

Special Issue Reprint

Social Life History of Chinese Buddhist Monks

Edited by
Jinhua Chen and Kai Sheng

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About the Editors

Jinhua Chen

Jinhua Chen is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a professor of East Asian intellectual history (particularly religions) at the University of British Columbia, where he also served as the Canada Research Chair in East Asian Buddhism (2001–2011). He has extensively published on East Asian state-church relationships, monastic (hagio-)biographical literature, Buddhist sacred sites, relic veneration, Buddhism and technological innovation in medieval China, and Buddhist translations.

Kai Sheng

Kai Sheng is a professor of the Department of philosophy at Tsinghua University where he also served as the Vice President of Institute for Ethics and Religious Studies (IERS). He has extensively published on Buddhist schools of South and North Dynasties in China, the relations between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, the social history of Chinese Buddhism, Buddhism in the modern society, Buddhism and western philosophy.

Preface

“The Social Life History of Chinese Buddhist Monks” is a major project funded by the Chinese National Social Science Foundation from the year 2017. It is an extensive interdisciplinary initiative planned over a five-year period (2017–2022), encompassing fields such as religious studies, philosophy, sociology, and history. The project adopts the “the social life of monks” as its observational perspective and follows the thread of interplay and influence between Buddhism and Chinese culture. It integrates viewpoints from the historical discourse on the “Tang-Song Transition” 唐宋變革論, proposing a new periodization of the history of Chinese Buddhism. Based on this redefined periodization, and employing an interdisciplinary methodology situated within the context of the history of global civilization that integrates religious studies, sociology, and history, this research concentrates on the social life history of Buddhist monks. Guided by inquiries into how the Sinicization of Buddhism occurred and how Chinese Buddhism spread, this research project seeks answers in Buddhist classical texts, epigraphic artifacts, Dunhuang manuscripts, and local gazetteers. It examines the spiritual, institutional, political, cultural, and material facets of the lives of Chinese Buddhist monks, as well as the economics and spatial organization of monasteries in relation to social life.

From the perspective of research methodology, this project is framed against the backdrop of the history of Buddhist thought and culture, employing methodologies from the sociology of religion, the history of ideas, and the history of social life. It selects its research themes based on the approaches of ideas and social history, articulating them through the lens of religious sociology. The research trajectory will exhibit three prominent characteristics:

a. Shift in Research Subject: from eminent monks to the monastic masses, transitioning from an emphasis on the actions and thoughts of exemplary individuals to a focus on the religious community bound by shared values and institutional norms.

b. Shift to Internal Perspective: from the external perspective to the internal perspective. Traditionally, scholars understood and analyzed Buddhism from external perspectives such as imperial politics and social psychology. This project will attempt to address the entirety of Buddhism through the observation of monastic masses, who are the subjects of religious practices.

c. Shift to Ordinary Life: from ideas and thoughts to bodily practices. The project emphasizes specific practices that demonstrate the social life of monastic masses rather than the use of historical narratives of Buddhist schools to present ideas and thoughts.

This project aims to break the boundaries between elite and popular Buddhism, as well as those between doctrinal and devotional Buddhism, advocating for a holistic understanding of the religion. It also reveals the essence and characteristics of the secularization of Buddhism. Furthermore, within the framework of the history of global civilization, this research examines the Sinicization of Buddhism. The project’s team members, many of whom are affiliated with the From the Ground Up (FROGBEAR) Project (including its director, Jinhua Chen 陳金華), have investigated how Buddhism, following the principle of “confirming both Buddhist doctrine and realistic situation”, spread in the land of Chinese culture, and how Chinese Buddhism developed its own characteristics through these interactions.

With regard to disciplinary construction and development, this project intends to integrate the research methods of religious studies, philosophy, history, literature, and sociology to construct a history of Buddhist social life that provides the significance of methodology. The findings will be presented in multiple volumes, arranged in accordance with the historical stages of Chinese Buddhism. We hope the project will continue to produce a series on “The Social Life History of Chinese Buddhist Monks” in the future and make a significant contribution to the history of global civilization.

Reprinted from the Special Issue of *Religions* bearing the same title, which comprises twelve articles published in 2022–2023, this volume represents the latest research findings in the “Social Life History of Chinese Buddhist Monks”, primarily those on Buddhist institutional life, political life, cultural life, faith, medicine, and astronomy and calendrical science.

Five articles are situated within the realm of monastic regulations, Buddhism, and political interactions. These scholarly works investigate the complex dynamics between Buddhist institutions and political authorities in historical China, particularly during the Sui, Tang, and Qing dynasties.

In his paper, Kai Sheng 聖凱 of Tsinghua University 清華大學 explores “Commentarial Interpretations of the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa in the Controversy over Requiring Buddhist Monastics to Pay Homage to the Emperor during the Sui and Tang Dynasties”, the debate surrounding Buddhist monastics paying homage to the emperor. Analyzing Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa commentaries by scholars such as Kuiji 窺基 (632–682), Sheng examines the Sangha–state relationship. His research emphasizes the Sangha’s use of skillful means, monastic customs, spiritual awakening, and moral principles to navigate political pressures. It reveals the era’s intellectual and societal context, focusing on the interplay between the Sangha’s quest for religious autonomy and the rising central imperial authority.

The paper by Jiajia Zheng 鄭佳佳 (Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics 浙江財經大學), entitled “Research on the Interdependence and Interaction between Sacred Space and Religious Personality—Centered on the Political and Religious Image of Wanhui 萬迴 (632–712)”, analyzes the relationship between sacred spaces and religious figures in the Tang Dynasty, using the “miraculous monk” Wanhui as a case study. The paper highlights the mutual reinforcement of Wanhui’s religious authority and the palace chapel’s political power, and discusses the portrayal of Wanhui in monastic texts, suggesting that these narratives were shaped by political or religious agendas. This research provides new insights into the complex state—Buddhist relations of the Tang era.

Jing Guo 郭敬 (Tsinghua University 清華大學) examines the Jiansi system in her paper “The Creation of Jiansi: Study on the Buddhist Monastic Supervision System during the Sui and Tang Dynasties”, highlighting how this lay-involved supervision system extended state control over Buddhist monasteries during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, contrasting with the internal “Three Principal Monks” governance. Guo’s research reveals Jiansi’s regulation of monastic life and its adaptability amid political shifts such as the Tibetan occupation. New roles such as the Monastic Minister and Sangha Regulator emerged, especially in Dunhuang; this demonstrated the fluid interplay between religion and state. The study contributes to an understanding of Chinese religious policy, Buddhism’s Sinicization, and the historical church–state dynamics in these eras.

In “Struggling to Restore a Lost Identity: Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623)’s Reforms at Nanhua Temple, 1600–1610”, Dewei Zhang 張德偉 of Ji’nan University 暨南大學 recounts the reform efforts of Hanshan Deqing at the ancestral temple of Chan Buddhism. Zhang highlights the complex interplay of local, regional, national, and international dynamics that influenced the reform’s outcomes, reflecting on the unique challenges faced by Buddhism in the Lingnan region during the late Ming period. This analysis outlines the critical interdependencies that shaped the tragic yet transformative efforts of Deqing at Nanhua Temple, and provides an important perspective for understanding the Buddhist reforms undertaken in the late Ming Dynasty.

Xuesong Zhang 張雪松 of Renmin University of China 中國人民大學 authored “The Number and Regional Distribution of Chinese Monks after the Mid-Qing Dynasty”, which offers a quantitative analysis of the ordination certificates issued and the trends observed in the demographic characteristics of monks in China since the mid-Qing Dynasty. This paper reveals that despite historical upheavals, the number of monks remained relatively stable; however, significant regional shifts occurred, with Northern China experiencing a decline and other regions seeing an increase. This study contributes to

an understanding of the geographical layout and resilience of Chinese Buddhism.

These five articles collectively illustrate the nuanced and evolving relationship between Buddhist monasticism, sacred space, religious personality, and political power in imperial China. From doctrinal debates and the shaping of religious figures to monastic supervision and reformist endeavors, these scholarly works demonstrate the rich tapestry of religious life and its intersection with imperial authority, offering valuable perspectives on the historical and cultural landscape of China.

The following research findings address “The Cultural and Belief Life of Chinese Buddhist Monks”.

In his contribution, “A Study on the Literacy Rate of Buddhist Monks in Dunhuang during the Late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Early Song Period”, Shaowei Wu 武紹衛 (Shandong University 山東大學) analyzes various documents from Dunhuang, including monk signature lists and scriptures copied by monks; this is in order to determine the literacy rates within the sangha during the Guiyi Army 歸義軍 period (851–1036) in comparison to the Tibetan occupation (786–851). Interestingly, despite a decrease in overall literacy, the integration of literate monks into secular society increased, enhancing their societal roles. This trend reflects the broader secularization of Buddhism and the evolving role of monks who primarily stayed within monastic confines.

Xing Wang 王興 of Fudan University 復旦大學 explores the religious shifts that occurred during the early Qing era in his paper entitled “Hongzan’s Maitreya Belief in the Context of Late Imperial Chinese Monastic Revival and Chan Decline”, with a particular focus on the monk Zaisan Hongzan 在慘弘贊 (1611–1686). Wang’s study reveals that Hongzan did not just eschew the merging of Chan with the Pure Land of Bliss practices, but also launched a profound critique of the Chan tradition that had been prominent since the Song dynasty. This study portrays Hongzan’s efforts as part of a broader monastic revival that sought to restore doctrinal rigor and discipline in response to what he perceived as a crisis within Chinese Buddhism.

In the article “From ‘Sangha Forest’ to ‘Buddhist Academy’: The Influence of Western Knowledge Paradigm on the Chinese Sangha Education in Modern Times”, Yifeng Liu 劉懿鳳 (Beijing Foreign Studies University 北京外國語大學) critically examines the transformation of Chinese Buddhist education by tracing the evolution from traditional conglin 叢林 (Sangha Forest) education to that of modern Buddhist Academies. This shift indicates a substantial change from a faith-based system to one that emphasized knowledge, aligning Buddhist education more closely with contemporary educational paradigms influenced by Western thought.

Overall, these three articles collectively illustrate the dynamic and evolving nature of Chinese Buddhist monastic life, education, and practice. They reveal how external influences such as political changes, religious rivalries, and cultural shifts have profoundly affected the literacy, doctrinal focus, and educational systems of Chinese Buddhism. These studies underscore the resilience and adaptability of Buddhist monastic communities as they navigate and respond to the challenges posed by different historical contexts.

In the field of Buddhist medicine, there are two articles that discuss distinct aspects of how Buddhist practices influenced medical knowledge and treatments in historical China.

The first, “Techniques of the Supramundane: Physician-Monks’ Medical Skills during the Early Medieval China (220-589)” by Dawei Wang 王大偉 of Sichuan University 四川大學, provides a detailed exploration of the medical expertise possessed by Buddhist monks in Early Medieval China. This paper emphasizes the unique hybrid of medical knowledge these monks developed due to their monastic connections and access to diverse cultural knowledge. Despite some existing historical records, Wang argues that more research is needed in order to better understand the extent and specifics of their medical practices.

The second article, “Seeing the Light Again: A Study of Buddhist Ophthalmology in the Tang Dynasty” by Wei Li 李巍 (Henan University 河南大學), delves into the specialized field of ophthalmology within Buddhist medical practice during the Tang Dynasty. The study covers, in detail, the medical techniques utilized, including the revered golden scalpel technique, and the influence of texts on eye care attributed to Nāgarjuna Bodhisattva. Li also explores the integration of Esoteric Buddhist elements such as *maṇḍalas* and *dhāraṇīs* in treating eye conditions, illustrating a holistic approach to medical treatment that was deeply intertwined with religious practices.

Overall, these studies enhance our understanding of Buddhist medicine by illustrating how Buddhist monks combined spiritual beliefs with medical practice, not only to treat physical ailments but also to enhance spiritual well-being. The integration of diverse medical knowledge with the spiritual dimensions of healing in these contexts highlights a complex interplay between religion and medicine in historical China.

Finally, two papers concurrently address the subject of astral science and calendrical systems.

The first paper by Meiqiao Zhang 張美喬 (Zhejiang University 浙江大學), entitled “Whence the 8th Day of the 4th Lunar Month as the Buddha’s Birthday”, addresses the conundrum of two different dates traditionally recognized as the Buddha’s birthday in Chinese Buddhism. Zhang’s research suggests that the birthday could signify the date of conception, aligning with the belief in both Indian and Chinese traditions that life begins at conception. The date corresponding to the eighth day of the *śuklapakṣa* of Vaiśākha, which is the day of the vernal equinox in the Indian calendar, matches date A in the Chinese Xia calendar, thereby offering clarity on this historical ambiguity.

The second article, “The Astronomical Innovations of Monk Yixing” by Jeffrey Kotyk, examines the contributions of the Chinese monk Yixing to astronomy and calendrical science during the Tang Dynasty. Kotyk documents Yixing’s astronomical achievements and assesses how his work was perceived and valued in subsequent centuries, indicating a lasting appreciation for his scientific endeavors within the context of Chinese history.

These two studies offer valuable perspectives on the intersection of religious observance and scientific understanding in ancient Chinese society. Meiqiao Zhang’s exploration into the dating of the Buddha’s birthday provides a critical examination of historical texts to clarify a long-standing confusion, while Jeffrey Kotyk’s documentation of Yixing’s contributions underlines the unique role Buddhist monks played in the development of scientific knowledge. Both articles highlight the intrinsic connection between cultural traditions and empirical inquiry, demonstrating that religious figures were often at the forefront of scientific thought and innovation. These findings underscore the importance of interdisciplinary methods in historical research and the complex ways in which religious and scientific domains have interacted throughout history.

The contributors to this special issue are predominantly major project members, and their articles represent the research achievements of this project. Currently, we are organizing a series entitled “Research Series on the History of Buddhist Ideas and Social History” with the aid of the Commercial Press, Religious Culture Publishing House, and the Social Sciences Academic Press, which will comprise eleven volumes. We are confident that with the publication of this Special Issue, as well as the ultimate outcome of the major project “The Social Life History of Chinese Buddhist Monks” (17ZDA233), the study of the history of Buddhist ideas and social history as a research methodology will gain deeper resonance and wider recognition.

Jinhua Chen and Kai Sheng

Editors

Article

Commentarial Interpretations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in the Controversy over Requiring Buddhist Monastics to Pay Homage to the Emperor during the Sui and Tang Dynasties

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Abstract: Once Buddhism had become established in China, one of the central issues in the relations between the Saṃgha and the state was the ongoing controversy over requiring Buddhist monastics to pay homage to the emperor. When this controversy resurfaced at the end of the Sui dynasty and the beginning of the Tang dynasty, the participants in the debate frequently referred to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* to support their arguments. In this paper, I discuss these references to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and how they were interpreted by various participants. I argue that the ideas of “the distinction between expedient means and monastic conventions” and “the distinction between individual realization and general ethics” prevalent in the Buddhist circles of the Sui and Tang dynasties are in line with the concepts of “veneration out of gratitude” and “signless veneration” used for interpreting the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, indicating that the Sui and Tang Buddhist communities had a common understanding on this issue. A more extreme position was that of Kuiji, who interprets the relevant passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in terms of “forgetting decorum out of ignorance” in his arguments against the institutional feasibility of requiring monastics to pay homage to the emperor. The arguments put forth in this debate clearly reflect the interaction between Buddhism, absolute monarchy, and historical events in China, in a fusion of intellectual and social history.

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Keywords: monk-lay relations; *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*; Yancong; Jingying Huiyuan; Zhiyi; Kuiji

1. Introduction

One of the central issues in the relations between the Saṃgha and the state in ancient China was the ongoing controversy over whether or not Buddhist monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor. The issue was first raised by the Eastern Jin (317–420) officials Yu Bing 庾冰 and Huan Xuan 桓玄, and came to a head some three centuries later, at the end of the Sui dynasty 隋 (581–618) and the beginning of the Tang dynasty 唐 (618–907). The debate is a manifestation of the historical tension in Saṃgha-state relations in China. Although Chinese Buddhism has been primarily based on the Mahāyāna school since the end of the Northern and Southern dynasties 南北 (420–589), the Buddhist Saṃgha continued to adhere to the monastic precepts of both the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, resulting in much tension between the mutually incompatible positions of monastic superiority and equality between the Saṃgha and laity, a tension which was exacerbated by the deeply entrenched feudal and patriarchal social system. This type of debate never occurred in India, where a very different relationship between state and religion prevailed.¹

The political unification which came about during the late Sui to the early Tang strengthened the notion of imperial authority, leading to a reemergence of the debate as to whether or not Buddhist monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor. By this time, Buddhist thought had already become deeply engrained in the Chinese heart and mind, and many of the nobility and ministers were now conversant in the Buddhist scriptures, such that the Buddhist view of the Saṃgha as an entity outside of conventional society was generally understood, if not widely accepted. In Part 3, Chapter 5 of *The*

History of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty, Ryōshū Michihata 道端良秀 discusses the historical development of the Buddhist position on paying homage to parents and secular authorities, and presents the various arguments put forward when this topic was debated in China (Michihata 1957, pp. 335–57). Arthur F. Wright, Tang Yongtong, Shigeo Kamada 鎌田茂雄, and Stanley Weinstein also discuss this “Buddhist pay homage” debate in the Sui and Tang dynasties but fail to extend their discussions to the various interpretations made on *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* happening in the background (Wright 1951; Tang 1982, pp. 10–14; Kamada 1994, pp. 55–62, 92; Weinstein 1987). There is also the Japanese scholar Senshō Kimura 木村宣彰, who devotes nearly a hundred pages in his book *Studies in Chinese Buddhist Thought* to the translation and commentary of *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, but no connection between *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the debate is mentioned (Kimura 2009, pp. 201–347). The Chinese scholar He Jianping notices the references to *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in the Sui and Tang debates and discusses the kinds of appearances of the topic of bowing to laypeople in Buddhist scriptures. However, his research does not bring the appearance and the connection to a methodological level to understand the difficulties with monk–lay ethics and the interaction between scriptural interpretations and social history.

In the debate as to whether or not Buddhist monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor, those who were in favor adduced various passages from the Buddhist scriptures, such as the passage in Chapter 20 of the *Fahua jing* 法華經 [*Lotus Sūtra*] on the bodhisattva Never-disparaging, who paid homage to every Buddhist he met, lay or monastic; the passage in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* where a group of Buddhist monks pay obeisance to the layman Vimalakīrti; the passage in the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 that states that the emperor is a bodhisattva on one of the three levels of worthies prior to the bodhisattva grounds; and the passage in the *Guan wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經 [*Sūtra on Contemplating the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*], which states that filial piety is a prerequisite for rebirth in the Pure Land (Michihata 1957, pp. 342–43). Among these, the passage from the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, and how it was interpreted by the Buddhist community, is of particular interest.

In the “Disciples” chapter of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, we read that one time the monk Pūrṇa was teaching a group of newly ordained monks when Vimalakīrti arrived and admonished him on the proper way to teach, with the words, “After entering into a state of deep concentration, examine the minds of these individuals, and then teach them the Dharma” 先當入定觀此人心，然後說法, i.e., the teaching needs to be tailored to suit the capacity and proclivities of the audience. Moreover, these monks all had the capacity to understand and practice the Mahāyāna (Greater Vehicle), yet Pūrṇa was teaching them the doctrines of the Lesser Vehicle, which is why Vimalakīrti rebuked him so sternly. Vimalakīrti then enters into samādhi, causing those monks to “recall their past lives” 自識宿命, whereupon they all attain enlightenment and “bow down in homage at the feet of Vimalakīrti” 比丘稽首禮維摩詰足.² The corresponding passage in the Sanskrit text reads, “They prostrated themselves towards this distinguished man, touching his feet with their heads; they then sat down, clasping their hands together in the traditional gesture of reverence” 他們俯首向這位賢士行觸足禮，然後坐下，雙手合十 (Huang 2011). The Buddhist monastic code clearly states that monastics are not permitted to pay homage to a layperson, yet this is exactly what is done in this passage of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*. Thus, this passage and its commentarial explanations played a particularly important role in the debate over whether monastics should be required to pay homage to secular authorities.

The debate over whether monastics should be required to pay homage to the emperor and the interpretation of *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* are two fields of study of Buddhist social history and scriptural hermeneutics, which no attention to their connection has been paid by any scholar before. My research is thus concerned with the interaction between *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* as a scriptural interpretation in a particular ideological context and the Sui and Tang debate over the issue of “Buddhist pay homage” as a historical event. This methodological approach is then with an intention to show that the fields of philology, social history, and the history of ideas can be integrated.

2. Emperor Yang of Sui's Interpretation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*

As the ultimate form of secular power, an absolute monarchy is established through the possession and domination of a particular territory and its inhabitants; it is based on narrow interests, backed by force, continues through blood ties, and requires a large bureaucratic system to operate. By contrast, Buddhism is an enduring spiritual force that operates on a deeper level, influencing people's behavior by appealing to their hearts and minds, and embodied and perpetuated primarily by the living example of exemplary monks and nuns. Prior to becoming the Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama relinquished his right to kingship by becoming a monk, demonstrating that Buddhism, right from its inception, has been antithetical to worldly power and domination, and that it regards secular power as inferior to spiritual power. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many Buddhists were of the view that monastics should be exempt from paying homage to those in positions of secular authority, a view which at times provoked the ire of many in the upper echelons of Chinese society, especially the conservative Confucian establishment, who feared that the increasing popularity of Buddhism would gradually erode the foundations of Chinese society (Weinstein 1987, p. 3).

Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (r. 604–618) had a rather divided personality. Although he provided much support to the Buddhist religion, treated eminent monks with courtesy, provided generous endowments to Buddhist temples, and sponsored the expansion of the Saṃgha, it appears that he was also concerned that the ascendancy of Buddhism might endanger imperial authority. Thus, in 607, Emperor Yang issued an edict stating, "All Buddhist and Daoist monastics who are invited to teach at the imperial court must pay homage to the emperor prior commencing their discourse" 諸僧道士等有所啓請者，並先須致敬，然後陳理.³ The background of this proclamation is recounted in the Biography of Mingshan 明瞻 (d.u.) in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* as follows:

In the year 606 [sic; should be 609], when the emperor returned to his palace in the capital, in the southern precincts the army was displayed in magnificent array. At that time there were some debauched monastics who were flouting court etiquette, and when the emperor heard about it, he was furious. He summoned all the monks and had them line up in front of the imperial court. When they failed to follow the customary etiquette, he issued an edict stating, "the statutes requiring the proper display of respect have long been in effect." At that time the Daoist monks and nuns immediately began to pay obeisance, and only the Buddhist monastics stubbornly failed to do so.⁴ 大業二年（案：應為五年），帝還京室，在於南郊，盛陳軍旅。時有濫僧染朝憲者，事以聞上，帝大怒。召諸僧徒並列御前，峙然抗禮。下敕責曰：條制久頒，義須致敬。於時黃老士女，初聞即拜，唯釋一門，儼然莫屈。

Thus, we can see that Emperor Yang of Sui was keen on exerting his imperial power to gain absolute authority over all the religious orders within his realm. Although the Daoist monastics were quick to submit, their Buddhist counterparts resisted, a number of whom bravely stood forth to argue in favor of their position, including the monks Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), Mingshan, and Sengfeng 僧鳳 (562–638). For example, in the biography of Sengfeng in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, we read:

In the middle years of his reign, Emperor Yang of Sui was sojourning in the southern precincts . . . when he issued an imperial decree stating, "The military and nation have rules of decorum, and there is no distinction between Chinese and foreigner; paying respect to those in positions of authority preserves the nation's dignity; in order to promote the harmonious growth of all things, ceremonial rules need to be followed. Laozi, emperors, and kings are venerated in Daoist temples, while emperors and parents are honored in Buddhist temples; these regulations were laid out long ago, so why resist proper decorum?" The Daoist monks and nuns have heeded the order to pay homage, and it is only the Buddhist clergy who stubbornly remain standing.

The monk Mingshan took the lead in answering the edict, as recorded in another biography. In the case of Feng, since he was the revered head of a monastery, he was repeatedly pressed to explain his failure to pay homage. He replied by citing passages from the scriptures which clearly explain why monks don't pay homage [to secular authorities]. 大業中歲，駐蹕南郊... 下敕曰：軍國有容，華夷不革；尊主崇上，遠存名體；資生通運，理數有儀。三大懸於老宗，兩教立於釋府，條格久頒，如何抗禮？黃老士女承聲下拜，唯佛一宗相顧峙立。沙門明瞻率先答詔，具如別傳。然敕頻催，何為不禮，鳳為崇敬寺主，依例被追。乃擺撥直進，援引經論，明不敬之理。⁵

Whereas Sengfeng quoted the scriptures to explain why Buddhist monastics should not be required to pay homage to secular authorities, Yancong 彦琮 (557–610) wrote a fictional account of a dialogue between a host and a guest, in which he satirizes this edict promulgated by Emperor Yang. Yancong's parody, the *Futian lun* 福田論 [Treatise on the Field of Merit], is referred to in fascicle 5 of the *Datang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 [Catalogue of Buddhist Works in the Great Tang], fascicle 25 of the *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification], and in the *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramanas should not bow to secular authorities] compiled by Yancong 彦琮 (d.u.). In the *Futian Lun*, the guest argues that monastics should not resist the edict stipulating that they pay homage to the emperor, but should abide by the code of conduct adopted for the imperial court, and his reasoning fully accords with that proffered by Huan Xuan during the Northern and Southern dynasties, i.e., "(He) followed Huan Xuan's logic and recounted the previous argument" 遙附桓氏，重述前議. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the guest's argument is that he actually refers to two stories in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the *Lotus Sūtra* when he says, "In the past, monks paid homage to laymen by touching their feet, and bodhisattvas prostrated to each and all; their decorum was repeatedly displayed, and the meaning is evident" 昔比丘接足於居士，菩薩稽首於慢眾，斯文復彰，厥趣安在.⁶ However, neither the young monks paying homage to Vimalakīrti nor the bodhisattva Never-disparaging's bowing to the Dharma and the inherent buddha-nature of all beings has anything to do with the question of whether or not monks should pay homage to the emperor (He 2009, p. 448), and those who cite such passages as evidence supporting the position that monks should pay homage to secular authority do violence to the original meaning of the text. Moreover, in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, Vimalakīrti rebukes the ten leading disciples of the Buddha, and statements such as "generating *bodhicitta* is tantamount to going forth" 發菩提心即出家 and "that monk paid homage at the feet of Vimalakīrti" 比丘禮維摩詰足 are clearly intended to "put monks in their place," which is in line with the claims of those who were arguing in favor of requiring monastics to do obeisance towards secular authorities.

In the *Futian lun*, the host's argument is as follows:

If you could debate like Vimalakīrti, then you would already be a tenth-stage bodhisattva; he is sick in bed, to show that he has transcended worldly conditions; he regularly displays his supernormal powers, and all praise his eloquence. Neophytes pay their respects to him, and are grateful for his teaching on the Dharma; but these are all merely temporary expedients, and should not be taken as universal norms; they can change at any time, and numerous examples could be cited... Those who are capable of tailoring their teaching of the Dharma to suit the situation are rare indeed; but when one teaches in this way, it is hard to uphold decorum 論淨名之功，早升雲地；臥疾之意，本超世境；久行神足，咸歎辯才。新學頂禮，誠謝法施；事是權宜，式非常准；謂時暫變，其例乃多... 因機作法，足為希有；假弘教化，難著律儀。⁷

The young monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of gratitude for his teachings, and their actions should be understood as appropriate under the circumstances, but should not be taken as a standard to be followed by all monks, in all circumstances. According

to Yancong, making the exception into the rule amounts to failing to properly distinguish between principle and phenomena, doctrines and institutions, and Dharma and Vinaya. While such homage can be understood as an expedient at the doctrinal level, it cannot become a fixed standard of behavior at the institutional level.

Nonetheless, during the Tang dynasty these scriptural passages in which monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti were frequently cited by those who argued in favor of requiring Buddhist monastics to pay obeisance to the emperor.

3. The *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in the Debate on Monastics Paying Homage to the Emperor during the Early and Middle Tang Dynasty

The emperors of the early Tang dynasty adopted a conciliatory policy towards Buddhism and built temples for holding memorial ceremonies for the fallen soldiers; at the same time, they also made various efforts intended to strengthen state control over Buddhist monasteries and to undermine the considerable social clout Buddhism had attained by this time (Weinstein 1987, p. 5). Between 618 and 755, the imperial court organized five debates between Buddhists and Daoists, in each of which the question of monastics paying homage to the emperor and parents was one of the main topics.⁸ When Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626) became the first emperor of the Tang dynasty in 618, all the officials prostrated and did the customary dance; as for the Buddhist monastics, they shouted praise and cupped one hand in the other as a salute, but remained standing” 百官拜舞，僧但山呼，拱立一面。 Yuchi Jingde 尉遲敬德 (585–658), Duke of E, and Liu Wenjing 劉文靖 (568–619), a General of Jinwuwei, complained, “A monastic who has not attained sainthood is just an ordinary worldlying, so why should he merely bow to the secular authorities and to his parents, without making a full prostration? Who could possibly put up with such impudence?” 僧未登聖，俱是凡夫，何乃高揖王侯父母反拜，孰可忍也。 Emperor Gaozu ordered his ministers to record the vices and virtues of Confucianism and Buddhism, and they were incorporated into the imperial canon. After some discussion, his ministers reported to him, “They should not be required to pay homage” 不合拜上。⁹ In fascicle 7 of the *Zhenguan zhengyao* we read:

In the fifth year of Zhenguan, Taizong said to his ministers: “The teachings of Buddhism and Daoism are basically beneficial, but their monks and nuns have become arrogant and impudent, to the extent that they deign to remain seated while allowing their parents to pay homage to them. This is bad for established social customs and runs counter to the Confucian classics. This practice should be banned immediately, and they shall be made to worship their parents. 貞觀五年，太宗謂侍臣曰：佛道設教，本行善事，豈遣僧尼道士等妄自尊崇，坐受父母之拜，損害風俗，悖亂禮經，宜即禁斷，仍令致拜於父母。¹⁰

In 631, Emperor Taizong “decreed that Buddhist and Daoist monastics must do obeisance to their parents” 詔僧尼道士致拜父母,¹¹ but Buddhists strongly demurred, and in 633 the decree was rescinded.

During the reign of Emperor Gaozong of Tang 唐高宗 (649–683) the debate reached a climax. In 662, Emperor Gaozong issued an edict stating, “It is hereby decreed that ladies-in-waiting and Daoist and Buddhist monastics must pay homage to court officials, the empress, the crown prince, and their parents” 欲令道士、女冠、僧尼，於君、皇后及皇太子、其父母所致拜。¹² In six fascicles of Yancong’s *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* are recorded the prevailing views at that time, including those of more than 300 monks in the capital, more than 1000 civil and military officials of the ninth rank and higher, numerous officials at the prefect and county levels, as well as members of the imperial family, including Pei Wang 沛王, Madame Rongguo of the Yang clan 榮國夫人楊氏, etc. In fascicle 8 of the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* occurs the following passage on the *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi*:

In 662 an edict was promulgated stipulating the worship of the emperor and his relatives; fearing it would be deleterious to the national culture, officials at

various levels discussed it at length. At that time the monk Daoxuan and others jointly wrote a petition and presented it to the court; opinions varied widely, and the senior officials got involved; ultimately, the emperor read the petition himself and rescinded the edict. Keen on ensuring that this event would be known to later generations, Yancong recorded it in his *Ji shamen bu bai su yi* 集沙門不拜俗議 [Compilation on the views against requiring monastics to pay homage to laymen, an alternative title of the *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi*], along with the views put forth by the sages of old in regards to a number of similar past events. It has been handed down to posterity for the everlasting edification of all.¹³

The imperial decree of 662 on paying homage to the emperor and parents not only gave rise to resistance and petitions from the Saṃgha, but also led to divisions within the court, such that “539 court officials were against the decree, and 354 were for it 朝宰五百三十九人請不拜，三百五十四人請拜。”¹⁴ The literati were also divided on this issue. The camp which opposed the decree included Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (582–666) and were of the opinion that “There’s no need to force the adherents of this profound religion to adopt the manners of Confucianism” 何必破彼玄門，牽斯儒轍。¹⁵ The camp which supported the decree included Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602–670), Lu Cai 呂才 (606–665), Hao Chujun 郝處俊 (607–681), and some 20 others. Around the same time, Weixiu 威秀 (d.u.) of the Dazhuangyan 大莊嚴 Monastery and Daoxuan of Ximing 西明 Monastery submitted memorials to the emperor, citing passages in the Buddhist scriptures showing that monastics are not required to venerate rulers or parents, and sought support from Madame Rongguo and other members of the nobility who were sympathetic to their cause. Their efforts were successful, and within a few months Gaozong rescinded the decree requiring monastics to pay homage to the emperor. However, Cheng Shixiao 程士顯 (d.u.) and others then presented a memorial stating that “to be entirely consistent, it would be better to also exempt Buddhist monastics from paying homage to their parents” 人主猶存抗禮，豈惟臣下反受跪拜儀，願國無兩敬，讓僧奉內教，不拜父母。 Left with little alternative, Gaozong also rescinded the decree requiring monastics to venerate their parents.¹⁶

During the Kaiyuan period of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗 (712–756), the issue of monastics venerating their parents arose again, but the debate on their being required to venerate the emperor seems to have subsided.¹⁷ From Yancong’s *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi*, we can see that those who argued in favor of requiring monastics to pay homage to laypeople¹⁸ supported their position by citing passages from the “Disciples” chapter of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the “Bodhisattva Never-disparaging” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, both of which appear to support the Confucian position on etiquette. For example, in the section titled “*Taichang si boshi Lu Cai deng yizhuang yi shou*” 泰常寺博士呂才等議狀一首 [Section on the Argument Made by the Scholar Lu Cai of the Taichang Office, et al.], we read:

Careful inquiry shows that there are nine types of ritual worship in the *Zhou li*, one of which was prostration, which the commentary defines as touching one’s head to the ground. Also, the *Shang shu* states that Yu, Yi, and others performed this prostration; this is a way of venerating the ruler, and has been valid since ancient times. Thus the Buddhist monks and nuns of the present day should also be required to kotow. In this connection, the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* reads, “Because (the Buddha) can guide all sentient beings to silence, all sentient beings prostrate to the Buddha.” 一謹案：周禮有九拜之儀，一曰稽首。注云：首至地也。又案《尚書》言：於禹益等拜，皆言稽首，此為拜君之敬，通於古今也。然今之僧尼禮拜，正當稽首之法。是以《維摩經》雲：導衆以寂故稽首。¹⁹

This is one of the key passages from the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* cited to support the argument in favor of requiring Buddhist monastics to venerate the emperor.

