

"No Shadow at Luozhou": China at the Center, Then & Now

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Yijing's (I-tsing義淨, 635-713) *Accounts of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Sea* (Nan-hai Ji-gui Nei-fa-zhuan南海寄歸內法傳) is a well-known work that broadly describes Buddhist monastic life in India and Southeast Asia during the author's lifetime. In Chapter 30 of the book, while explaining how to tell time using a sundial, Yijing noted that on the summer solstice "in contrast to other places, no shadow is cast at Luozhou." Luozhou roughly corresponds to today's Luoyang, a city in North Central China located between 34° and 35° latitude north. Both modern astronomy and empirical observation deny the possibility of such an event ever happening at this latitude at any time of the year, including on the solstice. Is this a mistake in Yijing's book? Or, is there some other meaning behind it? Scholars have pondered this riddle since the end of the 19th century, when J. Takakusu, Yijing's first English translator, explained that here "Luozhou" probably refers to a place in Central India (where shadows do disappear on the solstice). Thirty years ago I thought that this should be understood as a mistake on Yijing's part. But in 1993, I came upon an ancient astronomical observatory near Luoyang where objects indeed cast "no shadow" on the summer solstice. In this lecture, I will show photos taken there on June 21, 2003, and discuss why this issue has bearing on the ancient belief in China's centrality as the earth's "Middle Kingdom," whether in Yijing's time, or today.

WANG Bangwei 王邦維, the world's foremost authority on Yijing, is a renowned scholar of Chinese and East Asian Buddhism. He directs the Institute of Eastern Studies at Peking University, and serves as a trustee of Nalanda University in India.

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