

## **The Imperial Plaque “Model Teacher for All Ages” at the Temple of Confucius in Tainan: With a Discussion of Kangxi and the Formation and Circulation of the Standard for Imperial Plaques in the Early Qing**

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### **Abstract**

Thirteen imperial plaques are hung at the Dacheng Hall in the Temple of Confucius at Tainan. The earliest one is “Model Teacher of All Ages” by the Kangxi Emperor, being also the largest as well. The “Model Teacher of All Ages” imperial plaque is not only found in Taiwan, but also in contemporary and later versions at Temples of Confucius in China, such as those in Beijing, Queli in Shandong, Jingyin in Jiangsu, Huangyan in Zhejiang, Deqing in Guangdong, Pingyao in Shanxi, and Zizhong in Sichuan. Not only did it cross the seas to Taiwan, it is also in the Temple of Confucius in Vietnam, but not at the Yushima Seidō in Japan or in Korea.

Judging from the writing format and calligraphic style of the limited number of “Model Teacher of All Ages” plaques made, it would appear that the style of writing had become standardized. Although there are some minor differences among them, they might be the result of copies done at different times and co-existed side by side (see the following discussion). In any case, the “Model Teacher of All Ages” plaques form a cultural image that is difficult to separate from the Temple of Confucius. This cultural image, despite having a distinct area of distribution, has a level of circulation over time and place that cannot be overlooked. Since the “Model Teacher of All Ages” imperial plaque at Queli in Shandong was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, the one at the Temple of Confucius in Tainan has become all the more precious along with its related textual materials, reflecting not only the history and cultural artifacts of Taiwan, but also how the Kangxi Emperor in the early Qing took the unprecedented step of establishing his political will within the sacred space of the Temple of Confucius and spreading it to other Temples of Confucius, forming a standard of imperial plaques for the span of the Great Qing Empire. It also shows how large-scale cultural objects both

centrally and locally underwent visual transformation along with their displacement and circulation over time and space, their spread further involving a background political motivation, which this study attempts to study. Research on cultural artifacts at the Temple of Confucius in Tainan also involves non-movable objects, such as architecture.

**Keywords:** “Model Teacher of All Ages,” imperial plaque, Kangxi, “Treasure of Vast Fortune”

Translated by Donald E. Brix