In addition, in the section titled “*Xiaowei zhang shi wang xuan ce qi cao xiao guan deng yizhuang yi shou*” 驍衛長史王玄策騎曹蕭灌等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by

the chief administrator of military officers Wang Xuance and the cavalry commander Xiao Guan, et al.], we read, “One of the officials challenged that monk again by saying, ‘In the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* a monk prostrates at the feet of Vimalakīrti, and in the *Lotus Sūtra* there is a monk who prostrates to everyone. In these two scriptures the monks clearly venerate a layperson, so how is it that you monks of the present age don’t do so?’” 一臣又親難彼僧曰：《維摩經》比丘亦禮維摩詰足，《法華經》僧行普敬。此二經文，拜俗明矣！何因比丘，得不拜尊者。²⁰ In the *Chunfang zhushi Xie Shou deng yizhuang yi shou* 春坊主事謝壽等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the supervisor of the Crown Prince Tutorial Office Xie Shou, et al.], we read, “Some people may ask, ‘We have read in the sūtras about those young monks who prostrated at the feet of Vimalakīrti, and the bodhisattva Never-disparaging, who venerated arrogant people. How is it then that in the case of the emperor, a layman whose spiritual stature is more than equal to that of Vimalakīrti, the Buddhist monks remain standing and arrogantly refuse to follow the established convention?’” 人或問曰：經中既說，新學比丘禮維摩詰足，不輕菩薩亦致敬於慢眾。況今聖主示為白衣，神德則不謝於維摩，立行則不同於慢眾。今使僧拜正合其宜，更有何辭敢不從順。²¹ The arguments of the ministers who advocated requiring Buddhist monastics to pay tribute to the emperor relied heavily on the passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in which a group of monks pays homage to the layman Vimalakīrti, arguing that since the emperor’s virtue and achievements are not inferior to those of Vimalakīrti, monks and nuns should have no objection to prostrating to him. Furthermore, in the *Siweisi liu yang si jian deng yizhuang yi shou* 司衛寺卿楊思儉等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the minister of guards Yang Sijian, et al.], we read, “Buddhist monastics paid homage to a layman, and the archivist Zhu Shi did not dare to greet the king of Zhou as a guest. They have long been the role model of the Buddhist and Daoist monastics. But now this is no longer the case; they have strayed from their own teachings which have a long history, and there is the danger that others will follow them in their folly” 是以聲聞降禮於居士，柱史委質於周王，此乃成服[緇服]之表綴，立黃冠之龜鏡。自茲已降，喪其宗軌，歷代溺其真理，習俗守其迷途。 These passages demonstrate that the memorials in favor of requiring monks to venerate the emperor relied heavily on the passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in which monks pay homage to the layman Vimalakīrti. As He Jianping sums up the debate:

These quotations have the following characteristics: First, even though the case of Vimalakīrti is an extraordinary one, they present it as if it were the norm, which amounts to mistaking the exception for the rule; secondly, they put the emperor on same level as Vimalakīrti; thirdly, they see the teachings of Vimalakīrti as comparable to those of the Confucian scriptures; and fourth, they reason that since monks venerate a layman in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, then the monastics of the present day should do so as well. (He 2009)

The frequent reference to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* in these petitions advocating the worship of the emperor by Buddhist monks indicates that, by the Sui–Tang era, Buddhist doctrines and scriptures had become well known and taken root in China, and had become an important force in society. Thus, it was no longer possible for the imperial court to simply impose its will on the Saṃgha, but now had to present a cogent argument to support any statutes affecting it. In the case of the statute requiring monastics to pay homage to the emperor, the court ministers made extensive use of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* to support their position.²²

At the same time, a line of reasoning which relied on both sacred doctrine and political expediency was put forth in the *Neifu jiancheng Liu Yuanzhen deng yizhuang yi shou* 內府監丞柳元貞等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the palace inspector Liu Yuanzhen, et al.], which states, “After the Buddha’s demise, the monarch takes charge of the Dharma” 佛滅度後，法付國王。²³ In this line of reasoning, the king has sacred authority to act as both the guardian and spokesman of the Buddhist religion, which provided a sacred reason for the royal power to intervene in Buddhist affairs and also strengthened the practical significance of the monks’ behavior in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*.

In both the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna scriptures, the superior status of monastics in relation to laypeople is taken for granted, and requiring monastics to pay obeisance to the emperor clearly contradicts this idea, so it comes as no surprise that any legislation to this effect was vigorously resisted by the Saṃgha. Faced with heavy pressure exerted by royal power and the patriarchal system in the early Tang dynasty, the Buddhist community fought hard to maintain its autonomy. In responding to the arguments that they should follow the precedent found in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, the Buddhists were required to present a convincing counter argument to defend their position. Their arguments were generally of the following three types:

(1) The distinction between expedient means and monastic conventions. A large number of Mahāyāna scriptures present the veneration of monastics by laypeople as the norm, and the confounding of monks is only a minor element of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, and can hardly be seen as a mainstream element of Buddhism. In the *You xiaowei zhangshi Wang Xuance qicao Xiao Guan deng yizhuang yi shou* 右驍衛長史王玄策騎曹蕭灌等議狀一首 [Section on the argument made by the chief administrator of military officers Wang Xuance and the cavalry commander Xiao Guan, et al.], we read that Wang Xuance 王玄策 (622?–682?) was sent to India several times on diplomatic and military missions by the Tang emperors Taizong and Gaozong, during which he learned that Buddhist monastics in India paid homage to neither deities, ancestors, king, nor parents, and that the king and parents actually paid obeisance to monks and nuns. Thus, in the *Yizhuang*, we read:

The Buddhist monastic code lays out the regular standards of behavior for monks and nuns; when the monks in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* prostrate to Vimalakīrti, it's merely an exceptional expression of gratitude suited only to that particular occasion, rather than a model to be followed by others. Likewise, in the *Lotus Sūtra*, just because we see a great being adopting a particular expedient means doesn't mean that we should take it as a norm to be followed by all people at all times. Take, for example, Zhuangzi. When his wife died, he circumambulated her body while singing and beating a basin; this was merely temporary expedient; how could it possibly be make it part of the official funeral rites. 佛製律經，乃是僧尼常軌；其《維摩經》比丘荷法，暫行曲禮。《法華經》大士一時別行，何得以權時別行亂茲恆典。臣深然之。臣聞妻死鼓盆環屍而歌，此亦一時別行，豈得預於喪服之制？²⁴

Wang Xuance, Xiao Guan 蕭灌 (626–682), et al. argue that the passage in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* where the monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of gratitude for his edifying instruction is an expedient means suited to a particular situation (*biaofa* 表法), rather than a rule of etiquette to be applied to all situations, and the same goes for the exceptional behavior of the bodhisattva Never-disparaging. By the same token, the fact that Zhuangzi beat a basin and sang a song when his wife died should not be taken to mean that his idiosyncratic behavior should be made into a standard rite to be performed at all funerals.

(2) The distinction between individual realization and general ethics. In the *You chunfang zhushi xie shou deng yizhuang yi shou*, we read:

A single scripture is to be interpreted in light of the entire canon, not vice versa. So if a particular monk prostrates to a layman, then it doesn't follow that the five types of disciples should be required to do so as well. Similarly, it might happen that a particular person doesn't cry at his mother's funeral, but that wouldn't be a proper reason to impose a blanket ban on crying at funerals. In the case of Zhuangzi, he sang and played music over his wife's corpse in the knowledge that life and death are like the four seasons; and Meng Sun didn't weep at his mother's funeral because he had realized the interdependent nature of life and death. They all had a high level of realization, so how could the average person be expected to emulate their example? The laws of a nation need to be formulated in accordance with the situation of the average person, rather than those who are exceptional 不可以一人別行而亂於大教。若以比丘頂禮於居士，則令五衆設拜於君親。俗人有居母喪而不哀，豈使天下喪親而不哭。至如莊周對婦屍而歌

樂，知存歿如四時；孟孫居母喪而不戚，達死生乎一貫。此皆體道勝軌，何不令天下俱行？若以體道之情，不可施於國法者；彼亦證理之行，豈得施於大化之議風也。²⁵

Whereas a monk prostrating to Vimalakīrti is an instance of the exceptional behavior of an individual, requiring that all monastics make a full prostration every time they meet the ruler or their parents is a matter of laying down a general rule for all to follow. Whereas the general teaching (*dajiao* 大教) needs to be suited to the situation and capacity of the average disciple, exceptional behavior (*biexing* 別行), though in accordance with the Dharma, is idiosyncratic in form and is a manifestation of an individual's particular level of spiritual attainment. Thus, it would be a mistake to try to turn the exception into the rule; Zhuangzi's idiosyncratic funeral rite for his wife is paradigmatic of such an exception.

(3) The incomplete teaching is not the complete teaching. In the “*Puguang si shamen Xuanfan zhiyi baizhuang yi shou*” 普光寺沙門玄范質議拜狀一首 [Section on the questions of the monk Xuanfan of the Puguang Monastery concerning homage], we read:

(It would be wrong) to use the famous case of Vimalakīrti as an example to advocate prostration. One time there was a teacher who taught the Dharma to a neophyte without giving due consideration of his capacity, so that he forgot the meaning, as though the teaching were incomplete. After mindfully composing his thoughts, he remembered his past lives, had an awakening experience, and returned to his original mind; this is revered as the complete teaching. Thus prostrating to an improper object or indiscriminately touching the feet is to fail to properly distinguish between monastic and laity, such that one's essential nature becomes obscured for a very long time. This is something a true master knows well, viz., that a teaching which suits those of lesser capacity should not be applied universally. 又舉淨名而取稽首，引知法而招恭敬。昔函丈於新學不觀機而授藥，以中忘此意，宗半字焉。既宴寂於正念，發宿生而示悟，還得本心，崇滿字矣。於是亡相稽首，無想接足，乃混[緇]素於一時，混性相於萬古。斯並大士權誠，未可小機普准。²⁶

Xuanfan 玄范 (d.u.) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) were contemporaries, and both were well-versed in the doctrines of the consciousness-only school. Xuanfan refers to the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna teachings as “incomplete” and “complete,” respectively, and explains that Vimalakīrti awakens the wholesome roots laid down in past lives by the young monks, causing them to awaken to their original mind, in true Mahāyāna fashion. Since the monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti while cutting off the external signs of worship, and since Vimalakīrti has no attachment to being venerated, this obliterates the distinction between monk and layman, as well as all external signs of veneration. Since Xuanfan is arguing from the perspective of the Mahāyāna, he points out the impracticality of absolute systematization.

It can be seen that, in arguing against mandatory veneration of lay people, the Buddhists of the early and mid-Tang dynasty made frequent reference to such concepts as exceptional actions, level of attainment, principle, and skillful means, to counter the notions of a universal teaching, institutionalism, and phenomena, an approach which is consistent with that adopted by Yancong in his *Futian lun*.

4. The Commentarial Interpretation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*

While referring to the relevant passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, the Buddhists of the Sui and Tang dynasties adopted the interpretations which had long been preserved in the commentarial tradition, yet their particular mode of argumentation was also affected by practical considerations. The appearance in 650 of Xuanzang's new translation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, the *Shuo wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經, especially the line “Thereupon they prostrated themselves at the feet of the great sage,” challenged the interpretive skills of Kuiji and others. From the perspective of philology and intellectual history, it is essential to differentiate the various interpretations of the passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* relating

to this issue, since doing so reveals the interaction and tension between the intellectual trends and historical events.²⁷

The commentarial interpretations of the pertinent passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* can be categorized into three types: veneration out of gratitude; signless veneration; and forgetting decorum out of ignorance (See He 2009, pp. 459–62).

(1) Veneration out of gratitude

None of the extant commentaries on Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*—the *Zhu weimojie suoshuo jing* 注維摩詰所說經 by Seng Zhao 僧肇 et al., and the *Jingming xuan lun* 淨名玄論 and the *Weimo jing yishu* 維摩經義疏 by Jizang 吉藏—interpret the line in which the monks prostrate at the feet of Vimalakīrti. However, in Jingying Huiyuan’s 淨影慧遠 (523–592) *Weimo yi ji* 維摩義記 [Notes on the interpretation of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], we read:

From “therefore” onwards, (the scripture) states that all those monks gained the original mind, and reverently expressed their gratitude; “top” means head; they kotowed at his feet as a gesture of respect “於是”下，明諸比丘由得本心，荷恩致敬；首是頭首，稽首禮足，顯敬愍至。²⁸

When the newly ordained monks realize the original mind, they prostrate at the feet of Vimalakīrti as a gesture of respect. The same interpretation is found in Daoye’s 道液 (d.u.) *Jingming jing ji jie Guanzhong shu* 淨名經集解關中疏 [Guanzhong explanation of commentaries on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], i.e., “Those four were inspired to express their veneration out of gratitude” 此四，大志開發，感恩致敬也。²⁹

Huiyuan’s interpretation influenced that found in the *Yuimagyō gisho* 維摩義疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], ascribed to the Japanese prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574–622), which states, “Second, from ‘therefore’ onwards (the scripture) states that the monks venerate Vimalakīrti” 第二從“於是”以下，明諸比丘報敬淨名。³⁰ However, the expression “veneration out of gratitude” only describes their motivation, without considering that doing so involves a breach on monastic discipline.

(2) Signless veneration

This veneration out of gratitude seems to run counter to the monastic code, and Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) addresses this difficulty in his *Weimo jing wenshu*, where he writes:

As for the line “the monks paid homage,” although they were eager to hear the Dharma, they weren’t ripe enough to understand it, so it would have been of no benefit to them. But when they were secretly blessed by Vimalakīrti with the power of *samādhi*, they remembered their past lives, and their good roots came to fruition. They were both ashamed and grateful, whereupon they prostrated at Vimalakīrti’s feet. But how can a monk pay homage to a layman? Because he showed them the Way, for which they were immensely grateful; moreover, since they were now intent on following the bodhisattva path, they were no longer subject to the constraints of the *śrāvaka* monastic code. 諸比丘敬禮者，滿願差機說法，回惶無益。今蒙淨名三昧冥加，即知宿命，善根開發，荷恩事重，感愧頂禮也。問曰：出家人何得禮白衣？答曰：入道恩重，碎身莫報，諸比丘欲行菩薩道，豈存聲聞戒律之形儀也。³¹

Zhiyi’s explanation that the monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of shame and gratitude agrees with that of Huiyuan, but Zhiyi goes further by explaining that, by virtue of the principle of equality emphasized in the bodhisattva practice, they were no longer strictly bound by the monastic code. Mahāyāna Buddhism takes the attainment of buddhahood as the highest ideal, and takes as its norm the bodhisattva path, wherein the distinction between monastics and laypeople is of little importance. This stands in stark contrast to early Indian Buddhism, in which only a monastic could become an arhat, the highest aim in the early schools. For Zhiyi, the lay–monastic distinction has no relevance to spiritual attainment, and the external appearance of the act of worship disappears in the wisdom of emptiness.

Zhiyi's interpretation had an impact on the commentaries of later generations. In fascicle 3 of the *Weimo jing shu*, Pelliot 2049, we read, "From 'therefore' onwards, they reverently expressed their gratitude; the benefit they had gained was so profound that they discarded external appearances, so it is called a courtesy "於是"下荷恩致敬，得益既深，亡其形相，故謂禮也。³² Similarly, fascicle 5 of the *Weimo jing lueshu*, Zhanran (711–782) states, "Now that they were practitioners of the great Way, how could they be constrained by minor points of etiquette. 方行大道，豈存小儀。³³ Once Vimalakīrti had awakened them to their original mind, the monks were endowed with the wisdom of non-discrimination, such that they were no longer attached to appearances; this is what could be called "signless veneration." However, this is to explain it from the level of principle, which cannot resolve the difficulties in reality. Of course, Zhiyi and others may not have been personally involved in this controversy relating to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, since it largely took place in the late Sui and early Tang dynasties, so they do not directly comment on the issue at hand.

(3) Forgetting decorum out of ignorance

The controversy over monastics venerating laypeople at the end of the Sui dynasty and the beginning of the Tang dynasty had a significant impact on the way in which the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* has been interpreted by subsequent generations of commentators, who often related their interpretations to issues being debated in their own time. For example, in the *Shuo wugoucheng jing shu*, Kuiji comments:

The verse states: Second is the passage in which they are brought into contact with the Mahāyāna. By hearing of various past events, their former aspiration reappears, enabling them to generate the mind of Mahāyāna. Since they are new to the Buddhadharma, they had but a rudimentary understanding of monastic etiquette; and when they hear the marvelous teaching, they lose their presence of mind, whereupon they abandoned the formal constraints of the monastic code, and prostrate at the feet of the great master. 讚曰：此第二文，教發大心。說諸前事，今踵前心，故能發大心。初入佛法，不解軌儀，創聞妙理，回惶失錯，故舍出家之正軌，而禮大士之卑足經。³⁴

Kuiji takes a more realistic approach in explaining why the monks paid homage to Vimalakīrti, arguing that, since they were recently ordained, they did not have a good understanding of the monastic code and customary etiquette expected of a monk, such that under such dramatic circumstances they easily lost their presence of mind and paid homage to Vimalakīrti. This line of reasoning is quite different from that of Huiyuan and Zhiyi and has considerable bearing on the controversy over monastics venerating laypeople. In the Never-disparaging chapter of Kuiji's commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra*, we read, "Those new monks pay homage to Vimalakīrti out of ignorance; not due to something learned in past lives" 新學比丘禮維摩足，未有知故，非舊學故。³⁵ According to the interpretation of Kuiji, that kind of veneration is done out of ignorance, so it cannot be taken as a precedent for other monastics to follow.

Kuiji's interpretation seems to be echoed by Zhanran, who in the *Fahua wenju ji* writes:

Somebody has asked about the propriety of a monk paying homage to a layman. Now I will reply. The bodhisattva's *raison d'être* is to transform sentient beings; the Dharma is fluid; only what is beneficial is mandatory, and that's the purpose of etiquette. Seen from the perspective of universal truth, there is no difference between paying homage to an ordinary person and paying homage to a Buddha; it's personal behavior ... In this connection, some have misunderstood the passage in the scriptures in which monks venerate laypeople. In the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* the standard form is to reverence the Dharma, so since you have learned the Dharma from someone, you pay homage to him. Since the monks heard the Dharma from Vimalakīrti and were very grateful, they forgot themselves and prostrated, but that doesn't make it a permanent rule. Since the true meaning of the Mahāyāna surpasses secular rules, it would be uncalled for to require monastics to venerate laypeople 有人問：何故禮俗？今為答之。菩薩化緣，法

無一準，唯利是務，故設斯儀。見衆生理與果理等，故禮生禮佛，其源不殊，此自行也... 有人此中引大經中禮知法者，及淨名中比丘禮俗。此義不然。《涅槃》常儀顯敬法之志，從彼請益，故忘情禮下。淨名聞法已獲重恩，故忘犯設敬，不存恆則。若大乘正義出俗恆則，亦無令道而禮於俗。³⁶

Zhanran's view is that the monks' veneration of Vimalakīrti is a manifestation of their entering upon the bodhisattva path, by virtue of which paying homage to a layperson is one of the skillful means by which a bodhisattva transforms others. By virtue of the ultimate non-distinction between the Buddha and all sentient beings, the bodhisattva's edifying actions have no fixed form; this is seeing things from the perspective of principle and personal behavior. However, from the point of view of phenomena and institutions, the newly ordained monks prostrate out of forgetfulness, which is the same as Kuiji's interpretation. By contrast, Zhanran argues that, despite the emphasis in the Mahāyāna on non-duality, it does not advocate that monks and nuns worship lay people, neither in particular cases, nor as a general practice.

Buddhism teaches the interpenetration of principle and phenomena, and one should not be attached to either of them. Both veneration out of gratitude and veneration out of signlessness are based on principle and non-discrimination, at the expense of phenomena and institutions; forgetting decorum and outward signs out of ignorance gives precedence to phenomena and institutions, without considering principle. Thus, neither of them makes for a strong argument. Of course, this is closely related to the relationship between Buddhism and imperial authority in China, which were both interdependent and at odds with one another, resulting in a certain tension, which is also apparent in the commentaries on the relevant passages in *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* composed in the Sui and Tang dynasties, in terms of principle and phenomena, ultimate and expedient, idiosyncratic and universal, and complete and incomplete.

5. Conclusions

Beginning with Huiyuan's *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 [Treatise on why monastics should not pay homage to the ruler] in the Eastern Jin dynasty, Buddhist commentators have put forth a variety of views on the issue of monastics paying homage to laypeople, and these have had a profound impact on the later Buddhist tradition. Huiyuan advocated maintaining a close relationship with the secular authorities, so as to facilitate cooperation in social education, but not at the expense of the Saṃgha's ideological and organizational independence, in line with the Buddhist emphasis on transcending worldly affairs. Perhaps the most convincing and useful model on the relationship between Buddhism and the Chinese state is that of Huiyuan.

With the national unification brought about under the Sui and Tang dynasties, there arose competition between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism for imperial favor, giving rise to a series of attacks on Buddhism, and it was in the resulting turbulent ideological environment that Emperor Gaozu sought to curb the power of Buddhism. Endowed with a stronger sense of self-criticism and political rationalism, Taizong paid lip service to the Saṃgha, while maintaining a certain distance.³⁷ Therefore, when the imperial court and Buddhists were debating the issue of monastics paying homage to the ruler, the various citations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* were first and foremost a manifestation of political rationalism.

In interpreting the related passage in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, Buddhist apologists in the Sui and Tang dynasties emphasized "the distinction between expedient means and monastic conventions" and "the distinction between individual realization and general ethics," lines of reasoning which are consonant with the interpretations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* commentarial tradition I refer to as "veneration out of gratitude" and "signless veneration," indicating a certain consistency in Buddhist circles on the question of lay-monastic relations. However, the apologetic put forth by Kuiji I refer to as "forgetting decorum out of ignorance" was an extreme interpretation in the argument against the feasibility of requiring monastics to pay homage to laypeople.

In contrast to India, religious activity in China has always been closely tied up with secular and state affairs, so when Buddhism came to China it was inevitable that its relationship with the state would be complex and strained. Another relevant factor was the concept of the “formless precepts” exemplified by such lay Chan masters as Pang Yun 龐蘊 (740–808) and Fu Dashi 傅大士 (497–569), which presented a considerable challenge to the traditional notion of monastic superiority, a challenge that went even further than that posed by the problematic passages in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*.³⁸ At the same time, while this series of debates relating to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* attenuated the literati’s traditional respect for Buddhism,³⁹ it also led to the widespread popularity throughout Chinese society of this important text.

Seen from the perspective of social history and the history of Buddhist thought, scriptural commentaries constitute a vivid and lively expression of the views and concerns prevalent in a particular time and place. The lay–monastic ethics of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the Sui–Tang debate on requiring monastics to pay homage to laypeople clearly reveal how, in the process of finding the right balance between doctrinal orthodoxy and individual capacity, i.e., discerning the proper relationship between what is true and what is right, the commentaries not only elucidate the meaning of the scriptures, but also the values and sentiments of the commentators themselves. As such, the commentaries can be seen as a fusion of personal views and social mores, and the meeting place of intellectual and social history.

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Notes

¹ For more on monk–lay ethics see: Schopen (1997, pp. 23–55).

² T14n541a. Alternative translations include “Thereupon all those monks paid homage at the feet of Vimalakīrti” 即時諸比丘稽首禮維摩詰足 by Zhi Qiang (T14n522c); and “Thereupon they prostrated at the feet of this great master” 即便稽首彼大士足 by Xuan Zang (T14n563a).

³ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n280c).

⁴ *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued biographies of eminent monks], fascicle 24 (T50n632c).

⁵ *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued biographies of eminent monks], fascicle 30 (T50n632b–c).

⁶ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n281b).

⁷ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification], fascicle 25 T52n282a.

⁸ In *Tang qianqi daorushi sanjiao zai chaoting de douzheng* 唐前期道儒釋三教在朝廷的鬥爭 [The clash of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the imperial court in the early Tang dynasty], Li Bincheng lists the main topics of these five debates: 1. Fu Yi’s attack on Buddhism; 2. the struggle between Buddhism and Daoism for primacy; 3. monastics paying homage to rulers and parents; 4. the *Laozi huan hui jing* 老子化胡經 [Book of Laozi’s Conversion of the Barbarians] an apocryphal Daoist text in which Laozi is said to have civilized the non-Chinese peoples; and 5. the construction of Daoist temples for the two princesses Jinxian and Yuzhen. See Yang and Fang (2001, pp. 123–49). For Fu Yi’s attack on Buddhism, see: Wright (1951).

⁹ *Fozu Lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通鑿 [Comprehensive registry of the successive ages of the buddhas and the patriarchs]. T49n563c.

¹⁰ *Zhenguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要 [A survey of politics in the Zhenguan reign], fascicle 7, “*Liyue di ershijiu*” 禮樂第二十九 [Part 29: Music and ritual]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2009, p. 194.

¹¹ *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑿 [Comprehensive mirror in aid of governance]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2007, pp. 2, 344.

¹² *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n284a).

¹³ *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 [Records of Buddhism in the Kaiyuan era], fascicle 8 (T55n563c).

¹⁴ *Weixiu zhuan* 威秀傳 [The biography of Weixiu], in *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Song-dynasty collection of biographies of eminent monks], fascicle 7 (T50n812b).

- 15 *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 [Expanded collection on propagation and Clarification], fascicle 25 (T52n289b).
- 16 For the details on this debate, see: Fujiyoshi (2002, pp. 341–70).
- 17 For more on this debate during the Xuan Zong era, see Tonami (1982, pp. 637–42). See also Kamada (1994, part 1, p. 92).
- 18 He Jianping categorizes the points at issue into: 1. ethics and etiquette; 2. the precedence of person over principle; 3. the three religions approach the same goal by different paths; and 4. the monarch takes charge of Dharma. See He (2009, pp. 456–59).
- 19 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 5 (T52n466c).
- 20 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 4 (T52n462a).
- 21 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 4 (T52n463a).
- 22 Emperor Xuan Zong was particularly interested in the *Jingang bore jing* 金剛般若經 [Diamond Sūtra] and the *Renwang bore jing* 仁王般若經 [Humane Kings Wisdom Sūtra]. This was influenced by the theories and practices of sudden enlightenment of the Chan school of the 8th century and by the ideal models of political leaders. See: The original version is Si 2702 and Bo 2188, and the corrected versions are Si 3770, Si 6503, Si 6568, and Si 6580. (Fang 1996, p. 248).
- 23 *Ji shamen buying bai sudeng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 [Collection [of texts] on the matter that śramaṇas should not bow to secular authorities], fascicle 5 (T52n467c).
- 24 *ibid.*, fascicle 4 (T52n462a).
- 25 *ibid.*, fascicle 4 (T52n463b-c).
- 26 *ibid.*, fascicle 6 (T52n471a).
- 27 See Wang (2009, pp. 7–10). For more on the interpretive history of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, see: Hashimoto (1966, pp. 118–91).
- 28 T38n453a-454a.
- 29 The original version is Si 2702 and Bo 2188, and the corrected versions are Si 3770, Si 6503, Si 6568, and Si 6580. (Fang 1996, p. 248).
- 30 T56n37c.
- 31 *Weimo jing wenshu* 維摩經文疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], fascicle 4. Xuzangjing 卍新纂續藏經, vol. 18, p. 567a-b.
- 32 *Weimo jing shu* 維摩經疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], fascicle 3 (T85n388c).
- 33 *Weimo jing lueshu* 維摩經略疏 [Brief commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], fascicle 5 (T38n624a).
- 34 *Shuo wugoucheng jing shu* 說無垢稱經疏 [Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*], end of fascicle 3 (T38n1049b).
- 35 *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經玄讚 [Commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra*], top of fascicle 10 (T34n840a).
- 36 *Fahua wenju ji* 法華文句記 [Notes on passages in the *Lotus Sūtra*], middle of fascicle 10 (T34n349a-b).
- 37 For more on Gaozu's policies on Buddhism and Taizong's Buddhist faith, see: Moroto (1990, pp. 513–84).
- 38 For more on “signless precepts”, see: Schlütter (2017).
- 39 For more on the Chinese literati's interest in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, see: Sun (1996).

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Article

Research on the Interdependence and Interaction between Sacred Space and Religious Personality—Centered on the Political and Religious Image of Wanhui 萬回 (632–712)

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Abstract: As a famous “miraculous monk” dating from the Tang Dynasty, Wanhui (632–712) was favored by four emperors, Gaozong (r. 649–683), Empress Wu (regency: 684–690; reign: 690–705), Zhongzong (r. 683–684, r. 705–710) and Ruizong (r. 684–690, r. 710–712). Relying on his special religious status as a Buddhist palace chaplain, he was alleged to have created religious momentum and to have advocated political opinions to maintain the “legitimacy” of the Li-Tang imperial family, but he was unflinchingly able to avoid political persecution. Although there have been some academic publications on Wanhui and the group of “miraculous monks” and “mad monks” in the Tang Dynasty, there are still ambiguities in the understanding of Wanhui’s political and religious image. This article firstly conducts textual research on the interdependence and interaction between the sacred space of the Tang Buddhist palace chapel on the one hand and religious personality as represented by Wanhui on the other. The former gave the latter a rich religious sacredness, mystical charm and strong political support; while the latter, in turn, strengthened the religious and political functions of the unique Buddhist institution in the service of imperial power, manifesting itself in the consolidation and elevation of the former. Secondly, by investigating the reasons for shaping the political and religious images of Wanhui in monastic biography and Buddhist hagiography, this article argues that this was a conscious arrangement due to the political purposes or religious intentions of the compilers. Finally, by exploring how Wanhui exerted various subtle political and religious impacts on the Tang emperors by virtue of his status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain—partly imparted by sacredness of the Buddhist palace chapel—this article attempts to shed new light on several key aspects of the complicated state–*samgha* relationship during this special period of the Tang Dynasty.

Keywords: Wanhui; miraculous monks; “mad” monks; Buddhist palace chaplain; political and religious image; sacred space; religious personality; state–*samgha* relationship; monastic biography; Buddhist hagiography

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1. Introduction

Wanhui 萬回 (632–712), who lived during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), is a typical representative of the category of miraculous monks within the history of Chinese Buddhism. Records of his various miracles have been kept in official histories, literary sketches, Dunhuang manuscripts and monastic biographies. Based on these texts, modern scholars regard Wanhui as a miraculous monk with vast and unpredictable powers. Additionally, because of his supernatural power (*shentong* 神通) in making a “10,000-mile round trip in a day” (*wanli er hui* 萬里而回), in the context of the wars and chaos of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), the image of Wanhui was transformed into the “*Hehe zhi shen*” 和合之神 (the god of reunion, harmony and good fortune), whose blessings can quickly reunite separated relatives. There have been several academic publications on Wanhui.¹ This one-sided image of “miraculous” Wanhui, which is almost non-human, gives people a highly unrealistic

impression that Wanhui was an eminent monk with supernatural powers and unhindered infinite Buddha-wisdom in his lifetime who could help people, whether at the palace or in the streets. He later evolved into a god who was efficacious enough to bless the common people. This understanding of Wanhui is obviously derived from the deliberately contrived influence of Buddhist hagiography, which sanctifies and mystifies the personalities of “sage monks” (*xianshengseng* 賢聖僧) in order to use them as a paradigm for a model of eminent monks. John Kieschnick sums up the purpose and manner of compiling the biographies of eminent monks: “The compilers of the Eminent Monks hoped that their works would serve as models for the monastic community, that they would be held up as ideals to which ordinary monks should aspire.” (Kieschnick 1997, p. 8) “The rich Buddhist lore that grew up around eminent holy men, whether imported from India or developed independently in China, was woven into the biographies, including accounts of miraculous births, interaction with deities, the power of Buddhist scripture, ascetic acts, and prophecy.” (Kieschnick 2022, p. 194) These overly laudatory writings deliberately elevate and perfect the vivid images of eminent monks in history, and cautiously discuss the emotions, psychologies and motivations of secular individuals in order to add more hagiographical elements to construct new images. Stuart H. Young points out that the obvious difference between hagiography and biography is not only that the latter is the source of the former’s written material, but also that the former has a special religious mission that the latter does not have: “Hagiographies of transcendents and eminent Chinese monks, for example, were rooted in ancient Chinese biographical conventions; they followed fixed sets of structural characteristics, they were based upon common Chinese source materials, and they functioned as both models of and for traditional Chinese religious ideals.” (Young 2015, p. 247) Massimo A. Rondolino’s interpretation shows more clearly the distinctive features of hagiography as a special kind of text: “Similarly, hagiography, literally ‘the writing of the divine/holy,’ or ‘sacred writing,’ and its related terms are here employed as a metalinguistic category referring to sources that offer a codified rendering of the life, deeds, and teachings of saints, both as a testimony, which preserves their memory and their cult, and as a relationship with an incorruptible human being in the form of a written discourse.” (Rondolino 2017, p. 1) For a long time, Chinese compilers of hagiographies had been used to not only absorb seemingly reliable historical materials in biographies, but also preserve the words and deeds of eminent monks according to their own religious and political intentions and shape many perfect images to establish the models for ordinary monks and nuns. Therefore, we should carefully choose the appropriate approach to the study of hagiographies.

