notes on sources—not, itself, an authoritative source.

At present, and for the foreseeable future, it is also vital to note that **CBC@ is incomplete**.

"Incomplete" means, first, that its information about any single given source, such as Nattier (2008), Hayashiya (1941) or Zhisheng's *Kaiyuan lu* T2154 (all discussed above) may be incomplete (in the case of Zhisheng, for instance, it certainly is at present).

"Incomplete" also means that there is no guarantee that CBC@ contains all the arguments ever made, or evidence ever found, about any single given Chinese text (indeed, it is hard to imagine how such a guarantee could ever be given, in light of the scattered, difficult and obscure nature of many potentially relevant sources).

"Incomplete" therefore also means that nothing can be inferred from the silence of CBC@ on any given topic.

User contributor model

As mentioned above, CBC@ grew out of a misguided attempt to survey the state of the modern scholarly literature on questions of ascription, which rapidly led to two gloomy conclusions: 1) That such a task is beyond my capacity, and probably beyond that of any single human researcher in much less than a lifetime; 2) that in the meantime, all researchers are probably operating, to a greater or lesser degree, in conditions of partial ignorance about our source texts.

I therefore conclude that any project that hopes to address this problem adequately must be collaborative and open-ended, and that led to the conclusion that it must be web-based, and operate on a user-contributor model.

We already have a successful example of such a model in Buddhist Studies—Chuck Muller's *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* (DDB). For this model to work, however, like the DDB, **CBC@ vitally needs scholars to contribute their time and expertise.** I therefore appeal to experts to contribute entries wherever they notice lacunae. Scholars who have done relevant research themselves, especially, might like to contribute entries summarising their own work—and feel free to check and correct entries already contained in the database based upon their work.

I also encourage postgraduate students to contribute, and hope that hope that scholars teaching postgraduates will encourage their students to contribute. I expect that this will be a good way for students to foster a critical awareness of problems of attribution, and the sources and methods that scholars rely upon in the effort to correct the record and place our research in many subfields upon a firmer text-evidential basis.

Scholars interested in contributing should please contact michael.radich@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de.

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