The first three Song emperors consolidated their rule not only through military superiority but also through promoting their “civilizing virtue” (wen 文). They took as their models the culture heroes of the ancient Zhou 周 (1122–255 B.C.E.), and regarded the reign of the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756), some two hundred and fifty years earlier, as a benchmark. They therefore generously patronized religion (both Daoism and Buddhism), literature, and the arts in an effort to recover lost cultural heritage.

Much indeed had been lost in the chaos stretching from the fall of the Tang. As Glen Dudbridge observed, the imperial library in the early Northern Song was smaller than that of Xuanzong’s time, and was filled with works of more recent times. In other words, a significant portion of the literary legacy of earlier times had been lost. In pursuit of recovery, and with military operations mostly over, the second emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976–997) increased support for literary production and for the imperial infrastructure needed for it with an enlarged library and new projects, both religious and secular. An effort was made to recover lost books and to rebuild the imperial library holdings. This included compiling and printing encyclopedia (Taiping guangji, Taiping yulan); printing histories of the previous seventeen dynasties (994–1063); underwriting the major Chan “lamp” collections (1004/1009; 1036); collecting, translating, and printing the entire Buddhist canon (983) and issuing periodic updates; and beginning the collection (1020) of what would lead to the Daoist canon.

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1 This essay summarizes portions of Orzech 2006b.
The creation of canonical collections signaled more than a wish to be seen in the mold of past culture heroes; it also indicated wide-ranging imperial oversight of the production and circulation of knowledge. Further, the acquisition of the Buddhist scriptures was an integral part of the Song’s vision of itself as the center of a great continental empire. Taizu 太祖, the first emperor (r. 960–976), initiated the task by dispatching one hundred and fifty seven monks to India in 966 to collect scriptures for the imperially sponsored translation institute. The first translations in over a century and a half were made by a team headed by Dharmadeva (Fatian 法天, d. 1001) in 973. Soon after, the Court received three more Indian monks who had come to form the core of the translation team: *Devaśāntika (Tianxizai 天息災, from 978 called Faxian 法賢, d. 1000), *Dānapāla (Shihu 施護, d. 1018), and Fahu 法護. In 982 Taizong constructed a special building for the translation work that included three offices and support structures in the western part of the Taiping xingguo 太平興國 temple. The Institute for Canonical Translation (Yijing yuan 印經院, renamed the Institute for the Propagation of the Teaching Chuanfa yuan 傳法院 in 983) turned out translations of recently imported Indic works for a century. In addition, an imperially authorized team searched monastic libraries for Sanskrit texts that had not yet been translated.

In parallel with other literary projects, the Song put to use printing technology for the Buddhist canon. Another building, the Institute for Printing the Canon (Yinjing yuan 印經院), constructed on the same grounds as the Institute for Canonical Translation, was dedicated to printing a complete edition of the Buddhist scriptures. The printing of the Buddhist canon had been initiated in Chengdu in 972 by imperial order and the first edition (referred to as the Kaibao canon, after the reign period in which it was initiated, 968–976) was completed in

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3 Tansen Sen 2002, 31–32. Tansen Sen’s essay, along with the work of Huang Qijiang 黃啟江, 1994 and 1997, is now the authoritative source.


5 Fozu tongji 佛祖統記, T. 2035.49:396b22–25. See also Tansen Sen 2002, 34. This Fahu soon returned to India and is not to be confused with a second monk, *Dharmapāla 法護 (963–1058), who translated the Hevajratantra. A solid account of the work of these translators is in Jan 1966a, 24–42.

6 Founded in 982, the institute was not disbanded until 1082.