Based on a critique of the different approaches taken by traditional historians and modern scholars in the study of biography, which describes the life of an individual, and hagiography, which idealizes the life of a saint, Jinhua Chen believes that the three traditional approaches all have their own advantages and disadvantages. The first one is “the all-embracing approach, which is adopted by traditional historiographers and some modern sectarian scholars who have taken uncritically the existing traditional (mostly sectarian) accounts at face value and presented them as historical records.” The second approach dismisses “the accounts of miracles and marvels” and “uncover[s] kernels of historical fact from the shell of legendary accretions.” The third one “set[s] aside the historicity of the accounts and accepts them as representations of the image of the monk, of what monks were supposed to be.”² He proposes a more balanced approach in which “we should also be careful not to fall victim to the delusion that all these apparently biographical elements can be used for historical and biographical purposes and that those apparently hagiographical accounts are all about paradigms, neither reflecting historical reality nor containing any historically verifiable details” (Chen 2007, p. 339).

Therefore, we must maintain a high degree of vigilance so that our judgment cannot be easily swayed by texts that record Wanhui’s words and deeds, and we should not fall prey to intentional misleading by compilers of monastic biographies, Buddhist hagiographies and other materials. “We must see the eagerness with which our subjects interacted

with the secular world” (Chen 2007, p. 339). We should direct the academic research on Wanhui toward verifying historical authenticity and understanding the construction of religious personalities in biographical and hagiographical materials. In this process, it is necessary to have the courage to break down the barriers between the religious realm and the secular realm.

How, then, do the religious and the secular realms interconnect with and influence each other?

In order to show that the sacred can manifest itself and make humans aware of it, the religious scholar Mircea Eliade proposed two very important terms in religious studies: hierophany, “something sacred shows itself to us” (Eliade 1987, p. 11); and homo religious, “a potential religious complex of human beings or a personalistic existence with religious attributes.”³ Take Buddhism as an example: Buddhism’s sacred space⁴ often exists as various sacred sites associated with all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and deities. Many statues, murals, instruments and even natural phenomena that reveal mysterious and auspicious aspects are hierophanies and have special religious meanings. “When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world” (Eliade 1987, p. 21). At the same time, on the one hand, the Buddhist monks and nuns living within sacred space are naturally endowed with the religious sanctity and mystery unique to the sacred space; on the other hand, they also perform various daily Buddhist activities. These could include praying for increased blessings and the elimination of disasters (*qifu rangzai* 祈福禳災), conducting consecration (Skt. *abhiṣeka*; Ch. *guanding* 灌頂) or ordination (Skt. *śīla samād-hāma*; Ch. *shoujie* 授戒), or preaching Buddhist scriptures (*jiangjing shuofa* 講經說法). These activities add a stronger religious meaning to the sacred space and win the patronage and loyalty of Buddhist believers. Thus, we can see that Buddhist sacred space and the religious personality of monks and nuns are interdependent and interactional, and they jointly undertake the religious mission of propagating Buddhadharma and defending Buddhism (*hongfa hujiao* 弘法護教). The function of the former and the responsibility of the latter are intertwined and together constitute a crucial factor for Buddhism’s continued spread and survival in the complex and ever-changing cultural scene in East Asia. As Jinhua Chen points out, “Sacred space is an essential component of any religious tradition. It is especially significant for a trans-culture religion such as Buddhism, which originated in India and spread through the whole of East Asia via Central Asia” (Chen 2005, p. 353). It is because of the construction of the “sacred” that mundane places are transformed into sacred spaces to be reckoned with, secular people are transformed into religious and sacred personalities with divine power and the secular realm and the religious realm are able to blend together and influence each other.

The Buddhist palace chapel (*neidaochang* 內道場)⁵, as a special sacred space, is also a unique religious and political institution that highlights the relationship between the Buddhist community (*samgha*) and the imperial power of the state. In particular, it had an important historical position and special religious and political value in the Tang Dynasty. The monks and nuns living in the palace chapels could be endowed with the sacredness and mystery of religion—although they were ordinary monks and nuns (*fanfuseng* 凡夫僧), they seemed to have great supernatural powers; and because of their special religious words and deeds, the devout worship and the wholehearted belief of Buddhist believers intensified in sacred space. How to properly deal with the biographical and hagiographical factors in the various texts about Wanhui is a key issue for the author. Not all of the former can be used as historical evidence without a doubt, and the latter also contains some verifiable content to supplement the lack of the former, not just to establish a perfect religious model. In addition, the author intends to conduct a “comparative material research into the textual history of hagiographic literature,” because this method can “provide us with a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the production of any specific holy figure, as well as the evolving discourses of sanctity and holiness in general” (Zimbalist 2019, p. 1).

This refers to the “comparative hagiography” which is “a scientific study of phenomena, discourses and processes on, about, and for the production, distribution, and consumption of hagiography in global perspectives” (Rondolino 2020, p. 2). Hence, this article will discuss the political and religious image of the miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain Wanhui in the Tang Dynasty by adopting the hagiography study approach advocated by Professor Jinhua Chen and the method of comparative hagiography⁶ to study the interdependence and interaction between sacred space and religious personality. The main goal is to explore how Wanhui exerted various subtle political and religious impacts on Tang emperors by virtue of his status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain, partly imparted by the sacredness of the Buddhist palace chapel, in order to attempt to shed new light on several key aspects of the complicated state–*samgha* relationship during this special period of the Tang Dynasty.

2. Wanhui’s Political Image: The Guarantee of Sacred Space for Religious Personality

Shi Wanhui 釋萬回,⁷ whose secular family surname was Zhang 張, was a native of Wenxiang 閩鄉, Guozhou 虢州.⁸ He was born on May 29, 632 (Zhenguan 6.5.5), and died on January 20, 712 (Jingyun 2.12.8) at Liqian li 禮泉里, Chang’an.⁹ According to a record from Dunhuang manuscripts, “Wanhui’s father used to be the *Yuanmen biexiao* 轅門別校 (Commandant of the Gates of the Camp). His eldest brother joined the army outside the Great Wall at that time” (父乃轅門別校也。時兄從軍在塞外).¹⁰ Wanhui was deeply favored by emperors during the reigns of Gaozong (r. 649–683), Empress Wu (regency: 684–690; reign: 690–705), Zhongzong (r. 683–684, r. 705–710) and Ruizong (r. 684–690, r. 710–712). The imperial family, nobles and scholar–officials all profoundly believed in his abilities, and he enjoyed high prestige among the Buddhist communities at that time. Even after the Tang Dynasty, common people continued their unabated belief in Wanhui.

Wanhui’s miraculous deed of making a 10,000-mile round trip in a day made “everyone change their minds, and his fame was known to the court” (人皆改觀，聲聞朝廷).¹¹ Afterwards, he “shaved his hair, dressed in brown and became a monk” (剃髮著褐衣，為沙門).¹² Following his tonsure, “the emperor [Gaozong] invited Wanhui to receive offerings at a Buddhist palace chapel. Because of a message received in his dream, the emperor said, Wanhui was the incarnation of Avalokiteśvara. And two palace officials were ordered to serve Wanhui” (帝請於內道場供養。帝感夢，云是觀音化身，敕遣二宮官扶侍) (Hao and Zhao 2010, p. 374). “In the fourth year of [Xianheng], the emperor ordered Chan Master Wanhui to enter a Buddhist palace chapel to receive offerings.” ([咸亨]四年，皇帝詔令萬回禪師入宮供養).¹³ From the above quotations, we see that during Xianheng 4 (January 24, 673–February 11, 674), Gaozong summoned Wanhui to receive offerings at a Buddhist palace chapel, and “rewarded him with exquisite and bright silk clothes and some palace servants served him” (賜錦繡衣裳，宮人供事).¹⁴ Following this, Wanhui developed close ties with the imperial family and scholar–officials in the Tang Dynasty by relying on his transcendental religious identity obtained from the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel, and exerted a subtle influence on the political situation at that time.

The *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [The Song Collection of Biographies of Eminent Monks] provides a record of a thrilling historical story:

Before this, during the reign of Empress Wu, cruel officials were appointed to fabricate facts about a crime and frame innocent people. [Before going to court], high-ranking officials said their goodbyes every day to their wives and children with the prospect of being imprisoned and unable to return home. Cui Xuanwei of Boling was a high-ranking official with a grand reputation, and his family may also have been in danger of being falsely accused. His mother, a very virtuous woman whose maiden name was Lu 廬, told him out of fear for their whole family: “You can invite Wanhui one day. This monk is like Baozhi 寶誌 (418–515).¹⁵ It is possible to know disaster and happiness by observing his behaviors.” So, Cui invited Wanhui to come to his house. His mother greeted Wanhui with tears, and gave him a charitable gift of a pair of golden *bizhu* 匕筋.¹⁶ Suddenly,

Wanhui descended the steps, threw the *bizhu* on the main house, and walked away. The whole family regarded it as unlucky. A few days later, when they climbed up to the main house to retrieve the *bizhu*, they found a book under the *bizhu*. After flipping through it, they found that it was a book of prophecy and quickly burned it. After a few days, some officials came to the house and searched for the book of prophecy, but found nothing. The accusation about their family was repealed. At that time, cruel officials often ordered thieves to bury the *gu* 蠱 (a poisonous insect), steal items, and falsify books of mystical prophecy to frame others. They also let false accusations be corroborated, so a great many officials and their families were killed, and their family assets were confiscated. If Wanhui hadn't thrown the *bizhu*, how could the Cui family have known that officials forged the book of prophecy? 先是天后朝任酷吏行羅織事, 官稍高隆者日別妻子. 博陵崔玄暉位望俱極, 其母廬氏賢而憂之曰: “汝可一日迎萬回, 此僧寶誌之流, 可以觀其舉止, 知其禍福也.” 乃召到家, 母垂泣作禮, 兼施中金七筋一雙. 回忽下階擲其七筋向堂屋上, 掉臂而去. 一家謂為不祥. 經數日, 令升屋取之, 七筋下得書一卷, 觀之, 乃識緯書也, 遽令焚之. 數日, 有司忽來其家, 大索圖讖, 不獲, 得雪. 時酷吏多令盜投蠱道 (盜) 物及偽造秘識, 用以誣人, 還令誣告得實, 屠戮籍沒其家者多. 崔氏非聖人擲七筋, 何由知其偽圖讖也.¹⁷

Cui Xuanwei 崔玄暉 (639–706) came from a distinguished family background, which was called the Cui family of Bolin 博陵. The time when “he had a very high position and a very grand reputation” probably referred to Chang'an 3 (January 22, 703–February 9, 704), when Cui “was appointed the *Luantai shilang* 鸞台侍郎 (the Second Executive Post of the Chancellery) and the *Tong feng'ge luantai pingzhangshi* 同鳳閣鸞台平章事 (the Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery), serving as the *Taizi zuoshuzi* 太子左庶子 (the Chief Official of the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent or the Crown Prince)” (拜鸞台侍郎、同鳳閣鸞台平章事, 兼太子左庶子).¹⁸ The “*Tong feng'ge luantai pingzhangshi*” was also the position of the Prime Minister, which was the highest rank among court officials. According to the records of the biography of Cui Xuanwei (Cui Xuanwei *liezhuan* 崔玄暉列傳) in the Old Book of Tang (*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書), “in Chang'an 1 (November 5, 701–February 1, 702), he was appointed the *Tianguan shilang* 天官侍郎 (the Attendant Gentleman of the Heavenly Official [the Second Executive Post of the Ministry of Personnel]). He was staunchly virtuous and always refused visits from other officials, which made him resented by those in power... Prior to this, Lai Junchen 來俊臣 (651–697), Zhou Xing 周興 (?–691) and others framed the innocent people for obtaining the ranks of nobility and its rewards, so the assets of hundreds of households had been confiscated. Xuanwei insisted on pleading by showing records of the false accusations. [Empress Wu] Zetian [武] 則天 was moved and realized her faults, so she pardoned all those who were falsely accused” (長安元年 [701年11月5日–702年2月1日], 超拜天官侍郎, 每介然自守, 都絕請謁, 頗為執政者所忌.....先是, 來俊臣、周興等誣陷良善, 冀圖爵賞, 因緣籍沒者數百家. 玄暉固陳其枉狀, [武] 則天乃感悟, 咸從雪免).¹⁹ As the victim of a false accusation himself, Cui Xuanwei took the initiative to plead for those who were convicted after false accusations by officials, and to lead Empress Wu to pardon those falsely accused. Cui was wrongly accused of “ordering thieves to bury the *gu* and to hide the books of prophecy in others' houses at night, and searching for them one month later because of a whistleblower” (令盜夜埋蠱, 遺讖於人家, 經月, 告密籍之).²⁰ Furthermore, officials were able to frame court officials (even the high-level officials) on a large scale without the slightest hesitancy not only for their own goals of “obtaining the ranks of nobility and its rewards,” but more likely because the reigning Empress Wu, by reason of distrust of court officials and consolidation of power, intended to eliminate hostile political forces through actions of corrupt officials in order to maintain her legitimacy as ruler.

Wanhui, as recorded by Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001), helped the Cui family avoid the catastrophe from the false accusations with the intentional behavior of “throwing the *bizhu* on the main house.” Although the story was not recorded in other documents, it is highly credible. Cui's mother regarded Wanhui as a miraculous monk comparable to Baozhi. Under the increasingly severe political crisis of Empress Wu's reign, Cui's mother first thought of seeking Wanhui's help to save the lives of the whole family, so she persuaded her son to

invite Wanhui home, hoping to gain the wisdom to avoid disasters by observing Wanhui's behaviors. This actually shows that Wanhui was in a politically detached position, free from the political influence that endangered him by virtue of his special status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain. In addition, he had supernatural powers and merciful compassions, so was deeply trusted and relied on by bureaucrats.

We can also see that Wanhui was deeply trusted by Empress Wu from another incident that occurred during her reign.

Crown Prince Huizhuang was the second son of Ruizong. Heavenly Empress (Empress Wu) once held him in her arms and showed him to Wanhui, and Wanhui said: "This child is the reincarnation of a great tree spirit from the Western Regions, and raising him will be beneficial to his brothers." 惠莊太子，乃睿宗第二子也，天后曾抱示回，曰：“此兒是西域大樹精，養之宜兄弟也。”²¹

Li Zong 李愔 (683–724), the second son of Ruizong, whose former name was Chengyi 成義, was posthumously conferred as Crown Prince Huizhuang after his death. His biological mother was “a servant from the palace residence of the concubines whose maiden name was Liu 柳” (柳氏，掖庭宮人). When he was born, Empress Wu “intended to disown him as a prince because of his mother's lowly position” (以 [其] 母賤，欲不齒).²² So, Empress Wu's act of showing Li Zong to Wanhui was probably meant as a request for Wanhui to read Li Zong's fortune from the details of his face and seek advice on whether to let the baby live. Wanhui cleverly succeeded in persuading Empress Wu to accept Li Zong and acknowledge his status as the second son of Ruizong (始令列於兄弟之次).²³ The subsequent facts were just as Wanhui predicted. Li Xian 李憲 (679–742), the lineal eldest son of Ruizong, steadfastly refused to become the crown prince after Ruizong's second accession to the throne, and elected Li Longji 李隆基 (Xuanzong, r. 712–756) to be the crown prince on the grounds that “when the country was stable, the lineal eldest son should be crown prince, and when the country was in danger, the prince with meritorious service should be crowned” (國家安則先嫡長，國家危則先有功).²⁴ The reason why Ruizong became the emperor again was due to the “Tanglong Coup” jointly initiated by Li Longji and Princess Taiping (665–713) at the Shen hour 申時 (corresponding to the modern time of 15:00 to 17:00 p.m.) on Tanglong 1.6.20 [gengzi] (July 21, 710). As the second son of Ruizong, Li Zong also abdicated the throne of the crown prince, so Li Longji was able to avoid the tradition of “respect for seniority” in the imperial succession system of the Tang Dynasty, and was appointed the crown prince by Ruizong in the name of righteousness.

In gratitude for Li Zong's virtue in abdicating the throne of the crown prince, Li Longji posthumously honored Li Zong as Crown Prince Huizhuang on Kaiyuan 12.11.28 (18 December 724), and wrote an article named the *Ce Huizhuang Taizi wen* 冊惠莊太子文 (An imperial Edict Conferring Li Zong as Crown Prince Huizhuang): “[Li Zong] was born with the nature of filial piety to his parents and friendship to his brothers, and his character was simple and gentle . . . The ancient emperors showed the kindness in caring for their relatives, and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 [the Spring and Autumn Annals] wrote about a higher level of righteousness. To confer him as Crown Prince Huizhuang as a posthumous honor” (體孝友以成性，用淳和而合道 . . . 夫先王演親親之恩，《春秋》著加等之義。上嗣之位，飾終在期).²⁵ In addition, Li Longji was grateful for Li Xian's virtue in abdicating the throne of the crown prince as the lineal eldest son of Ruizong, and posthumously honored Li Xian as Emperor Rang on Kaiyuan 29.11.25 (6 January 742) and wrote an article named the *Ce shi Rang Huangdi wen* 冊諡讓皇帝文 (An Imperial Edict that Enthroned and Gave Li Xian the Posthumous Title of Emperor Rang): “As the lineal eldest son of Ruizong, Li Xian deserved to be appointed the crown prince. In those days, I followed the teachings of my ancestors and put down the rebellions started by many villains. So, he kept the virtue of humility and sincerely abdicated the throne of the crown prince. His good deeds in life showed his deep benevolence and morality; and a grand ceremony should be held to show his exalted status and honorable fame after his death. Therefore, he was given the posthumous title of Emperor Rang” (惟王地居元子，合膺主鬯。昔朕上稟先訓，克清群凶，遂固守摠謙，懇讓儲副。然則深仁厚德，茂行已表於生前；寶位尊名，盛禮甯忘於沒後。是用諡王為讓皇帝).²⁶ It can be

seen that Li Longji and his brothers had a deep affection for each other and lived in harmony. The *Huizhuang Taizi ai cewen* 惠莊太子哀冊文 (An Imperial Edict Mourning and Conferring Li Zong as Crown Prince Huizhuang) written by the famous Tang Prime Minister Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (673–740) on Kaiyuan 12.12 [intercalary month] 27 (February 14, 725) told us: “Since childhood, they had a strong brotherly bond. Until the four princes had their own fiefdoms, the five brothers still remained one. They traveled together with a large number of horsemen and lived in the same mansion. They all enjoyed the love of their elders, offered sweet wine together to thank their teachers and learned the Confucian classics. As time went by, many very worrisome things would gradually appear. After the rebellions inside the palace were put down, Li Longji became the emperor. Although the emperor and his brothers were separated by the guards of the palace, they always acted in harmony with family protocol. Why did Crown Prince Huizhuang die? It was so sad that we shed tears for the past.” (昔在沖眇，具惟兄弟。四國並封，五王均體。游必連騎，居則同邸。各承愛於含飴，俱受經於置醴。既荏苒而雲邁，屬殷憂之將啟。實定禍於蕭牆，遂繼明於雲陛。雖隔深宮之衛，常洽家人之禮。曷殂謝以痛心，感平生而流涕。²⁷ The relationship between Xuanzong and his brothers remained friendly and harmonious throughout their lives. They loved and respected each other as good brothers should without any disagreements or disputes, which was a rare phenomenon among the imperial family of the Tang Dynasty, and really fulfilled Wanhui’s prediction that Li Zong, Crown Prince Huizhuang, would “be beneficial to his brothers.” Here, we can see that Empress Wu, who was a very devoutly Buddhist, trusted Wanhui so much that she sought his advice even on matters concerning the imperial family. It was Wanhui’s advice to Empress Wu that saved Li Zong’s life and later led to the closeness among all Ruizong’s sons. Wanhui also gained the trust of Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong in succession.

During the reign of Zhongzong, “in Jinglong (1 October 707–1 July 710), [Wanhui] entered and exited [the Buddhist palace chapel] from time to time. Many people competed to worship him regardless of whether they were scholar-officials, commoners, nobles, or lowly people. Wanhui was clad in a brocade robe, laughing and scolding, or beating a drum. Then, all his predictions came true” (景龍中，[萬回] 時時出入 [內道場]。士庶貴賤，競來禮拜。萬回披錦袍，或笑罵，或擊鼓。然後隨事為驗。²⁸ Although Wanhui was a Buddhist palace chaplain, he was not stationed in the Buddhist palace chapel all day and had the right to enter and exit the imperial palace freely. As a miraculous monk, the image of Wanhui was not only revered and trusted by the imperial family and the noblemen, but was also worshipped by the common people—even peddlers and menial servants. However, it was also because of the imperial family’s faith in the prophetic power of Wanhui that politics in the reign of Zhongzong were affected. The *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Broad records compiled in the Taiping (xingguo) era (976–983)] gives the following description:

[Wanhui] often told Wei Shuren 韋庶人 (a commoner whose surname is Wei, referring to Empress Wei, ?–710)²⁹ and Princess Anle: “*Sanlang* 三郎 (the third son) will chop off your heads.” Wei Shuren thought that Zhongzong was the third among his brothers and feared that he would have a change of heart, so she killed him with poisonous wine, but not realizing that she would be later executed by Xuanzong. [萬回] 常謂韋庶人及安樂公主曰: “三郎斫汝頭。” 韋庶人以中宗第三，恐帝生變，遂燭之。不悟為玄宗所誅也。³⁰

The *Song gaoseng zhuan* gives the following description:

At the end of the reign of Zhongzong, [Wanhui] once called Empress Wei a rebellious person who would be beheaded. After a short time, Empress Wei was killed by Xuanzong ... Princess Anle, the youngest sister of Xuanzong, catered to Empress Wei and became so powerful that the people of the country were afraid of her. When Wanhui saw her carriage, he kept spitting toward it and saying: “Fishy! It stinks! Don’t go near it.” After a short time, she was killed in a palace coup. 中宗末，[萬回] 嘗罵韋后為反悖逆，斫爾頭去。尋而誅死……安樂公主，玄宗之季妹，附會韋后，熱可炙手，道路懼焉。回望車騎，連唾之曰: “腥！腥！不可近也。” 不旋踵而禍滅及之。³¹

The *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Book of Tang) states that on Jinglong 4.6.2 [renwu] (July 3, 710), Zhongzong was “poisoned and died in the Hall of Shenlong at the age of fifty-

five” (遇毒，崩於神龍殿，年五十五). Then, Empress Wei began her regency on *dinghai* (July 8, 710). Until the night of *gengzi* (21 July 710), Li Longji, King Linzi, united with his aunt, Princess Taiping, launched an army to kill the families of Wei and Wu and to execute Empress Wei and her daughter, Princess Anle (685–710). This was later known as the “Tanglong Coup.”³² Although there is no definite conclusion on whether Zhongzong was killed by Empress Wei and Princess Anle,³³ the narratives of the *Tanbin lu* 譚賓錄 [The Tang Collection of Stories about Official and Folk Characters] and the *Liangjing ji* 兩京記 [The Tang Local Chronicles on Chang’an, the Western Capital City, and Luoyang, the Eastern Capital City] quoted in the *Taiping guangji* attribute Zhongzong’s death to the prediction of “*Sanlang* chopping your heads” made by Wanhui in front of Empress Wei and Princess Anle, which led Empress Wei to kill her husband to save her own life. However, Empress Wei mistook the “*Sanlang*” who would kill her in Wanhui’s prediction as Zhongzong Li Xian 李顯, the third son of Empress Wu, but in fact Wanhui was referring to Li Longji, the third son of Ruizong. As a Buddhist historian, Zanning is much more cautious, mentioning only Wanhui’s rebuke of Empress Wei as “rebellious” and his direct prediction that Empress Wei and her daughter would soon be killed. If it was really Wanhui’s prediction and Empress Wei’s firm faith in his prediction that led to the death of Zhongzong and the subsequent outbreak of the “Tanglong Coup,” can we infer that the same trust in Wanhui’s prediction of Empress Wei’s fate led Li Longji and Princess Taiping to daringly launch a coup in a politically unfavorable situation when Empress Wei had already acted as regent and assumed power at the imperial court half a month earlier?

Wanhui also used his prophetic power to create religious momentum for the succession of Ruizong and Xuanzong:

When Xuanzong was in the period of *qianlong* 潛龍 (the dragon hiding in deep waters),³⁴ he paid a visit to Wanhui with Zhang Wei 張暉 and his other followers. When Wanhui met Xuanzong, he was very contemptuous. Holding a lacquered cane in his hand, Wanhui shouted loudly and drove them away. All the people who went with Xuanzong were driven out. Wanhui dragged Xuanzong into the room and closed the door and windows from inside, and then he returned to his normal state without any other abnormal words or actions. Wanhui stroked Xuanzong’s back again and said: “You will be the Son of Heaven for fifty years. I hope you will cherish yourself. I don’t know what happens after that.” Zhang Wei and others outside the door clearly heard Wanhui’s words, so they did their best to support and embrace Xuanzong. The event that happened fifty years later refers to the disaster of Lushan.³⁵ When Ruizong was living in the Prince Residence before his reign, he would sometimes wander among the crowds in the streets. Where crowds of people gathered, Wanhui would shout: “The Son of Heaven will come.” Or he would say: “The sage will be here.” For the next two or three days, Ruizong would pass by and walk back and forth in the places where Wanhui had been. 玄宗潛龍時，及門人張暉等同謁。回見帝甚至褻黷，將漆杖呼且逐之，同往者皆被驅出。曳帝入，反扃其戶，悉如常人，更無他，重撫背曰：“五十年天子自愛，已後即不知也。”張公等門外歷歷聞其言，故傾心翼戴焉。五十年後，蓋指祿山之禍也。睿宗在邸時，或遊行人間。回於聚落街衢中高聲曰：“天子來。”或曰：“聖人來。”其處信宿間，帝必經過徘徊也。³⁶

Xuanzong’s deliberate visit to Wanhui clearly implies political motives. Additionally, the “*qianlong*” mentioned in the text is a metaphor for the time before Xuanzong became an emperor. According to the “Zhang Wei liezhuan” 張暉列傳 [Biography of Zhang Wei] in the *Jiu Tang shu*, “when King Linzi (Xuanzong) was the *Biejia* 別駕 (the Administrative Aide to the Heads of Regions and the Commanderies in Tang and Song Prefectures) of Luzhou 潞州, Zhang Wei secretly recognized him as a magnificent man, so he followed him every day and did his best to serve him” (會臨淄王為潞州別駕，暉潛識英姿，傾身事之，日奉遊處).³⁷ Xuanzong served concurrently as the *Biejia* of Luzhou in Jinglong 2.4 (April 25–May 23, 708),³⁸ and Zhang Wei, who served as the county magistrate (*xianling* 縣令) of Tongdi 銅鞮 (the ancient name of Qin County, located in the northern part of present-day Changzhi City) became a follower of Xuanzong. Ruizong issued an imperial decree to confer Xuanzong as Crown Prince on Tanglong 1.6.26 [*bingwu*] (27 July 710), shortly after the

“Tanglong Coup.”³⁹ Therefore, we can deduce that the time of Xuanzong’s visit to Wanhui should be between Jinglong 2.4 (25 April–23 May 708) and Tanglong 1.6.26 [*bingwu*] (27 July 710), and the place where they met could not have been the imperial palace, but in the private house given to Wanhui by Princess Taiping, which was more secluded.⁴⁰ Wanhui expelled Zhang Wei and his other followers from the house, but dragged Xuanzong inside, closed the door and windows very carefully, and gently stroked his back again while predicting that he would become the Emperor of Tang who would rule for fifty years, but deliberately concealed from Xuanzong the An-Shi Rebellion that would break out fifty years later. Although Wanhui’s action appeared to be cautious, Zhang Wei and other followers were able to hear Wanhui’s prophecy of Xuanzong clearly outside the door, and since then, they “supported and embraced Xuanzong wholeheartedly” (傾心翼戴). The “Zhang Wei liezhuan” in the *Jiu Tang shu* evaluates Zhang Wei as “finishing what he started” (善保終始).⁴¹ In combination with Zanning’s narratives, we may consider that Wanhui’s prophecy influenced Zhang Wei’s lifelong loyalty to Xuanzong.

From Wanhui’s political prophecy, Xuanzong gained confidence that his succession would be possible and that the loyalty of the political team that served him would be strengthened. At the same time, Wanhui’s prophecy that Ruizong and Xuanzong would successively succeed to the throne as emperors of the Tang Dynasty seems to be some sort of political strategy—reminding Xuanzong to firstly support his father to regain the throne and then consider his own interests, which led to the subsequent “Tanglong Coup (21 July 710)” and “Xiantian Coup (27 July–25 August 713)” that Xuanzong staged to seize imperial power. Wanhui’s prophecy, which nearly publicly told everyone that Ruizong and Xuanzong would be the emperors of the Tang Dynasty, seemed to be a personal statement of Wanhui. However, combined with his unique status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain, closely related to the imperial family with the ability to make efficacious predictions who also had the unquestionable faith of the nobles, scholar-officials and common people, his predictions were naturally regarded as powerful religious legitimation of the political destiny of Ruizong and his son Xuanzong. Zanning’s ingenious writing leaves enough room for our imagination, but it is also logical. Wanhui purposely waited at the road that Ruizong had to pass after leaving his Prince Residence, and loudly referred to him as “the Son of Heaven” or “the Saint”; Xuanzong brought his followers to pay a special visit to Wanhui, who promoted the prestige of Xuanzong. Wanhui insisted on the political position of safeguarding the “rightful”⁴² status of the Li-Tang imperial family. Therefore, he was happy to make full use of his status and reputation as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain to build up religious momentum and advocate the public’s belief to support Ruizong and Xuanzong’s legitimacy in seizing imperial power and succeeding to the throne.

To sum up, the reason why Wanhui was able to use his identity as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain to gain the deep faith and devotional worship of the Tang emperors, nobles and scholar-officials, and to skillfully exert a variety of subtle influences on the politics of the Tang Dynasty according to his will, was that the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel guaranteed and even strengthened the charisma⁴³ of his religious personality. Confucianism displays “its religious character primarily through the performance of ritual sacrifices and veneration” (Huang 2020, p. 213). However, Chinese Buddhism can not only demonstrate religious influence through “the believers’ interaction with sacred space” (Huang 2020, p. 212) of Buddhist temples, but monks and nuns can also make believers worship them more devoutly and believe in Buddhism more wholeheartedly because of the influence of the sacred space they live in. The Buddhist palace chapel as a special sacred space is not just a unique religious and political institution inside the palace, it is also a holy place that symbolizes the supreme imperial power and great religious sanctity as well as “a means of direct access to the center,” “in which Buddhist monks” can “cooperate with the highest secular authority” (Chen 2004, p. 102). Wanhui, as a monk with a transcendent status in the Buddhist palace chapel, was often regarded by the imperial family, nobles, scholar-officials and even ordinary people as a miraculous monk with

mysterious and unpredictable supernatural powers, as well as a Buddhist palace chaplain who always maintained close relations with the Tang imperial family and had extraordinary religious and political influence. Therefore, no matter what seemingly mad words or deeds he showed, everyone would regard them as accurate predictions or well-intentioned reminders. This just proves that the far-reaching influence of the Buddhist palace chapel was reflected in Wanhui's religious personality. When Wanhui was outside the Buddhist palace chapel, he often needed to evoke people's awe of the sacred space through some mad words and deeds, so that people could trust his predictions and act according to his will. "Although replicating a sacred space tied to a specific locale is difficult, recreating the sacred space ritualistically in miniature can be successful in evoking its sacrality" (Lin 2014, p. 178). This shows that the sacredness of sacred space is not necessarily fixed in a specific place, but can also be expressed anytime and anywhere through special words and deeds similar to the miniature rituals in different ways by religious people with great charismatic personalities.

3. The Religious Image of Wanhui: The Reinforcement of the Religious Personality on the Sacred Space

According to relevant records, the Buddhist monk with whom Wanhui first came into contact might have been the famous Tripitaka Master (Skt. *trīṣṭakācārya*; Ch. *san-zang fashi* 三藏法師)⁴⁴ Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). The latter was not only the founder of the Consciousness-only (Skt. *vijñapti-mātrātā*; Ch. *weishi* 唯識) sect and one of the greatest translators of Chinese Buddhism, but also a monk who was truly favored by Taizong (r. 598–649) and Gaozong, as well as by Empress Wu.⁴⁵ The *Song gaoseng zhuan* provides a historical material about Xuanzang's visit to Wanhui after completing his pilgrimage from India and returning to China:

During the period of Zhenguan, after returning to China from the West, Tripitaka Master Xuanzang said: "There was a Shizang Temple in Tianzhu 天竺 (an old name for India in the Eastern Asia). When I entered the temple, I saw an empty room with only the *huchuang* 胡床 (a type of portable folding chair) and the *xizhang* 錫杖 (Buddhist monk's staff). So, I asked about [the whereabouts of] the *bhadanta* [who lived in this room before], and everyone else said: 'This monk was punished to reincarnate in Wenxiang which was in an oriental country called Zhendan 震旦 (Skt. *cīna-sthāna*; a name for China in ancient Indian records and some Chinese Buddhist texts) because he was absent from Dharma events. He is named Wanhui in this life.'" After Xuanzang returned to China, he sought to visit Wanhui, and paid homage [to Wanhui]. [Xuanzang] asked [Wanhui] about the situation in the Western Regions, [Wanhui replied] as if he was watching [everything with his own eyes]. When Xuanzang was about to visit Wanhui's home, Wanhui told his mother: "A guest is coming, please prepare vegetarian dishes." Presently Xuanzang arrived. 貞觀中, 三藏法師西歸雲: "天竺有石藏寺, 奘入時見一空房, 有胡床錫杖而已。因問此房大德, 咸曰: '此僧緣闕法事, 罰在東方, 國名震旦, 地號閩鄉, 于茲萬回矣。'" 奘歸, 求見回, 便設禮。問西域, 宛如目矚。奘將訪其家, 回謂母曰: "有客至, 請備蔬食。" 俄而奘至。⁴⁶

The *Taiping guangji* also records a similar historical material:

Prior to this, Master Xuanzang went to the Buddhist country to obtain Buddhist scriptures. He saw a couplet on a Buddhist shrine that read: "The Bodhisattva Wanhui was relegated to Wenxiang to teach [all living beings]." After returning to China, Xuanzang drove to Wenxiang County on a post horse and asked others: "Is Master Wanhui here?" The others asked him to shout, then Wan Hui came to him. Master Xuanzang paid homage to Wanhui, gave him the *kasaya* (Skt. *trīṇī cīvarāṇi*; Ch. *sanyi* 三衣) and an alms bowl (Skt. *pātra*; Ch. *boyu* 鉢盂), and then left. 先是玄奘法師向佛國取經。見佛龕題柱曰: "菩薩萬回, 謫向閩鄉地教化。" 奘師馳驛至閩鄉縣, 問: "此有萬回師無?" 令呼之, 萬回至。奘師禮之, 施三衣瓶鉢而去。⁴⁷

The previous material tells us that when Xuanzang was at the Shizang Temple in Tianzhu, he learned from other monks that an eminent monk who lived here before had been reincarnated in Wenxiang, China, and his name in this life was Wanhui. After Xu-

anzang returned to China, he actually found Wanhui in Wenxiang, and confirmed that Wanhui was the reincarnated monk mentioned by the monks of Shizang Temple and had the supernatural power to predict the future. The latter material is relatively brief, mainly indicating that Xuanzang learned about Wanhui's identity as a Bodhisattva in the past and the information about his reincarnation in this life from a couplet on a Buddhist shrine in India.

Combining these two pieces of material, we can infer three conclusions:

First, Xuanzang arrived in Chang'an in Zhenguan 19.1 (2 February–2 March 645),⁴⁸ and only after that he had time to go to Wenxiang to visit Wanhui. The second material mentions that Xuanzang had the right to use the official post horse, which also shows that Xuanzang received great favor from Taizong after returning to China. Since Wanhui's birth year is 632, we can deduce that Wanhui was a child who had reached the age of thirteen and lived at home at this time.

Second, Xuanzang learned that "Wanhui" was the Dharma name of the monk Wanhui himself in India rather than in China. This is a third explanation for the origin of Wanhui's name.⁴⁹

Third, Xuanzang firmly believed that Wanhui was the reincarnation of a *bhadanta* or a Bodhisattva, and worshiped him devoutly. Considering the fact that Xuanzang was deeply favored and trusted by Taizong, Gaozong and Empress Wu, the reason why Wanhui was invited by Gaozong to enter a Buddhist palace chapel during Xianheng 4 was not only due to his miracle of making a "10,000-mile round trip in a day," but it is also very likely that Xuanzang strongly recommended Wanhui in front of Gaozong.

The above conclusions have actually explained the reason why Wanhui was born with a variety of Buddhist supernatural powers, and had the ability to perform many miracles freely, because his previous life was a respected *bhadanta* or Bodhisattva in Buddhism, who had reached the level of being able to use supernatural powers wisely and freely to teach and save sentient beings through the Buddhist practice of continuous reincarnation. The emperors of the Tang Dynasty also needed such miraculous monks to meet their political and religious needs, which also explains why Wanhui had the opportunity to become a Buddhist palace chaplain from a miraculous monk.

In fact, before Wanhui entered the Buddhist palace chapel, there was a prophecy that revealed the particularity of Wanhui's identity.

"At that time, a Fufeng monk named Menghong had a lot of miraculous events. At first, at the Buddhist palace chapel, he always said: 'Come back! Come back!' After Wanhui came into the Buddhist palace chapel, he said: 'My replacement has arrived! It's time for me to leave!' After ten days or so, he passed away" (時有扶風僧蒙頌者，甚多靈跡。先在內每曰：“[萬] 回來，[萬] 回來。”⁵⁰ 及公至又曰：“替到，當去。” 迨旬日而頌卒)⁵¹ Menghong (?–673 or 674), who was from Fufeng 扶風 (present-day Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province), was a Buddhist palace chaplain until Wanhui arrived. His prophecies gave Wanhui a religious mystique and a special status in the Buddhist palace chapel.

The "Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu" 唐玉泉寺大通禪師碑銘並序 [The inscription and preface about Chan Master Datong of Yuquan Temple in the Tang Dynasty], written by Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731), a three-time prime minister and a master of literature of his generation, shows us Wanhui's important influence in the imperial court and his esteemed status in the Buddhist community. Chan Master Datong, who was Yuquan Shenxiu 玉泉神秀 (605–706), the patriarch of Northern Chan, passed away at Tiangong Temple in Luoyang on the night of Shenlong 2.2.28 (15 April 706).⁵² The inscription written by Zhang Yue describes Zhongzong as so saddened that he gave Chan Master Shenxiu the posthumous title of "Datong" on Shenlong 2.3.2 (18 April 706). On the day of *Jiwang* 既望 of the month of *Zhongqiu* 仲秋 (27 September 706),⁵³ he issued an imperial edict to hold a funeral ceremony for Chan Master Shenxiu. "The *Taichang qing* 太常卿 (Chief Minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices) guided and led the funeral procession, and the *Cheng-men lang* 城門郎 (Gentleman of the Capital Gates in charge of the Entry to the Imperial Residence) guarded and monitored it. On this day, the emperor (Zhongzong)

came to the Dragon Gate (Longmen 龍門), wetting the golden lining of his clothing with tears, and climbed to a high place and stopped to look at the funeral procession until he could no longer see it, then returned to his imperial chariot. From the Yi River to the Yellow River, the faithful greeted the funeral procession along the road with sorrow. Countless hanging banners and colored flowers adorned the hundreds of chariots, and auspicious clouds stretched for thousands of miles in the air” (太常卿鼓吹導引, 城門郎護監喪葬。是日, 天子出龍門泫金縷, 登高停蹕, 目盡回輿。自伊及江, 扶道哀候。幡花百輦, 香雲千里)。 “In October (November 10–December 9, 706), near the time when the moon was full, a pagoda was built on the hill behind the former residence of Chan Master Shenxiu. The imperial court gave millions of coins to decorate the pagoda in a solemn manner. The huge bell was cast by order of the previous emperor, and many Buddhist scriptures were given by the current emperor. The golden plaque was inscribed by the emperor himself, and the magnificent hanging banners were made by the imperial court. The pagoda and the Buddhist temple were respected by everyone. Chan Master Shenxiu’s fame had spread far and wide and he was admired by all” (維十月哉生魄明, 即舊居後岡安神起塔。國錢嚴飾, 賜逾百萬。巨鐘是先帝所鑄, 群經是後皇所錫。金榜禦題, 華幡內造, 塔寺尊重, 遠稱標絕)。 Such a description shows the posthumous glory of Chan Master Shenxiu, who was held in high esteem by the imperial family. “The Bodhisattva [Wanhui] begged imperial wives and concubines for alms, and he received a chest full of precious clothes of great value. He was favored by the emperor and was elected to lead a Dharma assembly with offerings, parades and incense burning” (萬回菩薩乞施後宮。寶衣盈箱, 珍價敵國, 親舉寵費, 侑供巡香)。 This Dharma assembly was held in recognition of the great religious appeal and charisma of Chan Master Shenxiu, who “possessed profound blessings and many karmas both during his life and after his death, and whose glory and decline passed each other with the passage of time” (廣福博因, 存沒如此, 日月逾邁, 榮落相推)⁵⁴ Zhongzong gave Chan Master Shenxiu a posthumous title and led civil and military officials and believers to hold a funeral ceremony and erect a pagoda for him. Following this, Wanhui made offerings and paraded with burning incense for the Dharma assembly of Chan Master Shenxiu with the belongings collected from imperial wives and concubines. Zhang Yue calling Wanhui a “Bodhisattva” in the inscription singled out Wanhui as the representative of the Buddhist community and placed him after the procession of Zhongzong and officials to commemorate Chan Master Shenxiu. This reveals to us that Wanhui was actually the leader of the Buddhist community at that time, and only he was qualified and prestigious enough to represent the Buddhist community to honor and provide for Shenxiu, who was revered as “the leader of the Buddhist community of two capitals, Chang’an and Luoyang, and the national teacher of three emperors” (兩京法主、三帝國師)。 In addition, Wanhui’s special religious status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain and his close relationship with the imperial family were two important conditions that other monks in the Buddhist community did not possess at that time. Therefore, Wanhui was also elected by Zhongzong to lead the monks to participate in the funeral ceremony and memorial service of Chan Master Shenxiu. In conclusion, Wanhui was highly favored by the emperor and revered by the Buddhist community, and had considerable religious influence in the imperial court and an important religious position in the Buddhist community.

Chan Master Hui’an 慧安 (582–709), whose secular family surname was Wei 衛, was a monk at Shaolin Temple in Songshan. He was also one of the ten disciples of Hongren 弘忍 (602–675), the Fifth Patriarch of the Chan sect. In Shenlong 2.9 (12 October–9 November 706), Hui’an was given a purple robe by Zhongzong, and then entered the Buddhist palace chapel with Chan Master Jing 靜 (active in the seventh century AD) to receive offerings. The following year, he returned to Shaolin Temple. On Jinglong 3.3.3 (17 April 709), after Hui’an had instructed his disciples about his funeral arrangements, Wanhui came to see him. “Hui’an took Wanhui’s hand as if he had lost his mind and talked for a while, but the attendant monk next to them could not understand the meaning of their conversation even though he tried to listen” (安倡狂執手, 言論移刻, 旁侍傾耳都不體會)⁵⁵ The phrase “移刻 (*yike*)” refers to a short period of time. Wanhui came to visit Hui’an in person before

Hui'an was about to die, which shows that they had a close personal relationship. Hui'an had been living in Zhongzong's Buddhist palace chapel for nearly a year, so perhaps the two had formed a friendship during that time. Although Hui'an and Wanhui only talked for a moment, the attendant was unable to understand them, so it is clear that they had profound knowledge of Buddhadharma and knew each other well, and were therefore not able to be understood by outsiders.

The two religions, Buddhism and Taoism, continued to maintain a competitive and/or mutually influential interactive relationship in the Tang Dynasty. Even the relationship between monks and Taoists was often characterized by various situations of either close admiration or struggle and dislike. Ming Chongyan 明崇儼 (646–679), the *Zhengjian dafu* 正諫大夫 (Grand Master of Remonstrance), who was a Taoist, was willing to call Wanhui a “miraculous monk” because of an incident he had personally experienced, leading him to discard the views of religious sects.⁵⁶

Since he was young, [Wanhui] had been close to the Sramana Daming 大明 (active in the seventh century AD) of Longxing Temple. He came to the Monk Dorm of Daming [as a guest]. When Ming Chongyan, the *Zhengjian dafu*, came to the temple at night, he was frightened to see that Wanhui was guarded by divine soldiers. In the morning, he told Daming what he had seen the night before, gave him valuable golds and silks, bowed to him, and then left. 有龍興寺沙門大明少而相狎，公來往明師之室。屬有正諫大夫明崇儼夜過寺，見公左右神兵侍衛，崇儼駭之。詰旦言與明師，複厚施金繒，作禮而去。⁵⁷

Here, the personal experience of Ming Chongyan, who was both a court official and a Taoist, proves that Wanhui was indeed an unusual “miraculous monk,” highlighting the fact that Wanhui's high reputation not only reached the Tang imperial court, the Buddhist community and his believers, but also attracted the admiration of Taoists as non-Buddhists.

In conclusion, we can conceive that Wanhui, as a charismatic type of Buddhist leader with a high degree of Buddhist attractiveness (or rather, supernatural powers), had a charismatic religious personality, which naturally strengthened the influence of the sacred space in his Buddhist palace chapel. The more inconceivable the miracles he performed were and the more accurate his prophecies were revealed to be, the more obvious the political influence and religious sanctity demonstrated by his religious personality were. This was very beneficial to the Buddhist palace chapel, especially for setting up to meet the various religious and political needs of the emperors of the Tang Dynasty, so that the imperial power could take advantage of the authority of eminent monks and the sanctity of Buddhism to consolidate its own rule. Whenever there were sudden natural or man-made disasters within the state, one of the ways that the extremely worried emperors could think of to tide over the difficulties was usually to use religion. The reason the emperors of the Tang dynasty were willing to establish the Buddhist palace chapels and make offerings to eminent monks was not only to satisfy their own religious needs, but also to use the religious prestige of the Buddhist palace chaplains and the sanctity of Buddhism they represented to create religious momentum for the legitimacy of their power and to ease the discontent of nobles, ministers and ordinary people with the emperor's rule in times of crisis. As Tambiah particularly emphasizes, when the country was in times of war, famine, epidemic, flood, drought, etc., the forest monks must play the role of recharging and fortifying “monarchical legitimacy and creative powers by tapping the purity and charisma of the untarnished forest ascetics” (Tambiah 1984, p. 77). The more religiously influential and capable the eminent monks summoned by the Tang emperors were, the more powerful the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapels would be—especially when the emperor's difficulties seemed to be solved many times by various incredible Buddhist rituals performed by the Buddhist palace chaplains. The emperors' purposes of inviting the eminent monks into the Buddhist palace chapels to receive offerings can be broadly summarized into three aspects: first, to allow the Buddhist palace chaplains to perform regularly various Dharma events for different purposes in the sacred space; second, to create a holy place exclusively for the rule of the Tang Empire with the prestige and ability of the Buddhist palace chaplains; and third, more likely, to use the Buddhist palace chapel as a place to restrict the Buddhist leaders

with charismatic personality to prevent those with ulterior motives from using religion to undermine the existing order and oppose imperial rule. “A continuous reinforcement of the barriers against a free movement of charismatic persons is carried on by the custodians of the routine order” (Shils 1975, p. 130). This mentality of the Tang emperors towards the Buddhist palace chaplains, which was both exploitative and defensive, usually meant that the favor and trust from the imperial power was in fact very fragile and short-lived.⁵⁸ Only very few Buddhist palace chaplains were not treated like this, such as Wanhui. Why did Wanhui always manage to avoid political persecution without fail? His mad words and deeds might be a means of wisdom that he deliberately showed. As a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain with great charisma, he had to deal with the Tang emperor carefully so as not to arouse the emperor’s suspicion—this also confirms that Wanhui’s religious personality had a great influence on the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel. “Religious figures of more obvious historical and social significance—such as priests, prophets, and charismatic leaders—who often enjoy a widespread appeal, and at times even possess a dramatic potential for effecting far-reaching social transformations” (Silber 1995, pp. 1–2). We should recognize that when Wanhui won the great trust and favor of the imperial family of the Tang Dynasty with his charismatic religious personality and Buddha-wisdom, the status of the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel was also consolidated and even elevated, and thus the imperial rule was strengthened by the authority of the Buddhist palace chaplains and the influence of the Buddhist palace chapels—a good result of the close cooperation between the Buddhist monks and the imperial power.

4. Conclusions

As a final conclusion, let me highlight some major scholarly findings in this study. The historical sources I have used—including official materials such as the Tang inscriptions, the imperial edicts, the *Liang Tang shu*, the *Zizhi tongjian*, etc., the *Sengzhuàn zhaichào* (in S.1624 of the British-collected Dunhuang documents written in the Five Dynasties (907–960)), and Buddhist hagiographies provided by Zanning in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) and Zhipan 志磐 (d. after 1269) in Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), together with literary sketches such as the *Taiping guangji*—agree that the miraculous monk Wanhui was closely related to the “rightful” successors of the Li-Tang imperial family, namely Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong. Although the available materials about Wanhui are too scattered to prove the nature of the relationship between Wanhui and the three Tang emperors, it is easy to see from the results of this study that Wanhui made political contributions by influencing public opinion with his religious prestige to win the favor and trust of the emperors. He was successful by making use of his religious identity and sublime religious appeal as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain, who “could not be understood by common sense in what he did and had a reason for what he said” (然其施作, 皆不可輒量, 出言則必有其故).⁵⁹

Although most of the literary sketches and the inscriptions only depict Wanhui as a “mad” monk whose words and deeds were mad and unpredictable, he was also regarded as a “miraculous monk” who was revered and believed by the people at that time for his efficacious predictions, his words about political affairs and his miraculous signs. In these texts, Wanhui is an outstanding person who is free from the fetters of the mundane. However, the impression left by the historical materials of monastic biographies and some official materials is very different from the image of Wanhui that the aforementioned literary sketches and inscriptions try to construct for readers.

Shi Dao’an 釋道安 (314–385), who was a Buddhist leader in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420), once argued that only under the dire survival predicament of surviving “the current famine years” (今遭凶年) could the Buddhist community be compelled to practice the expedient measure of “being unable to promote Buddhism without relying on the emperor” (不依國主, 則法事難立)⁶⁰ in order to keep the Buddhist community alive.⁶¹ Through history, there were also some monastic leaders who adhered to the principle of “not to go out of the mountains of their hermitages, not to deal with worldly people”

(影不出山、跡不入俗)⁶² for the rest of their lives, so as to minimize their dealings and entanglements with imperial power and politics as much as possible. In fact, in ancient China, Buddhist monks with vision, talent, courage and prestige—especially those in the north—either out of their subjective desire to protect and promote Buddhism or under the threat of political pressure of imperial orders, participated extensively and continuously in political activities and actively advised the emperor and planned politics. In the course of their mission to promote Buddhism and perpetuate the Buddhadharmā, they also aspired to increase their own power and wealth. In the Tang Dynasty, several emperors, out of their realistic political and religious needs, were close to or supported the Buddhist monks, who they valued in their role in consolidating of their political power and even the seizure of power by coup. Therefore, monks were involved in a series of political activities in various forms, bringing themselves and their Buddhist communities either a momentary favor from the emperor or death.

On the one hand, the monks in medieval China had to deal with such unfavorable external factors as the control and fetters imposed on Buddhism by the national religious system, the moral reprimands, economic exploitation and political interference by disbelieving court officials and local officials against Buddhism and monks, the destruction by disasters such as drought, famine, pestilence and war, and the infestation by thieves, among other challenges. On the other hand, they also had to face the rhetorical attacks from various sects within Buddhism. All these factors forced Buddhist monks to re-examine their on-the-ground situation and take the initiative to improve their relationship with the state power, and to establish and maintain limited cooperation between the state and Buddhism. Sometimes, however, circumstances forced them to give up their religious independence for a time, relying entirely on the support of state power and obeying the arrangement with the imperial family. In order to maintain the complex state-*samgha* relationship between the Buddhist community and the secular regime—full of tension but interdependent and mutually desirable—the leaders of the Buddhist community usually considered satisfying the ruler’s real political interests with the religious skills they could provide. These skills included knowledge of Buddhist scriptures and non-Buddhist classic books, Buddhist rituals and even supernatural powers and divinations, which could build up religious momentum and advocate for public opinion to prove the legitimacy and sacredness of the regime in exchange for political support, resource supply and a guarantee of safety from the secular regime.

As the son of a garrison militia and the younger brother of an active-duty conscript at a frontier post, Wanhui was a monk from an ordinary family from the time of the Tang Dynasty, but he was able to rise to his high position as the leader of the Buddhist community in a few decades. We cannot say with confidence that there were no political factors involved. Admittedly, he grew up with miraculous abilities and behaved differently from ordinary people. “When Wanhui was a boy, he stacked tiles and stones to form a pagoda at Xingguo Temple of Wenxiang. Upon entering, the pagoda emitted light. Therefore, the people built a large loft to cover the pagoda” (先為兒時，於閩鄉興國寺累瓦石為佛塔。入內之後，其塔遂放光明，因建大閣而覆之)⁶³ Because of Wanhui’s miracle of making a 10,000-mile round trip in a day, he was known to the imperial family, and was then called into the imperial palace to become a Buddhist palace chaplain. At the same time, he was given the opportunity to get close to the Tang imperial family. However, there were many Chinese monks, barbarian monks (*huseng* 胡僧; that is, a monk from Central Asia) and Sanskrit monks (*fanseng* 梵僧; that is, a monk from India) in the Tang Dynasty who were adept at supernatural powers and divinations—why was Wanhui the only one who had the ability to perform supernatural powers through the reigns of four emperors and have his holy favor remain intact? After reviewing the existing historical materials, we did not discover any reliance on Wanhui’s familiarity with Buddhist scriptures and non-Buddhist classic books, proficiency in Buddhist rituals nor transmission of sectarian lineage. However, we often find in the literature that Wanhui was politically active during the reigns of Gaozong, Empress Wu, Zhongzong and Ruizong, and defended the “legitimacy” of the Li-Tang im-

perial family by means of predicting efficaciously and rebuking those who usurped and disturbed the imperial power of the Li-Tang, but unflinchingly avoided political persecution.

The most common phenomenon in the world of politics and faith in the Tang Dynasty was that eminent monks who once had great power and prestige would retire from the stage of history with the succession of the new emperor, or that the ruler, because of his changing religious feelings and political interests, would ruthlessly wipe out his favored monks whom he once trusted and respected. Combined with the results of recent academic research on the state–*samgha* relationship of the Tang Dynasty, this phenomenon can be summarized as follows:

By studying the last ten years of Xuanzang’s life, Liu Shufen attributes his political disillusionment and spiritual hardship to the political storm in which Gaozong regained political dominance from the faction of old ministers who assisted in politics, in which Xuanzang was classified by Gaozong as being close to the old ministers (Liu 2009, pp. 1–98). By studying Degan 德感 (active in the seventh century AD), a disciple of Xuanzang and one of the “Ten *bhadanta*-monks” of Empress Wu, Sun Yinggang demonstrates that a monk proficient in Consciousness-only study played an important role in the incubation and creation of the Wu-Zhou 武周 (the dynasty established by Empress Wu) regime, but the historical truth was deliberately obscured due to the subsequent political sensitivity (Sun 2015, pp. 217–44); Jinhua Chen discusses the military activities and political relations of Faya 法雅 (?–629), a “Villain Monk” who was favored by Gaozu (r. 618–626), and points out that the main reason for his historical vilification is that his relationship with the regime collapsed in a catastrophic manner.⁶⁴ As for the notorious “Evil Monk” Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義 (?–694) and the “Villain Monk” Huifan 惠範 (also written as Huifan 慧範, ?–713) (Chen 2016, pp. 140–221), both of whom were reviled by the monks and laymen, they were quite talented and had made great political achievements. However, how could Wanhui, as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain with remarkable powers, win the favor and trust of four emperors throughout his life and keep himself safe through several coups?

First of all, unlike other monks of the Buddhist palace chapel, Wanhui was not appointed by the emperor to be a Buddhist palace chaplain to provide religious services such as sutra translation, conducting ordination, Buddhist services, and offering Buddhist relics to the Tang imperial family. The personal relationship between Wanhui and the imperial family was more intimate, which is especially obvious from the two facts: that Empress Wu asked Wanhui whether Crown Prince Huizhuang would live or die, and that Xuanzong personally visited Wanhui and asked for his future. Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–757) once wrote a poem to praise Wanhui’s high status: “When Wanhui acted foolishly, he would scare everyone; but when he was wise, he could become the emperor’s teacher. He acted in accordance with this era; there is no more capable person produced by heaven and earth” (愚也駭蒼生, 聖哉為帝師。當為時世出, 不由天地資).⁶⁵ As we can see, Wanhui was not only a spiritual teacher in the usual religious sense, but also an adviser, prophet and even imperial teacher with great wisdom and insight, advising the emperor and his heirs and foreseeing the future. “This ability to know the future in advance was highly valued; the monks also claimed that they had the same ability” (流俗之重, 莫如先知, 故沙門之見附會, 多在於此) (Lü 1982, p. 964). Wanhui was praised for his ability to predict the future, which attracted the imperial family and ministers to inquire about future fortune and misfortune. He was able to accurately predict the downfall of the powerful Empress Wu’s male favorite, Zhang Yizhi 張易之 (?–705), the execution of Empress Wei and Princess Anle, the restoration of Ruizong, the succession of Xuanzong and the rebellion of An-Shi. Wanhui’s accurate predictions satisfied the Tang imperial family’s need for political security; and the imperial family, out of their own practical considerations to avoid misfortune in the struggle for political power and their worries about danger, also needed a miraculous monk and a wise man such as Wanhui, who was an outsider to secular politics, to be prepared to explain the confusion encountered in real political affairs. In return, they gave Wanhui their long-term favor and trust.

Secondly, Wanhui always remained loyal to the “rightful” regime of Li-Tang, and rejected and showed his dislike of Empress Wu and Empress Wei, who usurped the imperial power of Li-Tang. Zanning’s historical writings revealed this for us. Wanhui saved the life of Crown Prince Huizhuang from Empress Wu, and prophetically implied that Ruizong’s sons were united in brotherly love. He publicly announced in the streets that Ruizong would regain the throne, predicted that Xuanzong would reign for fifty years, and deliberately revealed this to Xuanzong’s followers. It is hard to say that these are not political displays planned in advance by Ruizong, Xuanzong, and Wanhui, with the intention of using Wanhui’s popular ability of foresight and his religious identity as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain. These demonstrations would thereby create religious momentum and political propaganda in support for them to seize imperial power and succeed to the throne. As the most capable of Ruizong’s sons, Xuanzong must have been approved and assisted by Ruizong before he staged the “Tanglong Coup” and the “Xiantian Coup.” The final decision on the choice of crown prince was made after a political show in which the order of succession was determined by merit and the two brothers resigned one after another, but Ruizong and his sons must have already discussed the matter and made Xuanzong the crown prince. At the same time, Wanhui, who had become the leader of the Buddhist community in the year of Shenlong, could also influence the Buddhist community’s support for the imperial family of Li-Tang—a political force that could not be underestimated. In order to fight against political enemies and seize the throne, Ruizong and Xuanzong had to take care of the political interests and religious sentiments of Buddhist monks, and it was only right that they continued to honor Wanhui. Of course, it should also be understood that Wanhui predicted the demise of Zhang Yizhi, Empress Wei and Princess Anle, which objectively accelerated their political defeat, dealt a blow to those who usurped and disturbed the “rightful” imperial power of Li-Tang with public opinion and religious prediction and used the belief of the imperial family and bureaucrats in Wanhui to inspire the imperial family and bureaucrats loyal to the Li-Tang regime to rise up against them and set things right.

Finally, we need to note that religious beliefs, as ideologies, have a huge impact on human activities in the real world. “Religion, then, maintains the socially defined reality by legitimating marginal situations in terms of an all-encompassing sacred reality . . . Such situations may occur as the result of natural catastrophe, war or social upheaval. At such times, religious legitimations almost invariably come to the front. Furthermore, whenever a society must motivate its members to kill or to risk their lives, thus consenting to being placed in extreme marginal situations, religious legitimations become important” (Berger 2011, pp. 56–57). As the “rightful” successors of the Li-Tang regime, Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong fell into the political situation of Empress Wu’s reign, Empress Wei’s and Princess Anle’s chaotic rule and Princess Taiping’s interference in the regime for several decades. In order to regain the political power of Li-Tang, it was necessary to eliminate political enemies and consolidate political power through political blows and military interventions. At this point, the actions that the eminent monks could provide to rationalize the coup and legitimize the regime are particularly important. Wanhui, at the right time, assumed the responsibility of rationalizing and legitimizing the coups that allowed the Li-Tang imperial family to regain its “rightful” place in the sacred religious veneer. By virtue of his great religious appeal, he led the force of the Buddhist community, the political power of the imperial court and a group of believers to support the political actions of the imperial family, which to a certain extent reduced the resistance to the palace coup and provided religious rationalization for the reunification of the Li-Tang regime.

In summary, the interdependence and interaction between the sacred spaces of the Buddhist palace chapels and the religious personalities of the miraculous Buddhist palace chaplains in the Tang Dynasty emerge. As the Buddhist palace chapel was set up by the Tang imperial family in the palace, it naturally had the authority and legitimacy of imperial power. In return, its religious sacred space gave Wanhui, a monk living in the Buddhist palace chapel, a rich religious sacredness, mystical charm and strong political support,

which provided a political guarantee for Wanhui to establish an intimate personal relationship with the imperial family. At the same time, Wanhui's incomparable charisma and the methods of religious momentum won the favor and trust of the Tang imperial family, which in turn strengthened the religious and political functions of the unique Buddhist institution in the service of imperial power. This power manifested itself in the consolidation and elevation of the status of the Buddhist palace chapel's sacred space.

This study provides an academic discussion of the reasons shaping the political and religious images of Wanhui by reorganizing and examining the historical documents on Wanhui. As we have seen above, a large number of hagiographies and literary sketches have consciously portrayed Wanhui as an anti-traditional eminent monk with both the personality of a "mad monk," whose words and deeds were mad and unpredictable, and the personality of a "miraculous monk," whose predictions were always efficacious and whose miracles were frequently seen. The former is the outward secular appearance of the latter, and the latter is the inner sanctified character of the former. The combination of these two identities in Wanhui's religious personality made him a charismatic and distinctive Buddhist leader. It is essential that the influence of Wanhui's displayed charisma is recognized or regarded as such: "On the one hand, the charisma may lead to excesses of derangement and deviance, on the other hand charismatic personalities or collectivities may be the bearers of great cultural social innovations and creativity, religious, political, or economic" (Weber 1968, p. xx). Thus, Wanhui was able to display his accurate prophecies and unparalleled charisma to the fullest extent under the guise of his mad words and deeds, and to gain the favor of emperors and the worship of the nobles, scholar-officials and ordinary people while defending the "legitimacy" of the Li-Tang imperial family and helping others compassionately. His charismatic religious personality not only greatly enhanced the political status of the Buddhist palace chapel, which could serve as a shortcut for Buddhist monks to cooperate with the highest secular authority, but also played an important role in promoting the development of Buddhism and maintaining its religious influence in the Tang Empire.

In this article, the author tries to conduct textual research on the content of different hagiographies by means of comparative material research as far as possible, and thus has discovered the deep meanings contained in the descriptions of the hagiographies and drew several valuable historical conclusions. However, at the same time, we have to admit that whether for political purposes or religious intentions, the compilers deliberately exaggerated the political influence and religious appeal of Wanhui, overplayed the influence of the sacred space in the Buddhist palace chapel on Wanhui's status, and reinterpreted or distorted certain narrative elements in the historical background. Additionally, they often added some incredible legendary elements to attach historically verifiable facts to highlight that Wanhui, as a miraculous monk, had great skills and powerful abilities to save the common people with Buddha-wisdom and supernatural powers. The self-consistent reason of its inner logic can be attributed to the unimaginable sacred religious personality of Wanhui and the infinite use of the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel. Robert Campamy says: "Precisely because hagiography intends to inspire belief, veneration, and perhaps emulation, its depictions of the contexts of religious life must be, for the most part, realistic, which is to say, recognizable and familiar to readers" (Campamy 2002, p. 101). More importantly, we should be aware that any given hagiography contains both verifiable historical details and hidden hagiographical elements that deserve to be reinterpreted, and it is a matter of serious consideration how to properly treat the materials provided by the Buddhist hagiographies. In addition, a comparative material study of various hagiographical texts about Wanhui can more clearly verify the interdependence and interaction between the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel and the religious personality of Wanhui. Therefore, we can uphold the spirit of serious academic criticism and the ability of prudent historical research to discover the intrinsic logical connections in the complex and fragmentary hagiographical materials, and conduct a comparative study both with various documents passed down through generations and inscriptions on stone

tablets, with a view to reconstructing the obscured historical stories and characters as much as possible. With this, we restore the political and religious image of Wanhui to the greatest extent in accordance with textual research on comparative hagiographical materials and the characteristics of Buddhism itself.

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Notes

- 1 On Wanhui, see Cui (2016, pp. 110–17); Cui (2008, pp. 75–87); Hu (2019, pp. 112–14); Yang (2019, p. 14).
- 2 Chen (2007, p. 7). The third approach is from John Kieschnick’s academic viewpoint. See Kieschnick (1997, p. 1).
- 3 See the footnote written by the translator. Eliade and Wang (2002, p. 5).
- 4 On sacred space, see Chen and Sun (2014, pp. 10–466); Huang (2020, pp. 1–212); Lin (2014, pp. 25–178).
- 5 According to the research of Professor Jinhua Chen, the *neidaochang* can “have three possible meanings: (1) Buddhist observances performed in the imperial palace, (2) a place within the imperial palace for Buddhist observances, and finally (3) a Buddhist chapel within the imperial palace.” See Chen (2004, pp. 101–2); Chen (2006, pp. 44–45). Since this article is discussing the sacred space of specific buildings, the *neidaochang* refers to the latter two meanings. The purpose of translating “the *neidaochang*” as “the Buddhist palace chapel” is to emphasize the religious and political characteristics of this special institution. It is necessary to add that the author believes the Buddhist palace chapel implies a fourth meaning, namely, a system of the Buddhist palace chapel. It is because only when there was a normalized operating mechanism belonging to the religious management system of the Tang Dynasty in the Buddhist palace chapel that it could respond to the orders of the imperial power at any time to meet the religious and political needs of different emperors, such as translating Buddhist scriptures, making offerings to Buddha’s finger-bone relic, holding Buddhist rituals, managing state religious affairs, regularly performing religious performances, etc.
- 6 On hagiography and comparative hagiography, see Zimbalist (2019, pp. 1–8); Rondolino (2017, pp. 1–242); Rondolino (2020, pp. 1–4); Orsi (2016, pp. 12–252); Velez (2019, pp. 1–249).
- 7 He is also called “Wanhui” 萬迴 and “Wanhui” 萬迴 in the documents of the *neidian* 內典 (Buddhist scriptures) and the *waidian* 外典 (non-Buddhist classic books). The conclusion is roughly the same after conducting textual research and proofreading the records about “Wanhui” 萬回, “Wanhui” 萬迴 and “Wanhui” 萬迴 in the *neidian* such as the “*Song Gaoseng zhuan*” 宋高僧傳, the “*Jingde chuandeng lu*” 景德傳燈錄, the “*Fozu tongji*” 佛祖統紀, etc., and the *waidian* such as the “*Liang Tang shu*” 兩《唐書》 (including the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 and the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書) and the “*Taiping guangji*” 太平廣記, etc. It can be seen that “the differences between the traditional characters and simplified ones are changes in the circulation of ancient books, and it is impossible for two different monks to appear at the same time in the same event,” so they all refer to the same person. See Zhang (1990, p. 28).
- 8 The county town of Wenxiang is adjacent to Qinling 秦嶺 in the south, Hangu guan 函谷關 in the east, and Tong guan 潼關 in the west. Today, it belongs to a submerged area with an altitude of 333 meters below formed by the impoundment of the Sanmenxia 三門峽 Reservoir of the Yellow River.
- 9 The detailed dates of Wanhui’s birth and death can only be found in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, and other documents have no records. See *Jingde chuandeng lu* 27.433 a23–c8. “Liquan li” is the Liquan fang 醴泉坊 in the south of Chang’an city, where the dignitaries set up their private estates.
- 10 Only the *Sengzhuan zhaichao* 僧傳摘抄 in S.1624 of the British-collected Dunhuang documents written in the Five Dynasties (907–960) mentions that Wanhui was born in a family of the *Fubin* 府兵 (Garrison Militia). Hao and Zhao (2010, pp. 373–74).
- 11 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 12 *Fozu tongji jiaozhu* 40.925.
- 13 *Fozu tongji jiaozhu* 40.925.
- 14 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 15 In medieval China, Wanhui was regarded as a typical representative of miraculous or “mad” monks similar to Baozhi, Sangha 僧伽 (628–710), Shi Qici 釋契此 (?–916), etc. They formed another tradition within the group of eminent monks in Chinese Buddhist history, counteracting the tendency toward excessive rationalism and scholasticism that appeared within the Buddhist community, and prominently showing the traces of self-adjustment made by Buddhism in the process of its sinicization. In the Muromachi period (1336–1573) of Japan, Zen Master Ikkyū 一休 (1394–1481) was also regarded as such a miraculous or “mad”

monk. Let me briefly list some relevant studies, see Bruneton (2012, pp. 117–51); Fowler (2000, pp. 2–10); Huang (2010, pp. 59–98); Xie and Li (2020, pp. 47–55); Arntzen (2022, pp. 1–252).

- 16 The “*bizhu*” 匕筯, which is also called the “*bizhu*” 匕箸, refers to the spoons and the chopsticks used as the tableware.
- 17 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454–455. The *gu* 蠱, a poisonous insect, refers to a form of black magic that was outlawed during the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD). The *chenwei shu* 讖緯書 refers to the book of prophecy combined with mystical Confucianist belief which was prevalent since the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). It is also written as the *tuchen* 圖讖 because there are often pictures attached to the book. Because the books of prophecy were often used by the imperial family to gain political power and to prove the legitimacy of its source of power, from the Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, the imperial family prohibited anyone else from privately possessing the books of prophecy. Wanhui’s behavior reminded the Cui family to discover the book of prophecy in time and destroy it, so as to avoid family disasters caused by the cruel officials’ framing them.
- 18 *Jiu Tang shu* 91.2935.
- 19 *Jiu Tang shu* 91.2934–2935.
- 20 *Youyang zazu jiaojian* 3.405.
- 21 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.456.
- 22 *Jiu Tang shu* 95.3015; *Xin Tang shu* 81.3600.
- 23 *Jiu Tang shu* 95.3015.
- 24 *Zizhi tongjian* 209.6854–6855.
- 25 *Quan Tang wen* 38.415–416.
- 26 *Quan Tang wen* 38.415.
- 27 *Quan Tang wen* 293.2971.
- 28 *Taiping guangji* 92.607.
- 29 The meaning of Shuren 庶人是 commoner. Empress Wei was killed in the imperial palace during the Tanglong Coup in 710, and after her death, she was relegated to a commoner for her crime. So, she is called Shuren in the narrative of the *Taiping guangji*.
- 30 *Taiping guangji* 92.607.
- 31 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455–456.
- 32 *Jiu Tang shu* 7.150.
- 33 A summary of related discussions can be found in Ou (2018, pp. 96–103).
- 34 The term “*qianlong*” 潛龍 is from the “*Qiangua*” 乾卦 [the hexagram of Qian] in vol. 1 of the *Zhouyi* 周易 [the Book of Changes], and its political meaning refers to the period prior to the emperor’s accession to the throne.
- 35 The disaster of Lushan (*Lushan zhi huo* 祿山之禍) refers to the An-Shi Rebellion, the war launched by two Tang generals, An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757) and Shi Siming 史思明 (703–761) against the Tang central government from the end of Xuanzong’s reign to the beginning of Daizong (r. 762–779)’s reign (16 December 755–17 February 763).
- 36 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455–456.
- 37 *Jiu Tang shu* 106.3247.
- 38 *Jiu Tang shu* 8.165.
- 39 *Jiu Tang shu* 8.167.
- 40 According to the *Taiping Guangji*, “Princess Taiping built a house for Wanhui to the right of her own mansion. During the years of Jingyun, [Wanhui] died in this residence” (太平公主為造宅於己宅之右。景雲中, [萬回] 卒於此宅)。 *Taiping guangji* 92.607. Additionally, according to vol. 10 of the *Chang’an zhi* 長安志 [Records of Chang’an City] compiled by Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (1019–1079), “in the further south, is the Liqun fang . . . The residence of Princess Taiping is located in the southeast corner. After her death, the residence was confiscated and used as King Shaan’s Palace. To the north, it is the residence of Fanghui, a miraculous monk, which was built for him by Princess Taiping” (次南醴泉坊 東南隅, 太平公主宅。公主死後沒官, 為陝王府。宅北有異僧方回宅, 太平公主為造之)。 *Chang’an zhi* *Chang’an zhi tu* 10.336–337. The word “Fanghui” 方回 here is obviously an incorrect spelling of “Wanhui.” It can be seen that the residence of Princess Taiping was located in the southeast of Liqun fang in Chang’an City, and to the north of it was the residence of Wanhui, and the two residences were located next to each other.
- 41 *Jiu Tang shu* 106.3248.
- 42 As a Buddhist palace chaplain with deep ties to the Tang imperial family, Wanhui, despite his heretical behavior, had a political stance which was very close to the Confucian political concept of “legitimacy” —he seemed to insist that the Li-Tang regime was the legitimacy and the Wu-Zhou regime was a pseudo-regime. Although modern academic research on the history of the Tang Dynasty has long shown that this concept is mixed with excessively arbitrary value judgments and does not correspond to the actual historical impact, for the sake of convenience, quotation marks are used to emphasize that the terms “legitimacy” and “rightful” in the thesis do not use the original meaning.
- 43 On Charisma, see Weber (1968, pp. 1–369); Tambiah (1984, pp. 321–47); Cohen (2017, pp. 1–272); Silber (1995, pp. 1–221).

- 44 The term “Tripitaka Master” refers to a respectful title for a monk who is proficient in the Tripitaka, including Sutra-pitaka, Vinaya-pitaka and Abhidharma-pitaka.
- 45 See Chen (2004, pp. 108–56); Weinstein (1987, pp. 11–47).
- 46 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455. There are some punctuational mistakes in this passage of this version published by Zhonghua shuju, and the author has corrected them all in the text. The sentence that originally had punctuational mistakes is: “*Zang gui qiujian, Hui bian sheli wen xiyu, wanru muzhu*” (英歸求見, 回便設禮問西域, 宛如目矚). In addition, “*yuzi wanhui*” (于茲萬回) is also a relatively difficult sentence. In ancient Chinese, the “*yuzi*” has many meanings such as “here,” “so far,” “this life,” “sigh,” etc. According to the content of the preceding and following texts, after the monks of Shizang Temple introduced Xuanzang to the reason for the reincarnation of the eminent monk who had previously lived in that empty room, they would naturally talk about his name in this life. We cannot understand “*yuzi wanhui*” as a distance of 10,000 miles from India to China, and it takes one day for Wanhui to go back and forth between the two places. Therefore, we confirm that the “*yuzi*” means “in this life,” and “*yuzi wanhui*” means that “he is named Wanhui in this life.”
- 47 *Taiping guangji* 92.607. The term “*sanyi pingbo*” 三衣瓶鉢 means “*sanyi yibo*” 三衣一鉢. The *sanyi* and the *yibo* (an alms bowl) are two of the six items that monks should carry with them. The *sanyi* refers to the three types of clothing that a monk can personally own according to Buddhist vinaya, including samghāti, uttarāsaṅga and antarvāsa. They can only be made into mute-colored (Skt. kaṣāya; Ch. *huai'se* 壞色) cloths, so they are also called kasaya.
- 48 *Datang xiyu ji jiaozhu* 1.8.
- 49 In addition to “*yuzi wanhui*,” there are two explanations for the origin of Wanhui’s name: one is “*wanli er hui*,” and the other is “*kou zihu wanhui, yin'er ziyuan*” (口自呼萬回, 因爾字焉), which means that Wanhui called himself “Wanhui,” so everyone also called him Wanhui. *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454. For other related research, see Cui (2016, pp. 111–12).
- 50 This is obviously a double entendre. The superficial meaning of Menghong’s words is simply “to come back,” while the deeper meaning implies that “Wanhui will come into the Buddhist palace chapel.”
- 51 *Jingde chuandeng lu* 27.433 b4-6.
- 52 The Tiangong Temple was located at the Tianjin Bridge of the north of Shangshan fang in the eastern part of Luoyang, not at the Guanshan fang as stated in vol. 48 of the *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要 [Collection of Essential Material of the Tang]. The eminent monks of the early Tang Dynasty, Minglüe 明略 (572–638), Huixiu 惠秀 (c. 614–c. 713), Baosiwei 寶思維 (?–712), Shenxiu, etc., came to live in this temple by imperial decree. See *Tang Huiyao* 48.847; *Zengding Tang liangjing chengfang kao* (*xiuding ban*) 5.292–293; Li (2006, pp. 64–65). At Tiangong Temple, Chan Master [Shenxiu] received full ordination (Skt. Upasampanna or Upasampadā; Ch. *Juzujie* 具足戒) in Wude 8 [*jiyou*], and died in (Shenlong 2) *bingwu*. He was a monk for eighty years ([*shouxu*] 禪師武德八年乙酉受具於天宮, 至是年丙午復終於此寺. 蓋僧臘八十矣). See the “Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu” in *Quan Tang wen* 293.2335.
- 53 In the Chinese calendar, the *Jiawang* 既望 refers to the day after the full moon, the *Zhongqiu* 仲秋 refers to the second month of autumn. That is the second day of the Mid-Autumn Festival.
- 54 The “Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu” in *Quan Tang wen* 293.2335. The word “*xi*” 錫 could be an incorrect spelling of “*ci*” 賜.
- 55 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.453.
- 56 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455.
- 57 *Jingde chuandeng lu* 27.433 b2-4.
- 58 For the studies of several Buddhist palace chaplains who had intimate relations with the Tang emperors, see Liu (2009, pp. 1–98); Sun (2015, pp. 217–44); Chen (2017, pp. 208–30); Chen (2016, pp. 140–221); Cui (2016, pp. 110–17).
- 59 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 60 For related scholarly discussions, see Wang (2012, pp. 128–33); Gu (2015, pp. 154–65); Xia (2003, pp. 215–17).
- 61 *Chu sanzang jiji* 15.562.
- 62 The most representative figure is Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) of Lushan 廬山 (Mount Lu) in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Although he lived in seclusion on Mount Lu for more than thirty years and only stopped at Huxi 虎溪 (Tiger Stream) to welcome and send off his guests and friends, he had to communicate on multiple occasions with Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404), Yin Zhongkan 殷仲堪 (?–399) and Emperor Jin’an Sima Dezong 晉安帝司馬德宗 (382–419) by letter for the sake of the survival of the Buddhist community on Mount Lu and the promotion of Buddhism in the south. He advocated that monks should be “guests outside the secular world” (*fangwai zhi bin* 方外之賓) and maintain their own independence and that of the Buddhist community, which won the respect of the rulers.
- 63 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 64 For the Chinese version, see Chen (2020, pp. 75–148). The English version was published in Chen (2017, pp. 208–30).
- 65 Wang Changling 王昌齡, “Xiangjisi libai Wanhui Pingdeng er shengseng ta” 香積寺禮拜萬回平等二聖僧塔 [Worship The Pagoda of Two Sage Monks, Wanhui and Pingdeng] in *Quan Tang shi* 141.1431.

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Article

The Creation of *Jiansi*: Study on the Buddhist Monastic Supervision System during the Sui and Tang Dynasties

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Abstract: Besides the internal monastic supervision system of the “Three Principal Monks” already prevalent in the Sui and Tang dynasties, an additional lay-involved supervision system of *jiansi* was further added to the state religious policy to strengthen the control over the autonomy of the Buddhist community. This *jiansi* system can be seen once in the period of Gaochang Kingdom (449–640) in the Turpan region, and is traceable to the role of the Lay Rectifier of Monks created by Emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–549) in the Southern dynasty. It is then officially created by Emperor Yang of Sui (r. 604–618) but failed quickly in the Tang dynasty. In the late Tang dynasty, it re-emerged in response to the state’s need to strengthen the control over Buddhist affairs and extended to new grassroots monastic officials such as Monastic Minister and Samgha Regulator in the Dunhuang area during the Tibetan occupation period and the Guiyi Army period. Thus, the development and evolution of the *jiansi* system in this period was both a reflection of the state-religion tension and a sinicization process of Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhism in the Sui and Tang dynasties; monastic supervision system; state-religion relation; sinicization of Buddhism

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1. Introduction

The Sui and Tang dynasties were an important stage in the evolution and development of the monastic official system in Chinese history, as well as a period when Buddhism flourished in China and finally completed its sinicization. The monastic official system in this period not only inherited and fused the monastic official system of the Northern and Southern dynasties, but also laid down a basic form for later dynasties, which had a profound influence on the history of feudal bureaucracy and Buddhism in China.

As for monk officials, they are selected by the state from Buddhist community for the purpose of managing and supervising its order, administering the monks and nuns in performing pujas and so on. According to their power levels, they could be divided into central, local and grassroots power structures. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the titles, authority and management structure of monastic officials at all levels varied greatly in different periods and regions, whereas the grassroots monk officials were basically composed of the “Three Principal Monks” (*sangang* 三綱) and the monastic supervisors (*jiansi* 監寺).¹

However, although a number of overall researches have been made on the study of monastic official system during the Sui and Tang dynasties since the 1930s and 1940s (Yamazaki 1942, pp. 538–674; He 1986; Moroto 1990; Xie 2009), the discussions related to monastic officials at the grassroots level are abbreviated and lack of in-depth explorations, which could only give us a basic understanding about the structures, functions and transformations of this issue at the central and local level. Then, with the continuous compilation and usage of materials such as Dunhuang and Turpan documents, Buddhist historical materials, and inscriptions on statues, regional studies towards monastic official system have also been accomplished by many scholars (Xie 1991b, pp. 52–61; Tian 1996, pp. 99–100; Tian 1997, pp. 123–27; Wang 2008, pp. 185–89; Yang 2014, pp. 292–303), drawing a more detailed and diverse image of monastic officials in the whole country during

this period. But when looking at these existing research findings, the elaboration on the grassroots monastic posts is still insufficient and indistinct and scholars have always analyzed the monastic official system during the Sui and Tang dynasties as a whole, mixing the central, local and grassroots monastic official systems in one period while ignoring some deeper issues involved in the monastic official system at all levels.

Thus, regarding the system of grassroots monastic officials, it is acknowledged that the grassroots monastic officials from the Sui to early Tang as well as in the mid and late Tang consisted of the *sangang* and the *jiansi* of each monastery, which clarified that the grassroots monastic structure and composed staffs have all become more organized and secularized during the Sui and Tang dynasties (Xie 2009, p. 126). But there are still more questions and points that lack further and specialized discussions, such as the finalization of the system of the *sangang*, the implementation, abolition and development of the system of the *jiansi*, the relationship between the *sangang* and *jiansi*, the development of the monastic supervision system and the regional differences of the grassroots monastic officials throughout the country.

In this paper, I attempt to take the grassroots monastic official system, or more precisely, the monastic supervisory system during the Sui and Tang dynasties as the main research object. By compiling relevant historical materials, this study will restore some specific aspects of the establishment and development of grassroots monastic officials at that time, and then cuts into some larger issues like the relationship between Buddhist magisterium and secular kingship, and the historical process of the sinicization of Buddhism from the perspective of the monk officials.

2. Overview of the Grassroots Monastic System during the Sui and Tang Dynasties and the Historical Situation of the *Sangang* System

According to the record of *Tang liudian* 唐六典 [*Compendium of the Sixfold Administration of the Tang Dynasty*] fascicle 16 *Weiye Zongzheng Temple* 衛尉宗正寺, the complete proclamation for setting up grassroots monastic posts during the Sui and Tang dynasties is as follows:

Sui set up the Department of Chongxuan and its ministers. Emperor Yang changed every Buddhist monastery into a manda and every Daoist abbey into a mysterious altar, with each setting up a supervisor and a prime minister. The Tang dynasty also set up the Department of Chongxuan and its officials, and set supervisors of each temple and abbey, which belonging to the Honglu Temple. Thus, each monastery and abbey had one supervisor and this policy was abolished in the period of Zhenguan. 隋置崇玄署令、丞。煬帝改佛寺為道場，改道觀為玄壇，各置監、丞。皇朝又為崇玄署令。又置諸寺、觀監，隸鴻臚寺，每寺、觀各監一人。貞觀中省。²

From historical sources, the above record is exactly the same as the one noted in the *Sui shu* 隋書 [*Sui History*]¹—“Emperor Yang reigned, with much reform . . . Buddhist temples in counties were changed into mandas, and Daoist abbeys were changed into mysterious altars, all setting up a supervisor and a prime minister” 煬帝即位，多所改革 . . . 郡縣佛寺，改為道場，道觀改為玄壇，各置監、丞。³—which shows that Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (r. 604–618) took the lead in setting up supervisors and ministers in Buddhist temples and Daoist abbeys within his realm for the purpose of strengthening the management and consolidation of the monastic order. Then, the *Tang liudian* further points out that the system of monastic officials in the early Tang dynasty was inherited from the Sui dynasty, and the official supervisors were also set up in Buddhist temples and Daoist monasteries, but this system was abolished in the middle of Zhenguan 貞觀. Moreover, the statements in the *Tongdian* 通典 [*Comprehensive Account*]⁴, the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 [*New Tang History*]⁵, the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 [*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*]⁶, and the *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 [*Documentary General Examination*]⁷ are all highly consistent with the passages quoted above. It can be seen that these important historical texts

are quite clear and affirmative about the establishment of the post of *jiansi* in monasteries throughout the country from the Sui dynasty to the early Tang dynasty.

Accordingly, in terms of official historical records, there is not much controversy on the fact that the grassroots monastic officials were consisted of the *sangang* and the *jiansi* during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The so-called “Three Principal Monks”, namely, the *sthavira* 上座, the *vihāra-svāmin* 寺主 and the *karma-dāna* 都維那, are clearly explained in the legal text *Calling the Daoist Priests and Ladies-in-waiting* 稱道士女官 in fascicle 6 of the *Tanglü Shuyi* 唐律疏議 [*The Tang Code with Annotations*]. And the annotation of it is explained that “each temple has one top seat, one monastery chief, and one administrator, which is named as the *sangang*” 寺有上座、寺主、都維那，是為三綱。⁸ This shows that the name and status of *sangang* as the legitimate monastic officials have already been recognized and ranked in the early Tang dynasty. Thus, *sangang* are three respectable and competent monks that can lead the rest monks and take charge of the affairs in Buddhist temples; that is, the *sthavira* is appointed by a senior monk with great virtues, the *vihāra-svāmin* is responsible for all practical and administrative affairs of the communities, and the *karma-dāna* concerns with enforcing monastic disciplines and maintaining the order.

The origin of the *sangang* in Chinese Buddhism could be traced back to the Eastern Jin and the Sixteen Kingdoms Period 東晉十六國時期 (304–439). Wang Su has examined the Buddhist monasteries in Gaochang Commandery (Gaochang Jun 高昌郡, East of Turpan) based on Turpan documents and concluded:

The system of the *sangang* was established during the Gaochang Jun Period, in other words, the Eastern Jin and the Sixteen Kingdoms Period. It was during this period that Buddhist monasteries were built and expanded in China, creating the conditions for the establishment of a clear division of labor among the three principal positions of a monastery. At that time, *cizhu* 祠主 had the highest status and was known as one of the “Three Principle Monks” of the monastery, along with the rector 維那 and the upper seat 高座, who were in charge of the external and internal affairs of the Buddhist community together. Then, in the later period of the Gaochang Kingdom, the name and status of the *sangang* changed somewhat—the top seat 上座 emerged and gained the highest status; *cizhu* was confirmed by the name of the monastery chief 寺主 with the second highest status; and the *di-anzuo* 典座 replaced the rector and had the lowest status—whereas the duties of these new titles were the same as those in previous years. (Wang 1985)

Hence, based on the historical materials of the Western Regions 西域, the embryonic form of the *sangang* system is very likely to be established at the end of the 4th century in Chinese monasteries. Then, going through the stage of development and evolution during the Northern and Southern dynasties as well as the Sui dynasty, this system finally takes shape in the Tang dynasty. Bai Wengu also agrees with this opinion and explains that although the *vihāra-svāmin* and the *sthavira* have been set up in the Northern and Southern dynasties, there are no fixed regulations towards the *sangang* system, which is quite different from the case in the Tang dynasty (He 1986, p. 275). For example, in fascicle 43 of the *Jiu Tang shu* 旧唐書 [*Old Tang History*], we read:

Within the realm, the number of Buddhist temples must be regulated by the government and qualified monks would be appointed to serve as the “Three Principal Monks” of every monastery. To summarize, there are 5358 temples, 3235 monks and 2122 nuns in all the *zhou*, with each temple placing a *sthavira*, a *vihāra-svāmin* and a *karma-dāna*. 凡天下寺有定數，每寺立三綱，以行業高者充。諸州寺總五千三百五十八所，三千二百三十五所僧，二千一百二十二所尼。每寺上座一人，寺主一人，都維那一人。⁹

The quoted passage clarifies that the *sangang* system has been widely implemented within the domain of the Tang dynasty. In addition, Buddhist historical materials also remain numerous records of senior monks who took up the position of the “Three Principal Monks”. For example, in fascicle 3 of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [*Supplement to the*

Biographies of Eminent Monks], it writes that “Venerable Hui Jing, the sthavira of Jiguo Temple, has a far-reaching reputation and is well known for his profession” 紀國寺上座慧淨法師名稱高遠，行業著聞。¹⁰ And in fascicle 15, there is “Shamen Tanxian, who possessing the national prestige, established Cibe Temple and recommended (Shi Xuanhui) as the vihāra-svāmin” 沙門曇獻道開國望，造慈悲寺，奏（釋玄）會以為寺主。¹¹

The above-mentioned evidence illustrates that the composition, appointment criteria, number and duties of the “Three Principal Monks” have been clearly documented in the Tang dynasty. Moreover, owing to the decrees and regulated practices of the Tang dynasty, the *sangang* of important monasteries should be ordered by the emperor, such as Tanzang 曇藏 (567–635) was selected by Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626) to be the sthavira of the Huichang Monastery 會昌寺.¹² Whereas local and ordinary monasteries’ *sangang* would be raised by military commissioners 節度使 or other officials. Under such circumstances, we can understand that nearly all the monasteries are under the jurisdiction of the state and have been incorporated into the national administrative system. In this way, the state has enabled the control and management of Buddhist monasteries through the way of appointing monastic officials, so that the establishment of monastic officials during the Sui and Tang dynasties is mainly for the benefit of the dynasty instead of samgha’s own interests.

Consequently, the grassroots monastic officials, including the *sangang* and the *jiansi*, have played an important role in the interaction between Buddhism and imperial authority as well. The above is the summarization of the historical situation of the *sangang* system, we will then move to the *jiansi* system, which is the main focus of this paper, and try to analyze the origin, implementation, abolition and evolution of this monastic supervisory system during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

3. The Origin of the *Jiansi* System before Emperor Yang’s Implementing

Firstly, we have to look at the potential sources that formed the *jiansi* system, which may shed some light on the background of why and how this system appeared in the context of ancient China. Due to the lack of relevant materials, few studies have addressed this question until now and among these previous findings, I disagree with Xie Chongguang’s view that *jiansi* can be compared with the official messenger of the monastic supervision (*jiansishi* 監寺使) set in the *sheyi* 社邑 during the Sui and Tang dynasties. He claims that:

As a community organization laid on the basis of Buddhist beliefs, the *sheyi* always borrows the titles of monk officials to form the name of its own administrators. And the *jiansishi* could be a role who is in charge of the matters such as supervising the construction of monasteries of the community. Therefore, the *jiansishi* is a kind of temporary dispatching position originated from the community, which has been implemented earlier than Emperor Yang of Sui. Inspired by this practice, Emperor Yang similarly created the *jiansi* system to strengthen his management over the religious forces, and named it as the supervisor of the Buddhist monasteries (or Daoist abbeys). (Xie 2009, pp. 98–99)

In fact, Xie’s statement cannot be supported by corresponding historical texts, and he does not provide a detailed explanation and analysis of his viewpoint. From the results of Hao Chunwen’s research on nearly 250 documents of the *she* associations (*sheyi wenshu* 社邑文書) during the period of the Eastern Jin and the Northern and Southern dynasties, a total of 192 of these materials mentioned the important positions in a *sheyi*, such as the head of *yi* 邑主, the rector, which may generally reflect the basic information of the leaders of the *sheyi* in the meantime. Among these documents, there is no record of the *jiansishi* or *jiansi* as a member of the community (Hao 2019, pp. 110–13). This demonstrates that Xie Chongguang’s speculation about this issue may not in accordance with the historical facts of the *jiansi* system during the Sui and Tang dynasties, but he innovatively leads us to think about the relation between the lay-involved supervision system and the *sheyi*, from which the rector of *sheyi* bears more similarities with the *jiansi* instead of the non-existing *jianshishi*.

Strictly speaking, it has to be admitted that the current research is not possible to draw some definite conclusions about the origin of the *jiansi* system. Since the records about the monastic officials who have similar titles and functions as the *jiansi* or *jiansishi* can hardly be discovered at present, it may be feasible for us to explore this issue through the functions of the *jiansi* system. Along this line of thinking, we then notice that the grassroots monastic posts, who are likely to be the service staffs or administrators of Buddhist monasteries, have existed in the period of Qu's Gaochang Kingdom (449–640). For example, in the Turpan document “Zhai Mou, a shrine master, presents the matter of eating wheat” (*cili zhaimou cheng wei shimaish* 祠吏翟某呈為食麥事), we read:

□(month) 1st□□□

□ ate 1920 liters of wheat. Transcended one person who came from the fields and lived at the ancestral hall . . .

□ , □ ate 8 liters of wheat, the total cost was 64 liters. The whole spending was 1914 liters. Please note.

shrine master

recorder

□□

shrine official Mr. Zhai ○

□ 月一日□□□

□ 食麥十九斛貳鬥。超度一人，從田地來，住祠八

□ , □ 食麥八升，合陸鬥四升。都合十九斛鬥四升。請記識。

祠主 度

□□ 祠吏翟○呈¹³

Thus we can see that monastic officials of the Gaochang Kingdom have to record the amount of wheat spent during their merit-making activities. And this type of paperwork must signed by monastery's masters and recorded by the shrine officials, who would most probably be the lay people rather than monks or nuns from the secular name “Mr. Zhai” in the quoted texts. Under the monastic management system of that time, there may have been a situation in which the laity also participated in the management of Buddhist communities and reported daily affairs to the higher authorities of the monastery. Nonetheless, one point needs to be made clear here is that the *cili* in this document must be distinguished from the lay brother (*jingren* 淨人)¹⁴ who always plays an essential role since the early stage of the Buddhism. This is due to the fact that although they both belong to the laity, the former is required to report to state agencies while the latter only have to serve the community, which indicates the different nature of their duties.

Moreover, except for the precedents in the Turpan region, the Lay Rectifier of Monks (*baiyi sengzheng* 白衣僧正) which intends to be established during the reign of Emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–549) in the Southern dynasty¹⁵, is also a kind of monastic official wishing to be served by the laity (the emperor) and participate in the management of various matters linked to the monastic communities. In the fascicle 5 of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, we read:

In the midst of Datong in the Liang dynasty, the Three Jewels are revered, whereas profits still affect the mortals' heart. The social atmosphere is impetuous and people are reaching for wealth recklessly. In the meantime, the Buddhist community also cannot abide by the precepts strictly. Hence, Liang Wudi intended to take up the position of the monk official to maintain the Buddha Dharma. He said: I think the monks and nuns don't study the *vinaya* at present. If the Lay Rectifier of Monks could not understand these precepts and restricts the monks and nuns by secular laws, the consequence will be very damaging. So I wish to assert myself as a Lay Rectifier of Monks and establish a new law codex based on the *vinaya*. 逮梁大同中，敬重三寶，利動昏心。澆波之儔，肆情下達。僧正憲綱，無施於過門。帝欲自御僧官，維任法侶。 帝曰：比見僧尼多未誦習，白衣僧正不解科條，俗法治之，傷於過重。弟子暇日欲自為白衣僧正，亦依律立法。¹⁶

Faced with the rapid expansion of the monastic community and the disobedience of the *vinaya* by the monks and nuns, Emperor Wu of Liang wanted to appoint himself as

the *baiyi sengzheng*, whose obligation is to rectify the order of the monastic community according to a new law codex with the status of a secular emperor. Though Liang Wudi's assumption did not come true due to the strong resistance from the Buddhist power at that time, his thoughts about the Buddhist and imperial authority still reflect that the relationship between Buddhism and the state is always a complex and influential problem in Chinese history, and emperors have made various efforts to integrate Buddhism into their political administrative regimes. And among such practices, the establishment of monk officials is absolutely a simple but effective attempt, which may inspire the Emperor Yang of Sui to carry out a supervisory system of Buddhist authority like the Liang Wudi's *baiyi sengzheng* at a later time.

4. The Abolition of the *Jiansi* System in the Early Tang Dynasty and Its Possible Reasons

It is logical that we should then discuss the implementation of the *jiansi* system. However, in the absence of historical records of the *jiansi* system during the Sui and early Tang dynasties, it is inevitable for us to question that whether it had implemented in Buddhist monasteries throughout the country exactly as the historical books, such as the *Tang liudian* suggests. For example, Shaolin Monastery has well-recorded its historical events and other important information in the inscriptions and documents, among which we also could not find the trace of the *jiansi*. In the Shaolin Temple's Baigu Valley Certificate (*shaolinsi baiguwu zhuangdie* 少林寺柏谷塢莊牒), thirteen Shaolin monks' names were recorded while none of the secular names appeared:

Granted by the Emperor Taizong in the 4th year of Wude (621)
 The names of meritorious monks in the Shaolin Temple's Baigu Valley
 The sthavira monk Shan Hu
 The vihāra-svāmin monk Zhi Cao
 The karma-dāna monk Hui Yang
 The great military monk Tan Zong
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Pu Hui
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Ming Song
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Ling Xian
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Pu Sheng
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Zhi Shou
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Dao Guang
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Zhi Xing
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Man
 Monk jointly accomplished achievements Feng
 唐武德四年（621）太宗文皇帝敕授
 少林寺柏谷莊立功僧名
 上座僧善護
 寺主僧誌操
 都維那僧惠瑒
 大將軍僧曇宗
 同立功僧普惠
 同立功僧明嵩
 同立功僧靈憲
 同立功僧普勝
 同立功僧智守

同立功僧道廣
 同立功僧智興
 同立功僧滿
 同立功僧豐¹⁷

According to this list, there were thirteen Shaolin monks who not only contained the *sangang*, but also included some ordinary monks, participated in the capture of Wang Renze 王仁則 and received commendation from the Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649). And it is not difficult to find that this list is arranged in accordance with the status of these monks, from which we can have a general understanding of the structure of the Shaolin monastic order during the early Tang dynasty, and speculate that the Shaolin Monastery at that time may not set up the position of *jiansi*; otherwise, it is very likely that his name would also appear in this list, just like the *sangang*. From this, we may learn from a small case that the *jiansi* system might not have been implemented successfully as the governor intended, reflecting the disconnect between the national policy and the actual practice.

If this hypothesis holds true, then the quick abolition of the *jiansi* system during the Zhenguan reign may also support our analysis from the standpoint of the results. Thus, we will have to examine the possible reasons for the rapid abolition of this system from various aspects afterwards.

First of all, the total number of Buddhist monasteries during the Sui and Tang dynasties is always large and this situation obviously poses a considerable challenge to the implementation of this Buddhist supervisory policy. The Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 (r. 581–604) believed in Buddhism and established monasteries wherever monks and nuns lived, then by the time of the Emperor Yang, the total number of monasteries reached nearly 4000. In the Tang Dynasty, although the scale of Buddhist monasteries was restricted by the emperors, this number also maintained at around 4000 to 5000.¹⁸ The statistics of the number of Buddhist monasteries in the country during this period is as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1. The number of monasteries during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

Time	The Total Number of Monasteries	The Number of Monasteries per Zhou
618	3985	30
648	3716	10.4
650–683	4000	11.4
713–755	5358	16
842–845	4600	—

If the dynasty set up one supervisory official in each temple, the total number of the grassroots monastic posts (including the *sangang* and the *jiansi*) in the whole country would reach nearly 20,000. Whereas the *sangang* could receive necessary supports from their religious communities and society, the *jiansi*, who is a secular monk official appointed by the government, could only receive income from the government. Therefore, once implemented, the Sui and Tang dynasties must bear the salaries of these four or five thousand monastic officials, which will obviously impose a heavy burden on the empire’s finances. This may be one of the reasons that affected the widespread implementation of the *jiansi* system in the Sui and early Tang.

Secondly, in terms of the practical significance of establishing the *jiansi* system, such grassroots monastic officials are bound to serve the needs of secular kingship and to fulfill the political intentions of the feudal dynasty to strengthen the management of Buddhist monastic communities. Since Buddhism in the Tang dynasty as a whole was subordinated to the control of the state¹⁹, other religious policies may also satisfy the needs of the rulers in some degree, regardless of whether there were monastic supervisors or not. For example, as far as the below document suggests, the inspector (*jianjiao* 檢校) related to Buddhist affairs may be, to some extent, an alternative role to the *jiansi*. In the inscriptions of the *Datang jingyu shi gu dade fazang chanshi taming* 大唐淨域寺故大德法藏禪師塔銘 (Pagoda of

the passed bhadranta, Chan Master Fazang of the Jingyu Monastery in the Tang dynasty) written by Tian Xiuguang 田休光, we read:

In the first year of Ruyi (692), Empress Wu hearing about the reputation and capacity of the master (Fazang) and asked him to inspect the inexhaustible treasure (*wujinzang*) of the Great Fuxian Monastery in the East Road. Later, in the first year of Chang'an (701), Fazang was ordered to inspect the *wujinzang* of Huadu Monastery again. 如意元年（692），大聖天後聞（法藏）禪師解行精罪（最），奉製請於東路大福先寺檢校無盡藏。長安元年（701），又奉製檢校化度寺無盡藏。²⁰

From the text of this pagoda inscription, it is clear that during the reign of Empress Wu, the Chan Master Fazang (643–712)²¹ was required to inspect the monastic financial and banking institutions, *wujinzang yuan* 無盡藏院 of the Great Fuxian Monastery and Huadu Monastery, where a lot of possessions were stored.²² Though he did not belong to these two monasteries, he also had to go and supervise them temporarily by the appointment of the emperor. When this work was completed, he would return to his original monastery and did not have to stay at the monastery he inspected. This form of temporary appointment was objectively more efficient and focused than the implementation of the *jiansi* throughout the country, and can greatly reduce the financial burden caused by the expansion of the state bureaucracy. As a result, this practice was quite common during the Tang dynasty, not just in the administration of Buddhist affairs.

In fact, the practice of temporarily dispatching officials to oversee Buddhist affairs was not an institutional innovation of the Tang dynasty, but a form of governance that had already been used since the Northern and Southern dynasties. For example, in the *Wei shu* 魏書 [Wei History], we read:

In the winter of the first year of Shengui (518), the Minister of Works, the Chief of the Secretarial Staff, King of Rencheng, Yuan Cheng presented: ... I dispatched secular officials Lu Chang and Cui Xiaofen to examine the number of Buddhist monasteries in the capital and cities. 神龜元年冬，司空公、尚書令、任城王（元）澄曰：... 輒遣府司馬陸昶、屬崔孝芬，都城之中及郭邑之內檢括寺舍。²³

Yuan Cheng (467–519) assigned two secular officials to check on the number and establishment of Buddhist monasteries and reported the results to the central government. In this way, he also hoped to strengthen the national control over Buddhism and limit the privileges of the monastic community.

Thirdly, it is probable that the Buddhist side would reject the royal authority's desire to strengthen religious administration and make efforts to preserve its relative independence and autonomy within the realm.²⁴ The *jiansi* system was a radical measure taken by the state to further strengthen its supervision of Buddhist monasteries throughout the country, so it is not surprising that it might have suffered setbacks in the implementation and finally moved to abolition.

5. The Re-Emergence of the *Jiansi* in the Mid and Late Tang Dynasty

As above mentioned, the system of *jiansi* was abolished in the Zhenguan period, however, in the mid and late Tang dynasty it appeared in Buddhist monasteries again. In the fascicle 506 of the *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 [Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau], in April of the 12th year of the Dali 大曆 (777), a document submitted by the *duzhi* 度支 (officer in charge of fiscal revenues and expenditures) recorded that "the monthly salary of every monastery's *jiansi* was 1917 *wen* 文" 諸寺監（各一千九百一十七文）。²⁵

The *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [Complete Literature Works of Tang Dynasty] also records many supervisors of different monasteries and their brief deeds in the mid and late Tang dynasty. I will give three examples below:

- (1) The master's dharma name is Xingbiao and his secular name is Fang. His grandfather's name is Rong and his father's name is An. He comes from a prosperous family

in Putian. He was born in the second year of Jianzhong (781) and was extremely intelligent from a very young age. Then, at the age of nine (789), he retreated from the world to follow the *jiansi* Shenjiao of the Yujian Monastery. 師法號行標，俗姓方，祖榮父安，莆之盛族也。師生於建中二年辛酉，齠齠即穎悟，異於諸童。九歲投玉澗寺監寺神皎出家。²⁶

- (2) At the beginning of Taihe (827–835), the *jiansi* Huiming and the monk Daolin saw the destruction of the monastery and said to the community: “Buddhism was introduced to China from the west, and the statue of Buddha was regarded as the dharma. Now that the statues are scattered, what can we rely on to worship the Buddha and his teachings? So, we should ask the *vihāra-svāmin* to contact the people who had traveled here in the past, and raise money together for building new statues. 太和初，監寺僧惠明與寺僧道琳等見三門破壞，乃言於眾曰：此教東流，設象為法，牢落如是，瞻仰何依？乃請今寺主僧常誼昔旅於是者，戮力誓心，募緣祈化。²⁷
- (3) In the second year of Qianfu (875), the military commissioner of Youzhou escorted the two provinces deputy envoy, inspecting secretary and imperial secretary, the Purple Goldfish Bag Owner Dongkuo and Youzhou Lintan Vinaya Master Weixin and Zhuozhou Shijing Monastery *jiansi* Vinaya Master Hongyu, etc. 乾符二年，有幽州節度押兩蕃副使檢校秘書兼御史中丞賜紫金魚袋董廓及幽州臨壇律大德沙門僧惟信并涿州石經寺監寺律大德宏嶼等。²⁸

Thus we find direct evidence for the existence of *jiansi* in Buddhist monasteries during the mid and late Tang dynasty, such as Shenjiao 神皎 of the Yujian Monastery 玉澗寺 in Putian 莆田 area, Huiming 惠明 of the Daquan Monastery 大泉寺 in Runzhou 潤州, Hongyu 宏嶼 of the Shijing Monastery 石經寺 in Zhuozhou 涿州, etc. As they were located in different monasteries and regions, we may assume that many monasteries of that time carried out such a system and established a *jiansi* to deal with various affairs of the community.

In addition, in the *Rutang qiufa xunli xingji* 入唐求法巡禮行記 [Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Dharma] written by a Japanese pilgrim-monk Yuanren 圓仁 (793–864), the establishment of the *jiansi* system in the late Tang has also recorded carefully as follows:

- (1) On August 24, the fifth year of Chenghe (838): We went to the Kai Yuan Monastery While visiting, nearly all the monks arrived and greeted us, including the *sthavira* Zhiqiang, the *vihāra-svāmin* Linghui, the *dushi* Xiuda, the *jiansi* Fangqi and the *kusi* Lingduan. 承和五年八月廿四日：詣開元寺。 登時，三綱並寺和上及監寺僧等赴集。上座僧志强、寺主令徽、都師修達、監寺方起、庫司令端慰問。²⁹
- (2) On January 18, the fourth year of Kaicheng (839): In the Tang dynasty, there are three kinds of monastic officials, that is, *senglu*, *sengzheng* and *jiansi*; *senglu* takes charge of all the monasteries throughout the country and organizes the Dharma of Buddhism; *sengzheng* manages the monasteries in regional districts; *jiansi* only administers one monastery. 開成四年正月十八日：凡此唐國有僧錄、僧正、監寺三種色：僧錄統領天下諸寺，整理佛法；僧正唯在一都督管內；監寺限在一寺。³⁰

According to the records of Yuanren, the system of *jiansi* has already been confirmed as a management method for grassroots monasteries in the late Tang. And in general, the monastic official system eventually developed into a three-tier structure of jurisdiction, with *senglu*, *sengzheng* and *jiansi* performing their role and function respectively. Thus, central government strengthened its overall supervision and management of Buddhist affairs and communities.

However, it is worth noting that monks, rather than laymen, occupied the position of *jiansi* at this time, and they could also be called Supervisory Monks (*jianseng* 監僧), which was far from the original situation. Therefore, the adjustment of the identity of *jiansi* may be regarded as a result of a compromise between the feudal imperial power, which wanted to strengthen the management of monasteries, and Buddhism, which wanted to guarantee the autonomy of the monastic community. Afterwards, *jiansi* gradually took hold of the

functions of the monastery chief, and always appeared in the rules of the Chan School since the Song dynasty. For instance, in the *Chanyuan qinggui* 禪苑清規 [The Pure Rules for the Chan Monastery], it mentioned *jianyuan* many times and introduced its main duties as follows:

The prior manages various affairs of the monastery, including supplies and petitions to government officials, greeting such officials, the ceremony performed by the assembly of circumambulating the hall with incense, visits to donors, extending congratulations and condolences, financial loans, the annual budget, monitoring of grain storage, bookkeeping, and providing for meals year by year. The prior is entrusted with the purchase of grain as well as the making of vinegar and pastes and sauces according to the season. He should carefully tend to the production of oil and grinding. He must organize feasts for monastic assemblies with the utmost skill and effort. He must show attentive hospitality to guests from all directions. The winter solstice feast, the New Year feast, the retreat-ending feast, the retreat-commencement feast, and the eggplant-roasting feasts are managed by the prior, provided that the given ceremony is within the means of the monastic budget. If a festival requires work beyond his capabilities, the prior enlists the aid of others. He manages minor or routine affairs unilaterally, but for greater matters and for those cases where the reputation of the monastery may be at stake, he consults the administrators and the chief officers and reports back to the abbot before carrying them out. 監院一職，總領院門諸事。如官中應副及參辭謝賀，僧集行香，相看施主，吉凶慶弔，借貸往還，院門歲計，錢穀有無，與收出入，準備逐年受用齋料米麥等，及時收買；並造醬醋，須依時節；及打油變糜等，亦當經心；眾僧齋粥，常運勝心；管侍四來，不宜輕易。如冬齋、年齋、解夏齋、結夏齋、多茄會，如上齋會若監院有力，自合營辦；如力所不及，即請人勾當。如院門小事及尋常事例，即一面處置。如事體稍大及體面生勑，即知事頭首同共商量。³¹

Therefore, *jiansi* transformed into a position responsible for managing many miscellaneous matters in the Chan monasteries in the Song dynasty. The result was, as Xie Chongguang says, the original intention of Emperor Yang's creation of *jiansi* had been completely lost by this time (Xie 2009, p. 100). While on the other hand, it has finally integrated into the monastic system and survived until now.

As we know, the system of *jiansi* re-emerged in the mid and late Tang, specifically, during the Dali period of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779). And this leaves us a new question about how it was implemented again at this time. Lin Yunrou 林韻柔 have considered this before and inferred that the recovery of *jiansi* may coincide with the establishment of the Commissioners of Merit and Virtue of the Left and Right Avenues of the Capital (*zuoyoujie gongdeshi* 左右街功德使), from which the General Supervision Institute (*zongjianyuan* 總監院) developed to manage all monastic supervisors (Lin 2012, p. 181). In the description of the *zongjianyuan* in the *Rutang qiufu xunli xingji*, we read:

At 7–9 a.m. on August 24, the fifth year of Kaicheng (840): Then monks followed officials to go from the north side of the Honglu Temple, passed four blocks (*fang*), entered the Wangxian Gate, and then entered the Xuanhua Gate. After passing through the Neisheshi Gate and the *zongjianyuan*, we crossed another gate and arrived at the south gate of the office. 開成五年 (840) 八月廿四日辰時：僧等隨巡官人使御從 (鴻臚) 寺北行，過四坊，入望仙門，次入玄化門。更過內舍使門及總監院，更入一重門，到使衙南門。³²

Hence, the *zuoyoujie gongdeshi* and *zongjianyuan* are the central management officials and organizations of Buddhism in the mid and late Tang. Through these practices, the state increased its authority and efficiency of dealing with Buddhist affairs from top to bottom, which contributed to the strengthening of feudal kingship over Buddhist power throughout the country, despite the empire was facing the crisis of collapsing.

Besides, the influence of the monastic supervision system also extended to the borders of the empire in the mid and late Tang dynasty. Take the Buddhist monasteries in the Dunhuang area³³ as an example, in addition to the *sangang*, some new grassroots monastic posts appeared during this time, such as Monastic Minister (*siqing* 寺卿), Samgha Regulator (*sengzheng* 僧政), Senior Monk (*falü* 法律) and Administrative Assistant (*panguan* 判官), etc. (Xie 1991b, pp. 53–56; Wang 2008, pp. 185–89; Sørensen 2021, pp. 18–20). In P.3600 Record of the Number of Nuns in Puguang and Other Monasteries in the xunian 戊年 of Tibetan Reign (*tubo xunian puguangsi deng ju dangsi yingguan nishu die* 吐蕃戊年普光寺等具当寺应管尼数牒), the final signature of this document sent to the highest monastic authority in Dunhuang reads as follows:

(this document) Sent by siqing Suoxiu in Nov. □, Xunian
 sizhu Zhenxing
 falü Faxi
 戊年十一月□日寺卿索岫牒
 寺主 真行
 法律 法喜

In contrast to the names of *sizhu* and *falü*, *siqing* Suoxiu 索岫 is likely to be a secular man whose work responsibility is to manage daily affairs of the monastery and report to the higher institutions. Thus we find that there are many similarities between the *siqing* and *jiansi*, which probably indicates that the appearance of *siqing* was drawing on the experience of *jiansi* during the Tang dynasty (Xie 1991b, p. 53). In this way, the highest monastic authority in Dunhuang, *dusi* 都司 could effectively manage the affairs of each monastery through the records of *siqing*.

Then, during the period of the Guiyi Army 歸義軍時期, the relationship between secular regime and Buddhism was still tense, with the rulers exercising tight control over the religious power through restricting the number of monks and nuns, managing Buddhist economy and so on, whereas the establishment of grassroots monastic officials was also an important approach for governors in Dunhuang to use. As a result, we see the development of various monastic officials during this period, such as the *sengzheng*, *falü* and *panguan*, all of whom performed their administrative duties and were directly responsible to the higher officials (Wang 2008, p. 189). It was through this hierarchical subordination that the effective management of the Buddhist order by the secular regime was thus realized.

6. Conclusions

To sum up, the system of monastic officials during the Sui and Tang dynasties consisted of the *sangang* and *jiansi* at the grassroots level, in which secular posts were in charge of the affairs of Buddhist communities together with the monks. In my opinion, the origin of the *jiansi* system may be traced back to the Eastern Jin and the Sixteen Kingdoms Period as the *cili* established in Turpan region was a kind of secular administrators who managed monastic matters and recorded for the higher authority. And this practice shared similarities with the rector of *sheyi* and the *baiyi sengzheng* proposed by Emperor Wu of Liang. Therefore, it is clear that the monastic official system was implemented to strengthen the power of the state and weaken the autonomy of the monastic community, which could be seen as a concrete reflection of the relationship between Buddhism and the state in Chinese history.

In the Sui dynasty, Emperor Yang created the system of *jiansi*, which was inherited by the founder of the Tang dynasty, but was soon abolished during the Zhenguan reign. As for the quick abolition of this supervisory system, it may be explained in terms of the scale of Buddhist monasteries in the Sui and Tang dynasties, the substitution who can perform similar duties and the resistance of the Buddhist community. In any case, the implementation and abolition of this system could be seen as struggle between the secular kingship and Buddhist power.

Then, in the mid and late Tang dynasty, the *jiansi* system appeared again throughout the country and even affected the monasteries at the border. With the demand of strengthening centralized authority, the rulers of Tang at this period carried out a series of policies, among which the management of Buddhism was an important dimension and thus, *jiansi* was appointed by political forces to each monastery for the purpose of strengthening the central government's overall supervision and management of Buddhist affairs and communities. Through these practices, the state guaranteed its authority and efficiency of dealing with Buddhist affairs from top to bottom. However, under such circumstances, the post of *jiansi* was held by monks rather than laymen, which was different from the original intention of its establishment and perhaps represented a compromise between the imperial power and religious power, with monastic officials serving as the bridge and intermediary between these two sides. Hence, the development and evolution of the *jiansi* system was closely related to the kingship, religious power and the sinicization of Buddhism in the Sui and Tang dynasties, which could not only reflect the conflicts between political and religious dimensions in detail, but also comply with the historical process of Buddhism's sinicization.

Ultimately, by studying the development of the *jiansi* system during the Sui and Tang dynasties, the general trend was that the Buddhist power became increasingly subordinate to, subject to, and in the service of the secular kingship, and thus Buddhism finally completed its process of sinicization. So at the political level, Buddhism was gradually incorporated into the state's governance system and serve for the political purpose of maintaining regime stability and social stability.

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Notes

¹ For more on the establishment of monk officials see: Shigeo (1994, pp. 203–35).

² *Tang liudian* 唐六典 [Compendium of the Sixfold Administration of the Tang Dynasty], fascicle 16. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1992, p. 467.

³ *Sui shu* 隋書 [Sui History], fascicle 28. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1973, p. 802.

⁴ *Tongdian* 通典 [Comprehensive Account], fascicle 25. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1988, p. 704.

⁵ *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 [New Tang History], fascicle 48. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1975, p. 1252.

⁶ *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 [Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government], fascicle 215. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1956, p. 6871.

⁷ *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 [Documentary General Examination], fascicle 55. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2011, p. 1629.

⁸ *Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏議 [The Tang Code with Annotations], fascicle 6. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1983, p. 144.

⁹ *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 [Old Tang History], fascicle 43. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1975, p. 1831.

¹⁰ *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks], fascicle 3 (T50n444b).

¹¹ *ibid.*, fascicle 15 (T50n542c).

¹² *ibid.*, fascicle 13 (T50n525c).

¹³ *Tulufan chutu wenshu* 吐魯番出土文書 [Turpan Documents], fascicle 1. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1981, p. 155.

¹⁴ For more on the descriptions of *jingren* see: Xie (1991a, pp. 133–41).

¹⁵ For more on the relationship between Wudi and Buddhism see: Mikisaburō (1956). See also Janousch (1999).

¹⁶ *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks], fascicle 5 (T50n466b).

¹⁷ *Songshan shaolinsi beike xuan* 嵩山少林寺碑刻選 (Selected Inscriptions in Shaolin Temple, Songshan). Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe 中國廣播電視出版社, 1992, p. 60.

¹⁸ For more on the number of Buddhist monasteries in the Sui and Tang dynasties see: Zhang (2005, pp. 6–8).

- 19 For more on Buddhism under the Tang dynasty see: Weinstein (1987).
- 20 *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編 (*Compilation of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions*), fascicle 71. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian 中國書店, 1985, pp. 2–3.
- 21 For more on the biography of Fazang see: Chen (2005, pp. 11–84).
- 22 For more on Buddhist economy and the development of *wujinzang* see: Gernet (1995). See also Hubbard (2001, pp. 153–222).
- 23 *Wei shu* 魏書 [*Wei History*], fascicle 114. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1974, pp. 3044–45.
- 24 For more on the state-religion relation in the Tang see: Weinstein (1987).
- 25 *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 [*Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau*], fascicle 506. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe 鳳凰出版社, 2006, p. 5756.
- 26 *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [*Complete Literature Works of Tang Dynasty*], fascicle 826. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1983, p. 8701.
- 27 *ibid.*, fascicle 764, pp. 7940.
- 28 *ibid.*, fascicle 813, pp. 8558–59.
- 29 *Rutang qiufa xunli xingji* 入唐求法巡禮行記 [*The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*], fascicle 1. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019, p. 35.
- 30 *ibid.*, fascicle 1, p. 98.
- 31 *Chanyuan qinggui* 禪苑清規 [*The Pure Rules for the Chan Monastery*], fascicle 3 (X63n530a). The translation of this quoted passage references: Yifa (2002, p. 150).
- 32 *Rutang qiufa xunli xingji* 入唐求法巡禮行記 [*The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*], fascicle 3. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019, p. 335.
- 33 For more on the relations between administration, clergy and lay people in the 8–11th century of Dunhuang see: Taenzer (2016, pp. 19–53).

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Article

Struggling to Restore a Lost Identity: Hanshan Deqing's 憨山德清 (1546–1623) Reforms at Nanhua Temple 南華寺, 1600–1610

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[†] This paper is in honor of the seventieth birthday of Professor Timothy Brook at the University of British Columbia. I deeply appreciate the guidance and generous support he has given to me over the past twenty years.

Abstract: During the ten years from Wanli 28 to 38 (1600–1610), Hanshan Deqing, then an exiled leading Buddhist master, managed to launch large-scale reforms in Nanhua temple in an attempt to reinvigorate the ancestral temple of Chan Buddhism. Strategically significant though it was, this effort proved eventful and finally came to a tragic end, including the suicide of the temple's incumbent abbot. How deeply the process of the reforms and their significance can be understood hinges upon the extent to which two puzzles can be tackled. First, how could it have been possible for Deqing, as an exile, to initiate the reforms in such a significant temple in the first place? And how and why did Deqing's efforts evolve into such a life-and-death confrontation? Keeping these questions in mind, this article reveals how Deqing was able to mobilize resources for initial success by adjusting his strategies according to the situation; how his efforts were conditioned both by domestic situations on the local, regional, and national levels, respectively, and by international elements that characterized the dawn of the global age; and how the reform efforts failed halfway amid the escalating tensions between the new group led by Deqing and Nanhua's existing monks. This study highlights both the uniqueness of Buddhism in the often-overlooked Lingnan region—which, to a large part, determined the fate of Deqing's reform—and the vitality and fragility of the ongoing late-Ming Buddhist renewal.

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Keywords: Hanshan Deqing; Nanhua temple; reforms; resources mobilization; late-Ming Buddhist renewal

In the second month of Wanli 24 (1596), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623), a Buddhist master with national influence but then still on his way to his exile destination Leizhou 雷州, Guangdong, detoured to Nanhua temple 南華寺 in Shaoguan 韶州 (Present day Shaoguan 韶關, Guangdong). There, he paid respect to the mummy of Huineng 慧能 (638–713), the sixth patriarch and actual founder of Chan Buddhism. For Deqing, this visit was the moment when a long-awaited dream came true but, as suggested by his abrupt departure after taking only a single meal (Shi et al. 2016, 5:107), he was likely shocked by the painfully stunning decline of the monastery that he later described as follows:

For the benefit of convenience and security, the monks here in the monastery have developed the habit of living in country houses where, not unlike ordinary people, they plant crops and feed animals. Hundreds of rooms within the monastery are all locked. Nowhere can you find any traces left by human beings within it, except several monks taking care of public worship in the Ancestral Hall and a few other persons including the abbot. (本寺僧徒，向以便安莊居，種藝畜養，與俗無異。寺中百房，皆扃其戶，入門絕無人跡，惟祖殿侍奉香火數僧，及住持方丈數輩而已) (Shi et al. 2016, 6:136)

Given that Nanhua had been cherished by Chan monks as their ancestral temple (*zuting* 祖庭) for centuries, a serious identity crisis lurked in this much-unexpected scene. This

meeting marked the start of an eventful relationship between Deqing and Nanhua temple, which would last nearly thirty years until his death. Four years later, Deqing accepted an invitation by officials to return to Nanhua temple, where he launched a major reform geared to reinvigorate it. In Wanli 31 (1603), Deqing, being inadvertently implicated in a political event in Beijing, had to resume his military service as an exile in Leizhou, but he managed to resume the reform program two years later in the fall of Wanli 33 (1605). In Wanli 37 (1609), out of the blue, the abbot of the temple sued Deqing for misappropriating public funds. It took as long as two years for Deqing to restore his reputation, during which he almost died of illness. Eventually, the case ended tragically with the abbot's suicide. After that, exhausted and deeply frustrated, Deqing left Nanhua temple in a decisive move and the reform ceased to develop.

So far, scholars have paid much attention to this reform program that began promisingly but failed in tragedy after having triggered a horrifying crisis within Nanhua temple. Given the detailed accounts Deqing left about his efforts during the reforms, however, these studies amount to little more than a factual recounting of the events.¹ Unlike these accounts, this study focuses on two of the many puzzles that arise over the reforms: How could it have been possible for Deqing as an exile to initiate reforms at such a major and significant temple in the first place? And how and why did Deqing's efforts evolve into such a life-and-death confrontation between Deqing and the forces within the temple as represented by the abbot? To tackle those questions, this study has four parts that, thematically but in rough chronological order, deal with different aspects related to the reforms. It starts with locating the reform in a broader context by discussing the background of Deqing, regional features unique to Lingnan Buddhism, and the timing of the encounter between the master and Nanhua temple in the second half of the seventeenth century. The second section proceeds to explore how Deqing could secure support in Lingnan from a wide array of people with distinctly different backgrounds, including military officials, scholar-officials, local people, and eunuchs, support which proved crucial to the outcomes of his efforts at Nanhua temple. The third section takes a close look at the concrete measures that Deqing took over eight years in Nanhua temple in hopes of understanding how he tried to fix problems he perceived as most important but most worrying. In the last section, we shall reflect from the perspectives of both sides involved in the reforms to ponder why those efforts evolved into literal life-and-death combat. And finally, this study ends with a brief conclusion.

Overall, this study aims to provide a window through which we can see how Deqing was able to mobilize resources by adjusting his strategies according to the situation and how his efforts were conditioned not only by the domestic situation at the local, regional, and national levels, but also internationally in a way that is hard to detect but far from superficial. In a broader context, given that Deqing was one of the "Four Great late-Ming Buddhist masters", this study offers a case in often-overlooked Lingnan for us to see both the vitality of the ongoing late-Ming Buddhist renewal and the fragility inherent in it.²

1. An Encounter: A Lingnan Temple in Decline and a Jiangnan Master in Exile

Binding the second half of his life with Nanhua temple in such a deep and complicated way was very likely something that Deqing should not have expected. Despite the accidental beginning of their encounter, the process and results were, in a large part, conditioned by structural and context-dependent factors and elements. A true understanding of the two sides prior to their meeting would thus be helpful by situating the reform in a broader context.

Hanshan Deqing was a typical Buddhist master who was born and well-trained in the Jiangnan region, and the first half of his life was primarily driven and shaped by his mission to restore the Great Baoen monastery 大報恩寺 in Nanjing. In Jiajing 36 (1557), Deqing entered the Baoen monastery at the age of twelve and was soon singled out by Xilin Yongning 西林永寧 (1483–1565), then the abbot and a senior monastic official in Jiangnan, to train as a candidate for his successor. Notably, that training included Buddhist teach-

ings, Confucian classics, and literati skills (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990, 1:630–32, 635–37). Eight years later, before Yongning’s death, Deqing was tasked by the latter with restoring the monastery. Originally built in the third century, the Baoen monastery remained to be a great imperially-sponsored monastery in the early Ming, but its glory waned rapidly after the 1420s following the moving of the imperial capital from Nanjing to Beijing. By the end of the Jiajing period (1522–1565) when Deqing entered the monastery, it was desperately struggling for survival, which was just part of the general failure of Buddhist institutions in Jiangnan (Zhang 2020, chap. 2; Chen 1995, pp. 35–102). Fully aware of the challenges of the restoration project which, according to his own estimate at a later time, cost more than 100,000 taels of silver (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990, 1:710), Deqing decided to go to Beijing to try his luck. Unlike Jiangnan where the samgha was mainly backed by local gentry (Brook 1993b, p. 8), Beijing Buddhism was supported primarily by eunuchs and the imperial family. In particular, during the early Wanli period, it was Empress Dowager Cisheng 慈聖 (1545–1614), the birth mother of Emperor Wanli (r. 1573–1620), who functioned as the coordinator of those pro-Buddhism forces (Zhang 2020, chap. 3). Keen to recognize that Cisheng offered his best chance of success, around the year of Wanli 9 (1582), Deqing strategically forced his way into the political arena on an occasion when Cisheng sent eunuch envoys to Mount Wutai to pray for the birth of Wanli’s first son, who would become the crown prince. It happened that Deqing was then working with his life-long friend Miaofeng Fudeng 妙峰福登 (1540–1612) to hold the “Undiscriminating Great Assembly” (Skt. *Pañcavarsika*; *wuzhe fahui* 無遮法會) for their private causes. Deqing thus suggested incorporating their assembly into the one led by the inner court, claiming that it would enhance the latter’s chance of success. In the wake of the birth of the crown prince, Deqing indeed established a direct line of communication to Cisheng (Zhang 2014), which became even closer as time passed. Benefiting from the relationship, Deqing rose rapidly from a promising young monk to a master with national influence. Around the eleventh month of 1594, his success in the secular world reached its peak: Cisheng became his disciple and asked Emperor Wanli to pay homage to his portrait hung in the palace (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990, 1:720–21). Meanwhile, it seemed as if accomplishing Deqing’s intended mission was within his grasp.³

Unfortunately, in the end, Deqing’s strategy drew him into court strife, which constituted the backdrop of his exile and would haunt the remainder of his life. In the second month of Wanli 23 (1595), Deqing was suddenly arrested and thrown into jail in Beijing. Earlier in Wanli 14 (1586), Deqing purchased the foundation of the Daoist Taiqing abbey 太清宮, which was then dilapidated, at Mount Laoshan 嶗山 in Shandong province, but three years later he was sued by the Daoist Geng Yilan 耿義蘭 (1509–1606) for stealing it. Deqing won the case on the county level with Geng sentenced to exile for four years. In early Wanli 23, however, Geng Yilan managed to submit the charge directly to the Wanli emperor, who then ordered the arrest of Deqing. Behind Deqing’s arrest was the head-on confrontation between Cisheng and Wanli over the selection of the crown prince. Usually called the “Succession Issue” (*guoben zhizheng* 國本之爭), this confrontation led the inner and outer courts to split and, from Wanli 14 (1586) onwards, plagued the court for three decades in one way or another (Gu 1977, 67:1061–76; Carnes and Gardner 2005). Under such circumstances, Deqing’s siding with Cisheng implied his rejection of Wanli. As the mother–son relationship reached its lowest point around Wanli 22 (1594) (Zhang 2020, pp. 60–66), a close connection with the Empress Dowager was no longer a blessing but a curse. To return to the legal case: the fact that the purchase became a fitting target of attack was because on the foundation, Deqing had built Haiyin temple 海印寺, which was in turn named and backed by Cisheng. Geng’s charges included that Deqing falsely claimed himself to be a member of the royal family and that he hoarded provisions for a revolt, but these were clearly unfounded or else Deqing would have been sentenced to death. Despite that, the emperor called Deqing an evil monk “who harms the Way and brings disaster to common people” (害道殃民).⁴ The use of this highly charged language reflected more the emperor’s anger at Cisheng, who was behind the scenes, rather than the actual facts, but

inevitably it increased pressure for the processing of the case. Eight months after being arrested, Deqing was sentenced to exile (Zhou and Du 2018). On the tenth day of the third month of Wanli 24 (7 April 1596), Deqing finally arrived in Leizhou where, after reporting to the garrison (*weisuo* 衛所), he transformed from a monk into a soldier in uniform. His connection with Nanhua temple thus began as well. But before going into that story, we need to better understand the uniqueness of the Lingnan region as it would significantly affect Deqing's interactions with the area in the following years in one way or another.

Geographically, Lingnan was isolated from central China but open to the ocean, and these mixed topographic features had a two-edged impact on both the self-identity of the people there and their cultural images in the eyes of other regions. Lingnan refers to a vast region loosely consisting of today's Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan provinces. In the north, it was divided from central China by the Five Ridges (*wuling* 五嶺), the biggest mountain range in south China that serves as the watershed between the Yangtze River and the Pearl River. In the south, it expanded until it reached the ocean, where rare materials and precious goods abound. For centuries in pre-modern times, separated effectively by those mountains, Lingnan remained inferior to central China in the economic and cultural sense and was generally despised by northern Chinese as remote, dangerous, and barbarian. A depiction of the region that first appeared in the early 2nd century, for example, was often cited in later generations: "the land is sweltering, and poisonous snakes and brutish beasts appear frequently on the road." (土地炎熱, 惡蟲猛獸, 不絕于路) (Sima 1956, 48:1559) It was not until the mid-Tang dynasty (618–907), following the building of the Meiguan Ancient Road 梅關古道 on the Dayu ridge (大庾嶺) by Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (678–740), a native of Shaozhou who once served as the Chief Minister, that a turning point came in the history of Lingnan (Zhang 2022, chap. 5). "Following the completion of the road," it is said, "In the regions south of the Five Ridges, talented men have emerged, [the barrier to] the wealth and goods has been broken through, and the prestige and civilization of central China spread [southward], making increasing changes to the customs of [Lingnan] as a remote and secluded frontier region." (茲路既開, 然後五嶺以南之人才出矣, 財貨通矣, 中朝之聲教日被矣, 遐陬之風俗日變矣) (Qiu 1596) Nonetheless, for Lingnan, the remodeling of its image took a much longer time. Only starting in the sixteenth century did Lingnan forcefully rise to prominence in the cultural landscape of China, as evidenced by the appearance of Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1420–1495; *jinsi*, 1454), the grand secretary (*da xueshi* 大學士) who compiled the *Daxue yanyi bu* 大學衍義補 (a supplement to the *Daxue yanyi*) of 160 fascicles, as well as neo-Confucian scholars such as Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500) and Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水 (1466–1560; *jinsi*, 1505) (Zhao 2017). Notably, following the popularization of Confucianism during this period, more and more powerful families emerged in local societies by attaching importance to worshipping ancestors and building family temples (Inoue 2003). This result, to be seen in Section 3, created a challenging situation Deqing would have to tackle in Nanhua temple.

While maintaining national influence in the Buddhist world of China, however, Nanhua temple was simultaneously regionally embedded in Lingnan, and this dual nature implies inherent tensions that profoundly impacted the history of the temple. The degeneration that shocked Deqing, as noted above, was of course part of the decline of Chinese Buddhism in general. Nonetheless, more specifically, Nanhua's case could be somehow traced back to the early Ming when monks there increasingly engaged in cultivating wild lands, which was further encouraged by local officials who were seeking for more sources of land taxes. Since the famous "pure regulations" (*qinggui* 清規) by Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814), it had gradually become a tradition for monks within the Chan community to join in agricultural work with the intention of supporting themselves financially (Xie 2009). The ultimate purpose of self-maintenance, meanwhile, set an actual limit to the degree in which they were allowed to engage in agriculture. In Nanhua's case, however, monks simply ignored the limit, turning agriculture and other occupations like feeding domestic animals into opportunities to earn money. But the more time the monks spent on those secular affairs, the more they lost their identity as Buddhist monks. Meanwhile,

although Nanhua temple had been secluded for centuries, with the continuous inflow of farmer tenants, some villages had formed around the temple by the early sixteenth century. That concentration of people in turn attracted merchants to open hotels, butcher shops, brothels, a casino, etc., in front of Nanhua's main gate where a busy road ran. Surrounded by people with strong secular identities, the situation facing Nanhua temple became much more complicated and worsened, an issue that shall be discussed in more detail below. Moreover, profoundly but oft-ignored, Nanhua temple was affected by its long-lasting isolation from the more culturally advanced central China. Deqing once commented:

Caoxi (i.e., Nanhua temple) has led all the Chan monasteries under heaven, from which has originated the five branches [of Chan Buddhism], just as the Zhu and the Si rivers [serve as the origin of Confucianism]. However, located in the remote and less educated Lingnan region, the way to the monastery is full of ups and downs, which has frustrated scholars with lofty characters from approaching it. The monks here in the monastery have only limited knowledge. They have earned their living by cultivating the land, and no longer know anything about the ultimate matter [of awakening as promised by Chan Buddhism] as their customs have been established for a long time. (曹溪為天下禪林冠，一脈派五宗，源如洙泗。第僻處嶺外，道路間關，故高人上士足跡罕至；其徒見聞狹陋，以種田博飯，無復知有向上事，其習俗久矣) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 23:625c)

This comment was also applicable to Buddhism in Lingnan in general. Thus, though the monks there were not necessarily conscious of it, Nanhua temple was desperate for a fresh vision. In premodern times, as scholars have already noticed, itinerant monks (*xingjiao seng* 行腳僧), who traveled around for whatever reasons, played a significant role in circulating information among temples and facilitating the reorganization of specific monasteries or even of the entire Buddhist community to conform to certain modes (Wang 2013, p. 2023). In this sense, the presence of Deqing, a leading Buddhist master who was first trained in Jiangnan and then further refined in Beijing and Mount Wutai, then the Buddhist centers with national significances, made it possible to meet the need for Buddhism in Lingnan.

In addition to regional factors, timing would prove to be another significant variable for the meeting between Deqing and Nanhua temple as Lingnan, being a coastal region, was facing an unprecedented challenge engendered by a major reshuffling of Asian powers and the advent of the early global age. During the sixteenth century, the powers in north, east, and southeast Asia were experiencing significant restructuring, sparking a string of events that had remarkable consequences along the frontiers of the Ming empire. Among other factors, we should note the rise of Mongolian forces after regaining their momentum in the north, rampant incursions by Japanese pirates (*wokou* 倭寇) who frequently plundered southeastern and southern coastal regions of China, and the Korean War of Ming armies against the Japanese between 1592–1598 that significantly drained the financial and military resources of the Ming. South China felt these combined shockwaves in multiple ways, including the lost balance between Ming China and Annam (today's Vietnam) that would invite rebellions and the financially depleted Wanli emperor sending eunuchs to Lingnan in search of extra resources. We shall discuss these two things briefly later.

To complicate things further, Lingnan was increasingly, but mostly unconsciously, involved in the vast sixteenth-century maritime trade network.⁵ Following the large-scale influx into China of silver produced in Iwami 石見 in Japan, the Acapulco–Manila galleon route, which Spanish colonizers operated after occupying the Philippines, connected China with Latin America. Scholars have estimated that about one hundred and twenty-eight tons of silver were shipped from the New World to Manila each year in exchange for Chinese goods such as silk and porcelain.⁶ This trade brought immense profits to merchants from both Spanish and China, especially Fujian and Guangdong. Unfortunately, the ideologies and imaginaries of the emperor and court officials in the imperial capital were distinctively different from those of maritime merchants active on the South China Sea. Highly suspicious of maritime merchants, the Ming government imposed strict restrictions on them. Although it opened Yuegang 月港 port in Fujian for private trade starting

in the 1560s, two years before the formation of the well-known Dutch East India Company, the door was simply too narrow to meet the need. This development comes as no surprise given that the Ming government did not detect, let alone appreciate, the sea change that harbingered the advent of modern times. What was worse, in the wake of the 1548 destruction by Ming armies of Shuangyu port 雙嶼港 east of Zhejiang, then a center for smuggling, Chinese smugglers such as Wang Zhi 王直 (?–1559) who had moved to Japan started a large-scale armed merchant trade and thereby constituted a large portion of the “Japanese” pirates who repeatedly plundered China’s coastal regions.

All these factors worked together to increasingly change Lingnan into a new frontier with which local and regional officials had to confront. With their different responsibilities and concerns, those officials frequently responded in divergent and sometimes conflicting ways, but Deqing had to interact and deal with them as the precondition for his religious undertakings in Nanhua temple. Although he was an exile, as we shall see, Deqing’s time in Lingnan was significantly affected by these developments.

2. Mobilization: Military and Civilian Officials, Eunuchs, and Local People

While still active in north China as a new star, Deqing, together with Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603), a lifetime friend and another leading Chan master of the age, once planned to visit Nanhua temple to “dredge the source of Chan Buddhism” (疏禪源), which symbolized their determination to revitalize the tradition (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:840b). Although their plan was ruined by his exile, Deqing’s unexpected presence in Lingnan for two decades provided a rare opportunity that could facilitate the communication of Buddhism on both sides of the Five Ridges, the most important of which was the reforms he carried out at Nanhua temple. Deqing once recalled how he was convinced by officials to take on the task after a long-term hesitation:

Before long, Mr. Chen, the General-Governor and left Minister of War, who felt so regretful for the decline of the mountain of great significance (i.e., Nanhua temple), intended to entrust me with it. But I dared not engage in that because I was well aware that I had incurred insults from the sangha and was serving my military service. Shortly afterwards, both Mr. Zhou Haimen (i.e., Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 [1547–1629; *jinshi*, 1577]) and Mr. Zhu Xingcun (i.e., Zhu Yibin 祝以鬮 [1564–1632; *jinshi*, 1586]), both Intendant [of Nanshao circuit], strived to invite me [to the monastery], which decisively changed my mind in the end. (居無幾何，制臺左司馬陳公，深念名山寥落，欲以余託跡焉。余自知取辱法門，且在行間，安敢事事？既而觀察海門周公，惺存祝公，皆力致之，余始翻然) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 23:626a)

“Mr. Chen” refers to Chen Dake 陳大科 (1534–1601; *jinshi*, 1571), then the General-Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi (*lianguang zongdu* 兩廣總督). As Cisheng’s master, Deqing’s presence, symbolically at least, held unparalleled significance for Buddhist institutions in Lingnan. But, given that he was a convicted criminal, it was not a small matter for officials to entrust him with a major monastery with national influence. Instead of taking it for granted, therefore, the question must be raised: during the five years before he initiated the reform, how could he win patrons and, more importantly, how did he convince those patrons, especially those in power, that he was the right person, with the charisma and vision, to redefine the direction of Nanhua temple? How did he maintain their support over the eight years of reform and, with varying degrees, after that until his death?

The fact that Deqing was not viewed by many of his contemporaries as a criminal, but as a failed hero against the Wanli emperor, was the key for him to win full support from the very beginning. Deqing’s case was clearly political in nature, resulting from the crown prince issue that had thrown the imperial court into a state of political turmoil. Fortunately for Deqing, by 1595, the emperor’s misadministration had drawn strong condemnation from all walks of society, while Cisheng was widely believed to be the last rein on his conduct. Against this backdrop, Deqing was given a major spotlight after his arrest, and the wide support given to him was less because of the case itself or Deqing himself than because of a credibility contest between Cisheng and Wanli, a contest that Cisheng was

winning. While Deqing was suffering in jail, for example, he received secret consolation from a military official who, ironically, was the person ordered to carry out the corporal punishment (Hanshan 1975–1989, 16:574c). More noticeably, his ensuing exile to Leizhou, in some sense, was even turned into a route to glory.⁷ For example, he was seen off from Beijing by court officials in a way that applied only to their most beloved comrades. Then, he had the chance to travel first southward along the Grand Canal and then westward along the Yangtze River. Over the course of his journey, he met his mother for the last time and was warmly received by quite a few people, including Confucian-oriented scholar-officials and Buddhist monks alike, some his friends but some not.⁸

Following Deqing's exile, the Beijing-based networks extended further to Lingnan, as did the mechanism of politics working to encourage people to express solidarity with the master, which guaranteed the relatively warm and respectful treatment accorded to him in a totally unfamiliar region in the first place. Thousands of miles away from the imperial capital, Lingnan's people could receive Deqing without necessarily considering the emperor's stance. Upon Deqing's arrival in Guangzhou, for example, he as an exile was required to pay respect to Wang Hanchong 王漢沖 (d. u.), then the Regional Commander (*zongbing* 總兵). At the sight of him, however, Wang quickly descended the stairs and released the ropes binding him, saying that "you, o master, are a lofty person wandering beyond the world. Let alone the fact that you suffered this unexpected disaster only because of praying for the sake of the court. We all respect and admire you deep in mind. How can we treat you in the normal manner?" (公物外高人，況為朝廷祈福，致此奇禍，何罪之有？吾輩正中心感重，豈可以尋常世法相遇?) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 13:545c) The term *wubei* (all of us) is meaningful, indicating that there was a group of people who believed that Deqing had sacrificed himself for the state's interests. This helps explain why later, while in Leizhou, Wang Hanchong was so kind to arrange accommodation in an old temple rather than a barracks and, only four months later, transfer Deqing back to the city of Guangzhou. This was also the case with Chen Dake, who noticed the arrival of Deqing only due to a reminder from a Beijing friend. In addition to sending regards to Deqing, Chen arranged a permit for the master to use the imperial courier system. Later, Deqing visited Chen Dake in Duanzhou 端州, where the General-Governor was stationed, and impressed Chen deeply with a talk that lasted deep into the night. Subsequently, Chen often voluntarily introduced Deqing to his fellow officials, thereby effectively promoting Deqing's reputation and facilitating his reception in Lingnan. In retrospect, collectively, these deliberate arrangements made the exile largely a nominal one, enabling Deqing to enjoy a freedom unavailable to other exiles, and behind these favors was a loose alliance among people who shared a stance against Wanli. Nonetheless, before his officially sanctioned discharge from military service in Wanli 39 (1611),⁹ Deqing's status as a convicted monk remained an implicit or explicit hurdle on some occasions. A most striking case took place in Wanli 33 when Deqing was implicated in the so-called "evil pamphlet" case (*yaoshu an* 妖書案) that claimed the life of Zibo Zhenke (Zhang 1974, 226:5546–47; Yang 2018, chap. 2): Deqing was forced back to Leizhou, and the resulting two-year pause in the Nanhua reforms then underway had consequences, as we shall see below.

Before long, and more importantly, Deqing managed to renew and strengthen confidence in him as a leading Buddhist master among his patrons, followers, and fellow monks, especially those in Lingnan. Deqing repeatedly demonstrated an extraordinary ability to turn adverse circumstances into opportunities to improve his spiritual achievements. In a letter, he wrote:

I hear that the wonderful act of bodhisattva lies in the fact of testing the mind with perceptual objects. Once you can empty afflictions, it becomes unnecessary to seek for bodhi from elsewhere. And it is right here the mysterious gate (i.e., Buddhism) as long as you can see through affective disorders. (貧道聞菩薩妙行，妙在歷境驗心。煩惱空處，不用別求般若。諸塵透處，即此便是玄門) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 16:575a)

Afflictions could be constructive and educative in nature, and for Deqing, this was not just empty talk. Deqing “experienced all kinds of suffering that are hard to describe” (備歷苦事, 不可言) while in jail in Beijing (Hanshan 1975–1989, 2:471b). Nonetheless, he enjoyed preaching Buddhist teachings to prisoners and clerks there to such an extent that, ten months later when he left the prison for Leizhou, he looked back at the site of his imprisonment and said, “How great it is as a site to preach Buddhist teachings!” (好個道場) (Shen 2007, 27:693). Similarly, Deqing transcended the rigors associated with military service, as demonstrated by the following verse: “Only after changing monk’s robe with military uniforms have [I] started to believe that, according to the situation, wherever is the site of practicing Buddhism. Even if the scorching region is as hot as fire, it would find hard to melt down my mind that is as cold as snow.” (緇衣脫卻換戎裝, 始信隨緣是道場。縱使炎天如烈火, 難消冰雪冷心腸) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 49:803b). It was in this sense that later the Chongzhen emperor (r. 1628–1644) would rightly praise Deqing as “being exercised (*qianchui* 鉗錘) by the Son of Heaven”.

Let us take a closer look at the case of the *Lengqie biji* 楞伽筆記 (a commentary note to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*). Deqing started composing the commentary, which he had been entrusted with by a layperson on his way to Leizhou, almost immediately after he arrived for fears that he could not survive in such a sweltering hot place.¹⁰ Over the course of writing, however, he came to recognize that his attachment to the Dharma was not necessarily praiseworthy. He explained this in a letter to Fudeng:

My mind of assuming [responsibility] was as [earnest] as holding nine tripods, whereas the illness of attachment to the dharma increased by seven times over the course. I thought that I would fulfill my commission and keep up with former sages but, in reality, it is not wise but crazy and foolish. Fortunately, I understood deep in my mind that this act was not correct and that it was just like crossing a river in a dream (i.e., not real). . . . In the spare time while carrying weapons [as a soldier], I concentrated on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* to explore the Buddha’s mind-seal. I came to realize that previously I had fallen in the sphere of light and shadow (i.e., illusion), without obtaining the strength of authentic insight (*zhijian* 知見; Skt. *jñāna-darśana*). [From this experience I have learnt] that Buddhas and gods have more than one expedient way to cultivate sentient beings that have an affinity to Buddhism and, whether positive or negative, their only purpose is to introduce them into the grand gate of pure liberation. Both the accumulated fires [of hell] and the hill of knives are nothing but the place to attain the truth of *nirvana*. (其荷負之心, 實持九鼎。而法執之病, 益增七重。將謂不負所生, 敢追先哲, 此實狂愚, 非謂慧也。幸亦心知非正, 如夢渡河。 . . . 荷戈之暇, 惟對《楞伽》究佛祖心印。始知從前皆墮光影門頭, 非真知見力。是知諸佛神力調伏有緣眾生, 非止一種方便。若逆若順, 無非令入清涼大解脫門; 火聚刀山, 無非究竟寂滅道場地) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 13:547b)

The mission of restoring the Great Baoen monastery, which had dragged Deqing into court strife, belonged to the attachment to the Dharma. Fortunately, life in exile, especially repeated threats of death, powerfully freed Deqing from attachment and led him to face existential matters directly. This explains his later encapsulation of this experience of transformation as “entering the Dharma Realm because of the king’s law.” (因王法而入佛法)¹¹. In the first month of Wanli 26 (1598), shortly after the completion of the *Lengqie biji*, Deqing received a visit from Fan Yuheng 樊玉衡 (1549–1624; *jinshi*, 1583). Not only was Fan once the magistrate of Quanjiao 全椒 (today’s Quanjiao, Anhui province), Deqing’s hometown, but Fan was permanently exiled to Leizhou due to “the Succession Issue,” the same cause as Deqing. Fan asked, “What does the scenery in Leiyang 雷陽 (i.e., Leizhou) look like?” Deqing responded by showing Fan the manuscript of the *Lengqie biji* and said, “This is what the scenery of Leiyang looks like.” Completing this commentary symbolized Deqing’s pride that defied political persecution and that challenged the hardships associated with his exile. In this way, Deqing was attempting to encourage Fan, who was clearly anxious and discouraged at the time, to confront hardship with the spirit of transcendence. Deeply

moved, Fan then sponsored the printing of the *Lengqie biji* (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:841b). In early 1599, Deqing thus circulated more than one hundred copies of the commentary among fellow monks and patrons, especially those in Jiangnan and Beijing. Well received, the commentary sparked further confidence in and respect for him.¹²

Notably, the fact that Deqing came from Jiangnan and, more importantly, that he was taken as a cultural elite who embodied Jiangnan culture served as a motivator for many people, especially those coming to Lingnan from other regions, to draw closer to him. China had shifted its cultural centers several times over the centuries. By the Ming dynasty, Lingnan was perceived by most Chinese people as remote, peripheral, and barbarian, while Jiangnan was regarded as mainstream, refined, and more advanced (Chen 2021, chap. 1). For people, especially for officials and the literati, many of whom came from Jiangnan, ending up in Lingnan was thus far from a blessing. For one thing, as Deqing himself observed, “Guangzhong (i.e., Lingnan) is distinctively different in customs from those in the regions north of the Five Ridges (i.e., central China).” (但廣中風俗迥異，與嶺北相背)¹³ In addition, non-Lingnan people would easily be frustrated by regional dialects that could prevent effective communication, ways of life that might look outlandish, and scorching weather that threatened to claim one’s life at any time. Amid anxiety and uncertainty that were easily sparked, therefore, the significance of a shared background was understandably highlighted, whether it be the same home districts or similar cultural trainings. In one case, for example, Deqing wrote in a poem to a friend: “More than three decades has passed since [I] left the imperial capital (i.e., Beijing), how could I as a guest expect to meet you in this sweltering and remote region?” (三十餘年別帝鄉，客星何意聚炎荒?) (Hanshan 1995–2000, 13:507) Reminiscing about old days in Beijing, in sharp contrast with the “sweltering and remote” surroundings, collapsed the gap of three decades and instantly drew the two closer.

Moreover, benefiting from the education he received from Xilin Yongning in early life, Deqing as a leading Buddhist figure was also versed in Confucian and Daoist classics, and this capability made him a magnet for the literati. In their first meeting, for example, Zhou Yingzhi 周應治 (1556–1621; *jinsi*, 1580) asked him how to understand the proposition regarding “to know by penetrating the way of day and night” (通乎晝夜之道而知). Promptly, Deqing responded that this quotation from the *Book of Changes* (*yijing* 易經) was to remind people to understand what does not belong to life and death. Zhou applauded his response (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:840c). Behind this exchange of ideas was the “three-teachings-in-one” (*sanjiao heyi* 三教合一) (Yü 2021, pp. 4–6, 65–66; Brook 1993b, p. 31; Brook 1993a; Chu 2006), then the mainstream intellectual trend shared by both Buddhist master and Confucian scholar. After that, as a “heart-liked” comrade,¹⁴ Zhou Rudeng commissioned Deqing with the compilation of the *Caoxi tongzhi* 曹溪通志 (a complete gazetteer of Caoxi [i.e., Nanhua temple]). Not only did Deqing accept the task, but he reversely requested Zhou to write a preface several years later when the gazetteer was completed.

A drastic shift that occurred in Deqing’s attitudes towards the secular world was just in time to facilitate his taking root in Lingnan society. While in north China, Deqing spent most of his time improving his own spiritual achievements and directing his attention primarily to the inner court—especially Cisheng. Thus, his relationships with the secular world were quite limited, if not superficial. Exile, however, forced him out of his comfort zone into a real but much tougher world. Deqing confessed this shift in a letter to Xuelang Hong’en:

Blunt and stupid, I used to be infatuated with solitude and became growingly lonely and shallow. Although I kept concerned with the matter of life and death, the deep habit prevented me from awakening to non-existence and thus befriending with ancient people. This makes me shameful for failure to accomplish my intended goals . . . Since I received your instructions, my mind of benefiting others has gradually developed. Nonetheless, in self-reflections I find that I am short of enlightenment in terms of Chan and fail to make a deep study in terms of Buddhist doctrines. Besides, it is not easy to convince the superficial and shallow

students, who trust one's ears rather than one's eyes (i.e., relying on hearsay). My intention to change the customs gradually seems hard to be fulfilled quickly. (弟鈍根下劣，向耽枯寂，日沈孤陋，雖一念生死之心耿耿不昧，第習染深厚，不能頓契無生，上友古人。中心慚愧，有負初志。……弟自奉教以來，利他之心亦漸開發，惟時自忖，宗欠明悟，教未精研，且末學膚受，貴耳賤目，取信不易，移風易俗之懷，似難頓伸) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 13:549c)

Essentially, this shift in his behavior modes was the awakening to the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, which requires both “perpetuating the Dharma” and “saving sentient beings” at the same time. When he arrived in Leizhou in the third month of Wanli 24, for example, Deqing was shocked by a hell-like scene. By this time, Leizhou had been suffering severe famines and droughts for three years. Many people died on street, with bodies lying unburied all around. This, together with the blazing heat, had caused pandemics to spread. As mentioned above, this situation spurred Deqing to start writing the *Lengqie biji* immediately after settling down for fears that he would not survive. Nonetheless, by the seventh month, once the situation had become even more horrifying and miserable, Deqing put aside his writing and, together with a Provincial Student (*juven* 舉人), mobilized the local people to bury several thousand corpses. Out of compassion, he also held a seven-day Buddhist service for the diseased. Then, a heavy rain followed that helped to alleviate the drought and the pandemic (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:841a). It turned out that not only were his efforts appreciated by officials and ordinary people but, as Deqing noted, they served as an effective avenue of attracting local people to Buddhism:

At the time when I just arrived in Leiyang, I found that the people there worshiped ghosts and did not have a single Buddhist monk. I thought that it was *mleccha* (barbarian frontiers)¹⁵ where people no longer have the Buddha nature. That fall, in the wake of a pandemic that caused a huge loss of life, [I] picked up and buried several thousand dead bodies. I cultivated local people with Ullambana Dharma Service. Then they knew of the Three Jewels for the first time, and innumerable people were converted to Buddhism. Currently, they are all under the influence of Buddhism. It is a regret that I cannot stay here longer to preach Buddha's teachings. (貧道初至雷陽，見其俗尚鬼，絕無一僧，將謂蔑戾車地，無復佛性種子耳。即以是秋乘疫癘之餘，死傷之極，因拾骸骨數千頭瘞之，乃用盂蘭盆以開化之，是時始知三寶之名，頓轉邪心，皈向者無算。即今舉知佛化。弟恨不能久坐此中作佛事耳) (Hanshan 1995–2000, 15:623)

Evidently, a positive feedback loop formed accordingly. This case was not an exception; the same mechanism worked again in the following year when Deqing buried over ten thousand bodies in Guangzhou (Hanshan 1995–2000, 16:669).

In particular, Deqing's defense of regional interests amidst two critical crises won extraordinary credit for him in Lingnan society, which not only paved his path to Nanhua but helped him to retain support during the reforms. During the second half of the Wanli period, Lingnan was seriously troubled by eunuchs dispatched directly by the emperor to collect taxes and serve as Commissioner of Mines and Customs (*kuangguan taijian* 礦關太監). As a leading Buddhist master, it happened that Deqing had influence among eunuchs, both because Ming eunuchs as a group were well-known for their fascination with Buddhism and because he was the master of Cisheng, who had collaborated with eunuchs in many Buddhist projects in the first half of the Wanli period (Chen 2001; Zhang 2020, chap. 4). Thus, it became possible for Deqing to use his leverage to defend the interests of the Lingnan region when necessary. A case occurred in Wanli 28 (1600) when Li Feng 李鳳 (fl. 1605), then the eunuch responsible for collecting pearls in Lianzhou 廉州 and supervising tax collection in Guangzhou, was making trouble to General Wang Hanchong for being offended by the latter. On the day of the Dragon Boat Festival, a son of Dai Yao 戴耀 (1542–1628; *jinshi*, 1568), who had replaced Chen Dake as the General-Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi and was thus Wang's official superior, was returning home to Fujian by boat, and it happened that several *baicao* 白艚 boats (“civilian grain-transporting boats”) were

nearby.¹⁶ At the time, Guangzhou people, after having suffered famines for several years, were extremely sensitive to any outflows of grain. Li Feng thus spread a rumor that Wang Hanchong was bribing Dai's son by using the nearby boats to ship grain out to Fujian for profit. Enraged, several thousand people rapidly surrounded Wang's office and wrecked the son's ship with stone and bricks. A riot was about to erupt. Even worse, major officials in Guangzhou were all out at Duanzhou paying respect to Dai Yao as regulated. Amid the flare-up of tension, it was unwise for Wang Hanchong himself to meet the enraged people. He thus sent an official to call in Deqing as a mediator to dissolve the crisis. Although originally hesitant to act, Deqing rapidly recognized that what he could save was not only General Wang but also several thousand ordinary people and the city itself, for "Dai Yao will lead troops to suppress the rebellion if it brings about the death of General Wang or/and Dai's son." He wasted no time to go see Li Feng. Convinced, Li Feng agreed to stop the rumor but admitted that the situation was already out of his control. Thus, Deqing had no choice but risk his life to meet the angry mob. He asked them, "What you want is to eat rice at a lower price. But if you rebel today and are thus arrested or even executed, who among you could eat the cheap rice even it was here?" Stunned, those people gradually calmed down and dispersed. A major crisis was averted (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:842a).

It is hard to estimate precisely how great the pressure was over the course of the events; shortly afterwards, Deqing suffered from a serious illness for two months and his hair and beard turned white (Hanshan 1995–2000, 16:660). Fortunately, his audacity and selflessness as demonstrated in settling the crisis were fully appreciated by the people—from high-ranking officials down to the commoners. Dai Yao promised to serve as a patron in return for Deqing's quelling the riot, as did Wang Hanchong. Prior to that, during a few months at the start of the winter of Wanli 27 (1599), Zhu Xingcun, then the Intendant of Nanshao circuit (*nanshao daotai* 南韶道台), had urged Deqing three times to reform Nanhua, but Deqing was hesitant to take up the task. And now, with the convergence of supports and patronage from different people, military and civilian, upper echelons and the lower class alike, Deqing felt the time was ripe. So, in the fall of Wanli 28, with happiness (*chengxing* 乘興) Deqing entered Nanhua temple (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:842a).

In another critical case taking place after Deqing's entry into Nanhua, we can see how Deqing, through a similar mechanism that resembled a trade-off, transformed the credit he had newly accumulated into support to sustain his reforms. Li Jing 李敬 (fl. 1601), the Eunuch Commissioner of Mines and Customs dispatched by Emperor Wanli to Guangzhou, was noxious both for local society and for Dai Yao. For one thing, the thousands of boats then active at seas were seen as a threat to regional security by Dai Yao, who believed many of those boats belonged to pirates. It was within the jurisdiction of Dai Yao, the highest military official in Lingnan with responsibility for the security of the region,¹⁷ to decide how to handle those boats. But things became much more complicated when Li Jing used those pirates to collect pearls, and in turn refused to return boats, even disobeying the court's order. This conflict between maintaining security and doing business for profit came as no surprise, considering many of the pirates, as discussed earlier, were actually armed maritime merchants. Second, while opening mines at the emperor's order, eunuchs were notorious for blackmailing wealthy families—usually claiming that the latter's houses or ancestral graves were located upon a mineral vein, thus threatening to destroy them.¹⁸ Most powerful though he was, Dai Yao found no way to prevent Li Jing from doing that because behind the eunuch was the silver-thirsty Wanli emperor. During the Spring Festival of Wanli 29 when Deqing visited him in Duanzhou, therefore, Dai Yao turned to the Buddhist master for a solution. In response, Deqing visited Li Jing in Qingying 青鸚 on Dai Yao's behalf, during which time he established a personal relationship with the eunuch. The strategy began to work in the autumn when Li Jing paid a return visit to Nanhua temple (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:811c), finding Deqing both charismatic and persuasive. Unable to resist Deqing's influence, not only did Li Jing donate three hundred taels of silver to the temple but, more importantly, promised Deqing to maintain regional

peace by keeping a tight rein on his errands. Afterwards, the eunuch kept his promise, ordering pearl-collecting boats to return by a set date and leaving the delivery of the mining to the hands of local officials rather than those of his own clerks. These measures liberated Lingnan society from many burdens and alleviated Dai Yao's pressure in terms of regional security. Deeply grateful, Dai wrote a letter to Deqing saying with respect, "From now on I have recognized how extraordinarily magical and extensive the Buddha's compassion is." (而今乃知佛祖慈悲之廣大也)¹⁹

In retrospect, on the part of Deqing, all these efforts were probably what he believed he had to do for a greater cause rather than things he felt easily or happily done. Soon after entering Nanhua, Deqing found that the temple was a minefield and discovered no way to push through even the first move aimed at purifying the temple: to clear away the commercial enterprises in front of Nanhua's main gate. After being thwarted for several months, he had to return to Dai Yao, who then sent clerks to dismantle all the shops in three days (Hanshan 1995–2000, 16:660). Deqing's visit to Dai in Duanzhou this time, therefore, was a gesture to express gratitude, as was the visit of Li Jing in Qingying on Dai's behalf.²⁰ Given that the Eunuch Commissioners of Mines and Customs were notorious and that it was exactly those eunuchs who caused the trouble under discussion, Deqing would not have been happy to socialize with them. In reality, however, not only did he condescend to visit Li Jing in the first place, but he also later composed two farewell poems when the eunuch returned to Beijing (Hanshan 1995–2000, 12:491). In addition, Deqing even wrote a piece commemorating a temple that Li rebuilt two years earlier in which he praised the eunuch for being "loyal when serving the emperor and kind when fostering the subordinate," and saying that "he was peaceful without making trouble, which was a great benefit to the people [in Lingnan]." (事上有育下, 以忠愛為心。安靜無擾, 邦人受公之惠, 亦已厚矣) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 23:627c) Deqing could not have been serious in this case. Notably, however, this was not an exception. Concerning Dai Yao and other military officials, Deqing also had poems extolling their outstanding merits in military exploits or even spiritual achievements.²¹ His actions, very likely, reflect less the hypocrisy that derived from external pressure than the newfound flexibility that resulted from Deqing's spiritual progress. More specifically, it embodied expedient means (Skt. *Upaya*), a strategy that Deqing had used with consciousness when just arriving in Lingnan.²²

3. Reform: Restructuring the Temple, Fostering New Blood, and Lawsuits

Despite those forces pushing him into the role, the decision to enter Nanhua temple to initiate the reform was essentially the result of Deqing's conscious choice, which reflects the priority he gave to Buddhism over the secular world. In a letter to a general, Deqing explained his decision by revealing a tension between "perpetuating the Dharma" and "salvaging sentient beings" that was inherent in his case:

"Both moved by what bosom friends have done to me and motivated by the desire to do good things to local people, I threw myself in the thick of battle that could smash everything. [Eventually], although I managed to remove major enemies for the people, I could survive only narrowly. At present, I have made utmost efforts, but things that are about to happen are incalculable. How could it be possible for me to spend my limited energy drifting on the limitless poisonous sea? Would any wise men be willing to do so? Last year, the local situation would have been in a terrible mess without my humble efforts. [So] this fall [local officials] wholeheartedly invited me to go there, which I have forcefully declined. I believe that I myself am of significance for Buddhism, and will thus pray to the Buddha so as to accomplish enduring achievements for posterity. This is much greater when compared with the former, how dare I not respect myself? At present, after experiencing the many twists and turns of events, I have finally realized my plan of hiding traces (i.e., living in seclusion). . . . Birds will not dislike high [mountains] and fish will not dislike deep [water]. Caoxi will also be where I should stay. As one who knows me well, what do you think about that?"

(貧道感知己之遇，且為地方作福，橫身於百折之鋒，而與生民除其害之大者，幸亦僅僅自免。今區區力已竭矣，而事方無涯，安能以有限之精神泛無涯之毒海，豈有智者所甘心耶？去歲非貧道在，則地方大有可畏者。今秋極欲邀貧道往，故力辭之耳。貧道自視此身為法門所繫，將徼佛祖之靈，託之以為萬世功德，是大有過於此者，敢不自愛？今多方委曲，始遂藏跡之計。況自今以望，故吾不遠，豈忍蒙不潔，又為淨土之污辱乎？鳥不厭高，魚不厭深，曹谿將為邱隅也。足下知我者，以為何如？) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 15:571a)

Evidently, Deqing had once again found a strategic mission for himself. From his entry at Nanhua to the spring of Wanli 37, Deqing took pains to redefine its vision and direction in such critical aspects as institutional organization, economy, and discipline. The core of his efforts consisted of improving Nanhua's general wellbeing and, ultimately, restoring its glory as the ancestral temple of Chan. A close look at the measures he took reveals his vision, his competence, and his response to what he perceived as problems within the temple.

Deqing's first move aimed to cut off connections between the temple and the vulgar world surrounding it, but he could not carry this through until Dai Yao's intervention, which suggests a lack of cooperation from major forces operating within the temple. Deqing was disgusted by the shops in front of the main gate, both because they made the site too vulgar to be sacred and because, as we will see, they were a major lure to perdition for the monks. He thus relocated the main gate directly onto Cao Creek and, with the two ends of the road blocked by walls, isolated the merchants from the main road and thus their customers. Not only limited to shop-owners or merchants, this move sent a clear signal of attack on the privileges some elite monks had enjoyed for decades. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the strategy did not work in the first few months until Dai Yao, in response to Deqing's request, dismantled all the shops by force. This interference from external forces might have potentially intensified Deqing's tension with the existing monks in Nanhua, but for the moment he was safe and powerful enough to carry out his reform precisely because of the backing of those external forces.

Deqing redesigned the use of space by Nanhua temple according to the traditional art of Chinese geomancy (*fengshui* 風水), perceiving it as a precondition for Nanhua to recover from decline. Deqing understood that the Buddha had prohibited Buddhists from getting involved in geomancy because "the earth, mountains, and rivers are merely fused and made by one's genuine mind." (大地山河唯一真心之所融結) Nonetheless, not unlike contemporary Chinese people, Deqing still embraced the art by claiming that "although what geomancers say is not completely trustworthy, some ultimate truth exists there." (雖形家之言，未必盡信，而至理存焉！)²³ In his thirties, Deqing already helped Miaofeng Fudeng choose a propitious site to bury his parents (Hanshan 1975–1989, 53:835a). As for Nanhua temple, Deqing was convinced by a famous geomancer who claimed that the temple "[was suffering from] the imbalance between the *yin* and *yang* forces. [The hill exerting the decisive influence] comes from the left but leaves on the right, so [the temple] flourished at the first place but fell into decline in the end." (陰陽不經故也。以其左來而右去，故始大而終小) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 21:613b) This echoed Chen Yaxian's 陳亞仙 (fl. 677) warning against any major changes to the topography of the site, which he donated to the sixth patriarch Huineng, on the grounds that its layout was a dragon full of vitality and a white elephant (生龍白象) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:808a). Deqing agreed with the observation, saying that the layout of the mountain was a white elephant that had four feet, six tusks, one trunk, and one mouth with the temple on the elephant's jowl.

In order to resolve the issue, Deqing first filled up the Dragon Pond 龍潭 in the elephant's mouth, believing that its efficacious force had already leaked out after being drained by Huineng in an attempt to build a hall. Deqing paid particular attention to the trunk, which he viewed as vital to the elephant's life. The trunk was previously completed, on which were the wooden pagoda housing Huineng's mummy, Chen Yaxian's ancestral tombs, and Xinju 信具 Hall which housed Huineng's robe and alms bowl. During the Chenghua period (1465–1487), however, the wooden pagoda was replaced with a brick one which, unexpectedly, had since become dark and damp. In order to better protect

Huineng's mummy, Xinju Hall was converted into the Ancestral Hall to house the mummy taken out from the pagoda. After all these changes, the brick pagoda that should have been sturdier than the wooden one was now left in the elephant's chest. Worse than that, behind Xinju Hall was Chengsu Tower 程蘇閣, but a path leading to it cut the elephant trunk in two. To fix the problem, Deqing redesigned the road, letting it begin at the bank of the Cao Creek and then, through a corridor newly built on the right side of the temple, detour to the tower. Besides these issues, after a continual loss of its soil to various building projects, what had originally been a high hill behind Chengsu Tower had become too low to prevent north winds in winter. Deqing thus mobilized about one hundred monks to restore the height of the hill.

Deqing set a strategic direction for Nanhua temple to become financially healthy, and to that end, he institutionalized a strict management system. A deep crisis facing Nanhua temple was the loans it had borrowed, sometimes at an interest rate as high as 70% or even 80%, to cover budget deficits. Without a major change, the temple would have been doomed to bankruptcy. In theory, the annual land rent that Nanhua could collect, which was up to 400 taels of silver, was sufficient to maintain its operation. But when the ten households (*shifang* 十房) within the temple took turns to collect the rents, being beyond the control of the abbot, they pocketed the money themselves through connivance with the tenants, thereby leaving the temple's public accounts in deficit. In order to place the temple in a robust long-term financial position, Deqing institutionalized a strict management system, including establishing fixed posts to supervise Nanhua-owned assets, determining the temple's incomes and expenses, and setting quotas for its daily expenses. Also, Deqing chose ten capable and exemplary monks to act as supervisor-monks-in-chief (*dusi* 都寺) (Wang 2017, p. 63), each from one household, to form a kind of regulatory commission overseeing the running of the temple. Four of them were further entrusted with financial affairs after having taken vows in front of Huineng's mummy to work for the public interest. In addition, Deqing set the dates for land tenants to pay their rents and, more importantly, prohibited them from paying the money to any individual households. This system, it turned out, worked well, and Nanhua thus avoided a death spiral that fed on itself, at least temporarily. Its balance was soon in surplus, thereby establishing a sound economic foundation for future growth.

In order to shape the future of Nanhua temple according to the new features he envisioned, Deqing managed to help and improve monks in multiple ways. The first action he took, somewhat ironically, was to deal with the monks' debts. Some monks had borrowed money from what Deqing called "ruffians" (*liugun* 流棍) by using homesteads, mountains, or houses as collateral, and then found themselves stuck in endless trouble. To resolve the problems, Deqing first set different rules for the handling of those debts according to their nature, and then managed to liquidate verified debts in a relatively fair way (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:810b). He also returned those pawned properties to their former monk-owners. Accordingly, those monks involved, no longer open to blackmail, finally settled down. In addition, Deqing tried to curb monks from serious violations of the precepts; to the astonishment of many, especially the literati from Jiangnan, not only did some monks in Nanhua temple kill domestic animals to earn money, but they also provided wine and meat to provincial and prefectural officials when the latter came to visit. Previously, officials such as Zhou Rudeng and Zhu Xingcun, both scholar-officials from Jiangnan, had repeatedly imposed bans on those practices but the orders did not take effect (Hanshan 1975–1989, 51:830b). So, Deqing reconfirmed the prohibition through a provincial official who came to visit Nanhua temple. Most importantly, Deqing endeavored to train better-quality monks through discipline and education. He pointed out how pernicious the long-existing practices in Nanhua temple were:

Buddhist monks have got used to following the customs. For children who leave their households, what they see is only the masters and elderlies cultivating the fields. Since those things are not different from what is done by secular people, they know nothing about what becoming a monk means. For those who collect their

disciples, they only want to use those disciples to cultivate the land and mention nothing related to leaving the world (i.e., Buddhism) even in a single sentence. This practice has been long established. (諸僧徒習俗成風。凡幼童出家，只見師長務農，不異俗人，竟不知出家為何業。而畜其徒者，只利其得力於田畝，而無一言及出世事，其來久矣) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:809b)

To counter this trend, Deqing categorized the monks into different groups and took corresponding measures according to their ages, backgrounds, and capabilities. Monks aged 40 and older, the weak, the crippled, and those perceived as stupid and incompetent, were allowed to return to secular life or continue their old way of farming. Those aged between 20 and 40, more than one hundred of them, with representatives from all households included, were selected to receive the precepts. And, once chosen, the monks were required to perform Buddhist services and practice meditation in the halls every day or else they would be punished. In this way, Nanhua restored its routine practices as a Chan temple. As for novice monks aged 8 to 20, they were all forced to remain in the temple to study. With the texts including Buddhist sutras, Confucian classics, and literary collections, what Deqing did in this regard was strongly reminiscent of the training he himself had received from Xilin Yongning, which had already proved extremely successful (Jiang 2006, pp. 72–80). Three years later, for novices who were perceived as competent, they would be ordained and sent to the Chan Hall for further study, including practicing meditation, reciting sutras, and so on (Hanshan 1995–2000, 20:833). In retrospect, this classification demonstrated Deqing’s actual management competence in real life, but it also had the potential to divide the clerics and thus caused internal strife.

In line with his ambition and his self-identity as a Chan monk, Deqing’s chief concern was to bring Nanhua temple into the mainstream of Chan. His first move was to rebuild and expand the Ancestral Hall devoted to Huineng. Despite Huineng’s central role in the temple, the Ancestral Hall was small, low, dark, and surrounded by crowded residences, kitchens, and public functionaries’ offices. Deqing discovered that the complex of Nanhua temple consisted of the west, middle, and east rows of buildings built in different times, and the middle row, where the hall was, was jammed with monks ignorant of the art of geomancy when they built their residences. A large-scale restructuring of the temple was needed. Deqing relocated the monks’ residences on both sides of the Ancestral Hall to a hill west of Luohan Building 羅漢樓 he purchased and the Dragon Pond he filled in with donations he had collected. In addition, in the middle row, he dismantled such small buildings as Bai Hall 拜殿 and Zhutian Hall 諸天殿. Eventually, the area in front of the Ancestral Hall became quite spacious and empty. Deqing, then drawing on the model of the layout of a Confucian temple, built two side halls accompanying the Ancestral Hall to worship the founders of the five Chan branches. Moreover, fifteen more rooms were prepared around the hall to worship eminent Chan masters selected from the *Records of Lamp Transmission* (*chuandeng lu* 傳燈錄).

In addition, Deqing rebuilt the Chan Hall (*chantang* 禪堂) out of the conviction that “to a Chan temple the Chan Hall is just like a school to a country in the sense that they are where to foster and educate people.” (叢林之有禪堂，如國家之有學校，乃養育材器之地) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:815a) The Chan Hall in Nanhua temple was quite chaotic upon Deqing’s arrival with its foundation having seven residences for monks, two kitchens, and nearly ten toilets and pigpens. In order to evacuate a space to renovate the hall, Deqing first mobilized those monk-owners to relocate their houses to a place he had purchased and promised to defray part of the expenditures for rebuilding. Meanwhile, as a compromise, Deqing agreed that the Chan Hall would admit student monks only from within Nanhua temple rather than being open to the entire samgha as it was supposed to be. More than that, Deqing took actions to base the Chan Hall on a sound economic foundation. His major move was to redeem Zisun village 紫筍莊, an asset that was often tempting to powerful families. During the Hongzhi period (1488–1505), Nanhua lost the village to a powerful family, and took it back only because of a complaint filed by the then-abbot directly to the emperor. Around Wanli 20 (1592), Nanhua lost the village once again to the Jiang

江 family, who purchased the monastic lands and then encroached into Nanhua's territory by chopping down trees. Worried about the situation, Deqing requested assistance from Dai Yao, who ordered officials to investigate the boundaries on the spot and marked them with stones. To preclude potential dangers, Deqing finally purchased back the village with 200 taels of silver he collected and left it to the Chan Hall to strengthen its financial foundation. In addition, Deqing arranged an annual income of forty-four taels of silver for the hall, bought it hills for firewood, and gave it two houses he had exchanged with other monks. It was estimated that Deqing spent more than 1000 taels of silver on the Chan Hall.

For a temple as large as Nanhua, however, it would be naïve to assume that all the monks there had a unanimous attitude toward the reforms; instead, some of the greatest challenges came exactly from within the temple. Before Deqing's arrival, the monks in the temple had long been divided along the line of the firmly established households. Over the course of the reform, Deqing as a newcomer had to negotiate with those existing forces. In order to prepare the space for the Chan Hall, for example, he had to trade with monk-owners who "calculated inch by inch" (寸寸計之), and "compensated their expenditures at the ratio of ten to one" (以十易一) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:815a). All these struggles exhausted Deqing's budget and thus limited the scale of the new hall. In another case, despite his awareness of the importance of sojourning monks in facilitating communication and thus keeping the Chan community healthy, Deqing could do nothing but build a public hall called *Yixiu jue* 一宿覺 (Awakened overnight), outside the temple, to entertain those guest monks. The reason was simple: Nanhua, as a hereditary temple, did not welcome those monks into the temple to "waste" its money.²⁴

The tension seems to have intensified around Wanli 36 (1608) when Deqing started what might have been the last major project—rebuilding the Main Hall (*dadian* 大殿). Deqing planned to rebuild the hall but had no money. After learning of this, Dai Yao expressed his willingness to sponsor the project on his own. Deqing declined the proposal, and instead suggested that Dai lead a campaign to collect donations from as many people as possible. Dai agreed and distributed twelve appeal essays to regional and local officials, ranging from the General-Governor and Grand Coordinator (*xunfu* 巡撫) down to circuits (*dao* 道), prefectures (*fu* 府), and squads (*si* 司). Before long, the appeal received active responses from those officials, who each donated (or collected) one thousand taels of silver, and the budget was ready. At that point, notably, at Deqing's request, all donations were sent to the General-Governor's office without a coin left to the monks (無庸歸僧) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:843b). Deqing explained that it was for convenience, but very likely behind that unusual decision was the deficit of trust between him and the Nanhua monks. In early Wanli 32, when Deqing had just dismantled the old Ancestral Hall, he was implicated in the so-called "evil pamphlet" case in Beijing and thus forced back to Leizhou to resume military service (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:842c). When he returned to Nanhua in the following seventh month with Dai Yao's assistance, Deqing was happy to see that two-thirds of the new Ancestral Hall project had been completed. But there was also a debt of more than 1000 taels of silver awaiting him. Although Deqing finally cleared the debts with donations from two eunuchs, he may have wondered what happened to the project in his absence (Hanshan 1975–1989, 54:842c–843a). Thus, a seed of doubt lurked in Deqing's arrangement of the funds collected for the Main Hall, which would further exacerbate his relationship with the Nanhua monks.

It did not take long for internal strife to ensue within the Nanhua temple, which occurred in two phases. In the fourth month of Wanli 37 (1609), Deqing escorted some mighty timbers back to Mengli 濛瀼 port along the dangerous Duan River 端江 and scheduled the start of the project on a propitious day. Suddenly, however, Deqing was sued by Wansong Yuanzu 萬松顯祖 (?–1610), then the abbot, who alleged in the lawsuit that Deqing had embezzled eight thousand taels of silver from public funds and dismantled buildings of the temple. Deqing forcefully pushed back on the allegations of misconduct. Thanks to the strict financial system Deqing had established, Wu Anguo 吳安國 (1547–?; *jinshi*, 1577), then the Nanshao circuit governor, cleared Deqing's reputation. Instead, in

the investigation, Wu found evidence related to Yuanzu's own embezzlement. In doubt and fear, Yuanzu brought the lawsuit to the Provincial Surveillance Commission (*ancha shisi* 按察使司) on a higher level. In response, in the fifth month, Deqing took a boat to Guangzhou from Nanhua in an attempt to defend himself in court. The case was tabled, however, due to a vacancy in the position of Provincial Surveillance Commissioner (*ancha shi* 按察使), a situation that was due to Emperor Wanli's delinquency in duty—which was not uncommon at the time (Zhang 1985, 8:149). Deqing was required to wait for sentencing, but the situation became much worse than expected because it turned out that he would have to wait nearly two years. He missed Nanhua temple, as revealed that winter by a preface he wrote for two poems memorializing the plum flowers there:

“While in Caoxi, [I] sat there like in the fragrant world every time when plum flowers blossomed. This winter, having been implicated in the trouble made by evil men, I look at the mountains [i.e., Nanhua temple] that are physically very near but have no chance to enjoy the fragrance. [I thus] remember them with poems. (曹溪梅花每至盛開，如坐香積世界。今冬以魔作祟。牽次芙蓉江上，望山中咫尺，不得坐享香供，詩以憶之) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 49:804c)

What was even worse for Deqing, in a region as hot and humid as Guangzhou, being confined to a small boat for a long time could not go without consequences. Not only did Deqing use up his money, but he consumed his energy and became gravely ill. Learning of the urgent situation, fortunately, a friend invited Deqing to his governmental office and eventually saved him from the brink of death.

At the end of Wanli 38 (1610), the case finally came to a tragic end and, accordingly, Deqing's reform failed midway before the completion of the Main Hall. In the fall of that year, the case started moving forward after Mr. Wang, the newly appointed provincial surveillance commissioner, visited Deqing in his boat. The sentencing had a twist to it which, to some degree, reflected officials' stances on political rivalries rather than pure facts. In the first round, Jiang Shilun 蔣士綸 (*jinshi*, 1594), then the Prefectural Judge (*tuiguan* 推官) of Shaozhou prefecture, found Deqing guilty along with his disciples and those monks who had assisted him. Jiang sentenced that Deqing be deported and that the Chan Hall, Zisun village, and the lands and forests Deqing had purchased for the Chan Hall all be transferred to the abbot Yuanzu. The commissioner angrily overruled the sentence, blasting Jiang by pointing out that “Yuanzu has illegally sold Nanhua's foundation, while Deqing helped to reinvigorate the temple. This sentence is definitely unfair, considering it robs Deqing of the property he has newly purchased.” The full nature of the alleged fraud only came to light after Chen Guoji 陳國紀 (d. u.), then Vice Prefect (*tongzhi* 同知) of Shaozhou, was instead ordered to re-investigate the case on the spot. All the charges against Deqing proved unsustainable, and the abbot Yuanzu felt so embarrassed that he committed suicide. It is unclear why Jiang passed the sentence he did; behind the scenes, there was possibly corruption which, as we will see, was common among Nanhua monks and local officials.²⁵ No matter what happened, Deqing finally had his reputation cleared. Nonetheless, this lawsuit was a heavy blow to Deqing, who was already 66 years old. Exhausted and deeply disappointed, despite officials' repeated requests to bring the Main Hall project to completion, Deqing was determined to leave, claiming that “Buddhist monks decide when to act and when not to according to the chain of cause and effect. Now, my karmic connection [with the temple] is over.” (僧以因緣為進退，今緣盡矣) He entrusted a disciple with the Chan Hall, engraved on stone a detailed account of the happenings during the years, and then left (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:816a). A farewell poem to the temple exposes the pain he felt at his moment of departure:

Since I came to Caoxi with a staff in hands, I have sat looking at the mountains [around] and started smiling. Now I am about to leave after saying goodbye to those peaks, all birds and the [Cao] Creek sound endlessly sad. (自為曹溪杖策來，坐看山色笑顏開。從今一別千峰去，鳥語溪聲不盡哀) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 49:805c)

4. Setbacks: Internal Strife, Inborn Fragility, and Eventual Despair

Deqing's reform efforts in Nanhua temple came to an abrupt end due to the charge by Yuanzu, whom Deqing later described in a highly charged term as an "evil man" (*mo* 魔). But why and how did things happen as they did? Fuzheng, one of Deqing's main disciples, once commented on the case as follows: "A couple of evil monks dared to start the revolt immediately after General-Governor Dai was dismissed from office. What kind of monks were they? Since General-Governor Dai took office and invited Patriarch Han[shan] to Caoxi, former monks had long lost their illegal profits as they were no longer allowed to take charge [of the temple]. Thus, they took advantage of the situation in which [Patriarch Han] had no friends in the censorate, and implicated him in the legal cases in an attempt to reverse the situation." (戴制府方罷，而不肖數僧，輒敢大發難端，此何僧乎？自戴督上臺延慈祖入曹溪，而舊僧不得主，久失侵漁之利，乘台憲知交乏人，構司理以翻局) (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990, 2:53–54) Fuzheng was right in pointing out the high relevance between the fluctuation of Deqing's reforms and the support he received from high-ranking officials. However, the morality of individual monks alone was not enough to explain the fragility inherent in the reform. The unleashed turmoil and acrimony arising between Deqing as a reformist and Nanhua monks deserves more attention.

Major events caused by changes in the political environment, both domestic and border-crossing, surely exposed Deqing to direct attack by robbing him of support from most powerful officials. In Wanli 38, a rebellion led by *the Macs*, a local force in Annam, erupted. In the eleventh month, as *the Macs* broke through the defenses and seized the city of Qinzhou 欽州 (today's Qinzhou), Guangxi, Dai Yao, as the highest official responsible for military affairs, was impeached and dismissed from office. Although the treatment was not necessarily fair because the defeat was only temporary, Dai refused to stage a comeback and left Lingnan forever. The rebellion, as mentioned before, resulted from the ongoing restructuring of powers in East and Southeast Asia, during which time, Ming China significantly lost its former influence. But this border-crossing event, no matter how far away it looked from Nanhua, struck a huge blow to Deqing. Due to the uniqueness of Lingnan as a remote frontier region, the support Deqing received, though not ultimately legalized, was mostly from officials with regional or even national influence, civil and military alike. Among them, Dai Yao, who served as an enthusiastic patron in a period of as long as twelve years, was of particular importance. As the most powerful figure in a region as vast as Lingnan, the General-Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi was replaced much more frequently than normal officials by the emperors who tended to see them as potential threats. During the Ming, therefore, as many as seventy-one officials took up the post, with an average term of only two years. The exceptional length of twelve years that Dai Yao held the post can be explained only by court strife that caused Wanli's indolence. Dai's promise to act as patron was the final push for Deqing to enter Nanhua; in the same vein, Dai's abrupt stepping down left Deqing vulnerable to attack.

Within the temple, institutionally, Deqing was never officially accepted basically due to a lack of "membership", which prevented him from dissolving the existing administrative structure and, instead, added an extra layer of complexity with his own involvement. During the Ming, Nanhua was by nature a hereditary temple (*zisun miao* 子孫廟), a type of temple in which, as a rule, a monk was acknowledged as its member monk only because he was tonsured there, and only a monk with membership was qualified to join to administer the temple and inherit its property. Over time, with some elite monks developing their own households or sub-lineages (*fang* 房), a temple of this sort could embrace several households and thus looked more like a confederation than a federation. The abbot, who was supposed to be the leader of the entire temple, was chosen only from the preceding abbot's Dharma heirs, sometimes on a rotating basis or by drawing lots.²⁶ In such an environment, a monk would easily find that it was his own household rather than the temple itself that he could ultimately rely on. Inevitably, therefore, there were always tensions between different households and between the public interest of the temple as a whole and the sectarian interest of a given household.²⁷ This was also the case with Nanhua temple

which, before Deqing's arrival, already had ten households that held real power.²⁸ With strong support from officials as powerful as Dai Yao, Deqing held an edge into the temple and was able to bring some changes to it. Nonetheless, the limitations binding Deqing as an external force were unambiguously there, preventing him from restructuring Nanhua temple from within. In this sense, it is meaningful that Deqing's first move was to renovate Wujin chapel 無盡菴, originally built in memory of Nun Wujinzang 無盡藏尼 (?–676), who was arguably Huineng's first patron and later disciple, and then turn the chapel into his headquarters to choreograph the reform. Given that Wujin chapel was independent of the temple complex, consciously or not, with this move, Deqing was claiming independence from the existing structure. With Deqing's participation, Nanhua temple hence had three kinds of forces—the abbot allegedly representing the general interest, the ten households with their own sectarian interests, and Deqing as a reformer. Vastly different in agendas, preferences, and strategies, Deqing was an invading force that threatened to shatter the existing order and structure. But if and to what extent he secured support from the ten households was a key variable for the process and results of his endeavor. Deqing was apparently in a dilemma.

Lacking full control over the temple, Deqing's conflicts with the existing forces inevitably intensified over time, and their eventual clash derived both from competition for benefits and from cultural conflict. Strongly driven by mission, Deqing, as one of the most influential and competent masters, with his presence in Lingnan, seems to have presented a rare opportunity for the two sides to collaborate for a greater cause.²⁹ In reality, however, with Nanhua's existing elite monks Deqing had few recorded interactions other than instructions he delivered on some formal occasions, with the exception that he was invited by a couple of monks, who followed Zhu Xingcun's order, into Nanhua temple, and that he composed a routine piece for the birthday of a former Nanhua abbot. This lack of effective communication was essentially decided by the nature of Nanhua as a hereditary temple and by the fact that what Deqing had done deviated from what Nanhua's elite monks had perceived as normal for centuries. With distinctively different visions and missions, which were in turn shaped by their cultural and regional backgrounds, the measures that Deqing took to improve Nanhua's financial health, especially those related to monastic lands, were exactly aimed at the illegal or at least unreasonable privileges those monks in power had enjoyed for decades.

For Deqing's decision to transfer Zisun village to the Chan Hall, for example, although Deqing purchased it back with his own money rather than public funds, the ten households took offense because they believed that the village should be divided equally among them. Deqing was right to say that their discontent reflected their narrowmindedness and short-sightedness as they did not share his stress on the central role of Chan Buddhism in Nanhua. On a deeper level, however, this opposition seems also to reflect that, even several years after Deqing's entry, the formerly privileged monks who saw reform as a threat were still left behind without clear assurances about how to guarantee their interests.³⁰ Viewed in that light, Deqing's efforts centered on the Chan Hall were not a friendly gesture intended to win their support but instead intended to inch toward victory by depending on new generations of monks. But this strategy, though steady, was too slow to produce enough fresh blood in a short period of time.³¹ Eventually, without due institutional support, Deqing would inevitably feel chilly when Dai Yao's removal from office tilted the balance of power in favor of the existing elite monks.

In addition to these institutionally inherent problems that were universal in the samgha of late imperial China, the fact that Deqing's reforms had the effect of spilling out of Nanhua and into local society, whose uniqueness in some significant respects derived from the Lingnan region as a whole, seems to have made a deadly lawsuit hard to avoid. The lawsuit was essentially a head-on confrontation after the tensions built up between the Deqing-led group and the privileged elite monks. By the early sixteenth century, Nanhua owned a large amount of land. Ironically, their property could be the source of big trouble rather than income. On many occasions, things became exacerbated due to the so-called

“system of permanent tenancy” (*yongdian zhi* 永佃制), which became popular in Lingnan primarily because of a unique three-tiered system of rights associated with lands, say, the ownership (所有權), the right of “land bottom” (*tiandi quan* 田底權), and the usufruct right or literally “the right of land surface” (*tianmian quan* 田面權).³² Under the stratification system, the “permanent tenants” (*yongdian hu* 永佃戶) were allowed to transfer their usufruct rights to other people, which was in essence the transferal or pawning of the usage right of land (Wang 2000, preface, p. 18). Importantly, however, despite the transferal, according to the registration book of the government, it was still the landowner who was responsible for paying the land tax, which was part of the rents they collected. Over this complicated process, enough space was left for manipulation and thus corruption. Back at Nanhua temple, the monks were split into camps according to their relations with tenant farmers and local powerful families. Mentioned above, it was not uncommon for the household, through collusion with tenant farmers, to pocket partial or entire rents that were supposed to go to the temple’s public funds. Also, some monks fell into traps set for them by powerful families and were thus forced to sell land to the latter privately. These transactions were illegal because they could not obtain official permission from the government but,³³ unfortunately for Nanhua, since ownership was not transferred to the buyer, the temple would still have to pay the land tax. As Nanhua found no way to clear up the assigned tax, sooner or later, the amassed deficit would force it to borrow. Following this, powerful families would swindle Nanhua of monastic assets and lands by filing lawsuits. Over the course of time, connivances were often seen between treacherous monks, local powerful families, and corrupt petty officials and clerks. An evil circle formed accordingly. Aware of the rife corruption, Chen Dake once acted in an attempt to clean up the mess, but was forced to cease before long. The reason was simple: the move, ironically, was easily manipulated by local powerful and corrupt officials as an opportunity to blackmail monks and drive away the insubordinate.

In Deqing’s case, given that investigations revealed that the abbot Yuanzu embezzled money from the public funds and sold Nanhua’s foundations privately, it seems safe to say that Yuanzu represented the privileged elite monks who had benefited greatly from those corruptions. Although we have no direct proof due to the meagerness of available material, we can still make an informed guess; Yuanzu and/or other corrupt monks in Nanhua—and those common people who lived outside the temple but who nevertheless benefited from the evil circle—were somehow linked through affinities deriving from families/lineages or home districts. This had long been an outstanding, if not totally unique, regional characteristic for Lingnan people.³⁴ No matter what happened, since the measures that Deqing took were exactly aimed to cut off the profit chain, it would be natural for the affected privileged monks, who sensed the uncertainty going forward, to fight back, and the collapse of the reform seemed inevitable sooner or later. In the wake of Dai Yao’s removal from his position, those affected groups of interest, within Nanhua and without, coalesced and took immediate action. Eventually, the inherently fragile reforms failed under their pressure, and the dream that Deqing had cherished for so many years to reinvigorate Nanhua and thus Chan Buddhism was destroyed.

In the broader context, Deqing’s reforms in Nanhua temple provide an outstanding case for the ongoing late-Ming Buddhist renewal, during which quite a few efforts were taken to revitalize Buddhism, but people could not agree on how to accomplish this goal. Deqing was once criticized by Yongjue Yuanxian 永覺元賢 (1578–1657) for his close tie to Cisheng. In sharp contrast, Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 (1535–1615), another leading and influential Buddhist master, was cited as an exemplary figure for concentrating his time and energy on Jiangnan society to establish Yunqi temple 雲棲寺 in Hangzhou as a model temple (Yongjue Yuanxian 1975–1989, 30:574b). In fact, unlike his reliance on Cisheng in the Baoen monastery case, voluntarily or not, Deqing clearly shifted his attention from the inner court to local/regional society in the Nanhua case. But Lingnan was vastly different from Jiangnan, and so was Deqing’s status as an exiled monk different from that of Zhuhong as a master deeply rooted in local society but always respected empire-wide

(Yü 2021; Eichman 2016). It would be interesting to know if Zhuhong, or Yuanxian himself, were in Deqing's shoes, what they would have done with Nanhua temple in particular and with Lingnan society in general.³⁵ Nonetheless, even in the Lingnan region, there were other options in terms of reform. Qingyun 慶雲寺 temple at Mount Dinghu 鼎湖, similarly located in Guangdong but in the west rather than in the north, was such a case. Deqing stressed the importance of a sound financial foundation for Nanhua temple, but an agreement set up by Qihe Daoqiu 棲壑道丘 (1586–1658), the founding monk of Qingyun temple, reads:

“Numerous though the Buddhist followers in the mountain are, they are completely prohibited from owning monastic lands lest they distract them from practicing Buddhism. [Instead], people should follow the Buddha's guidance as to collecting alms, and use it only to satisfy basic food. Those who disobey this agreement and upset the order of the sangha will not be allowed to join this monastery.” (山中法侶雖多，決不置立田產以妨道業。遵佛分衛，聊充粥飯耳。如不依此約，破壞僧倫，不與共住) (Shi et al. 2015, p. 29)

At the core of this article is an injunction to avoid the corruption potentially brought about by the owning of monastic lands. The term *juebu* 絕不 (absolutely not) reveals Daoqiu's resolution.³⁶ Given that Qihe Daoqiu once attended Deqing in Nanhua temple for three years and that Deqing lived in Qingyun temple for nearly one year after his failure in Nanhua, we may be curious to know if and to what extent this strategy was shaped by the lessons Deqing had just learned.

On the part of Deqing himself, this failure at reform was traumatic both because he had invested so much time and energy in the effort and because, more importantly, he had felt much pessimism or even despair for the future of the sangha. Sometimes Deqing felt temporary relief in the first one or two years after leaving Nanhua behind.³⁷ But as time passed, the temple was always there in his life, as revealed by his poems composed even one decade later:

Plum flowers on the bank of the Creek kept emitting fragrance, and how many times the fragrant fog there wet my clothes. In recent years, wherever I visit to look at flowers, [I feel] that it is similar to my sitting at the Dharma Hall in years gone by. (溪上梅花不斷香，幾回香霧溼衣裳。年來每到看花處，一似當時坐法堂) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 49:807b)

Deqing even anticipated another opportunity to resume the undertaking:

Year after year . . . [I] still hoped madly in restoring my earlier identity and fancied certain unexpected opportunities that would bring glory to Buddhism. All these secrets are hard to reveal, but I believe that you as my bosom friend would see them through. Luckily, an opportunity came up and I thus planned to enter the mountain waiting for that. Unexpectedly, however, the chief patron passed away, leaving everything to vanish into illusions. (年復一年 . . . 猶癡心思復故吾，且妄想意外之緣，為法門光。此難言處，想知己自能洞悉矣。幸已有機會，擬入山以待，不意大檀越實天，則一切都歸夢幻矣)³⁸

The “chief patron” refers to Cisheng, who died in Wanli 42 (1614), but no detail about any plan is available. Eventually, driven by unforgettable passion and sentiments, after receiving repeated invitations, Deqing returned to Nanhua temple in the twelfth month of Tianqi 2 (1622) and died peacefully in the temple one year later. With his mummy finally being transferred from Mount Lu 廬山 in Jiangxi province to Nanhua—where he has been worshipped up to the present—he ironically became a ready source of income for monks he would perceive as vulgar.³⁹

After experiencing the tragic failures of his two major missions in the Great Baoen monastery and Nanhua temple respectively, Deqing was thoroughly disillusioned with the situation of Chan Buddhism in the last years of his life. Although acclaimed for his “will of toughness and resilience” (堅忍不拔之志) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 50:816a), Deqing

failed in his desperate mission to reinvigorate Chan Buddhism, as was symbolized by his failed reform effort in Nanhua. He became disillusioned, which, at least partly, was due to the fact that, after entering the later years of his life, Deqing was no longer as courageous and hopeful as he had been upon arriving in Lingnan. He confessed in a letter as follows:

Since I crossed over the [South] Ridge, I look back to the secular world only to find that things change all shapes and even disappear within a constant. Roughly speaking, the karma inherited from previous lives works relentlessly and pressingly, making people, whether be sages or ordinary men, hard to escape from the consequences predetermined by the karma. How great Master Zibo was! But he nonetheless had to repay this debt inherited from previous incarnations, let alone other people. Speaking of that, I feel sad and heart-broken. I dare to expose this [only] to [you] as a bosom friend of Buddhism. I only feel painful, and what else can I say about that!" (貧道度嶺以來，回首塵世，幻化遷訛，頃刻萬狀，大都夙業相追，無論聖凡，難逃定業。若紫柏果何人斯，亦復了此夙負，況其他乎？言之酸鼻腐心。敢為法門知己者道，飲痛而已，更復何言！)⁴⁰

This letter reveals the despair he felt.⁴¹ Not limited to the Nanhua case, notably, this despair reflected his deep disappointment about the samgha as a whole, which was actually shared by other leading Buddhist masters of the age, including Zibo Zhenke and Yunqi Zhuhong (Zhang 2020, chap. 8).

5. Concluding Remarks

Deqing's reforms at Nanhua temple, in essence, were a struggle to restore the lost identity of the temple as the ancestral temple of Chan Buddhism, which constituted an integral but still somewhat independent part of the ongoing late-Ming Buddhist renewal. The fact that Deqing started a promising reform but finally buckled under pressure offers a perfect reflection of a polarized temple that mistrusted its leaders and was not ready to unite on a new path. "In order to understand the Buddha nature, you should observe the timing and the chain of cause and effect." (欲識佛性義，當觀時節因緣)⁴² This principle, which Deqing stressed frequently to appreciate the importance of timing and the contextual environment, may help us to better understand the ups and downs of Deqing's reform in Nanhua temple, as well as his general experiences in Lingnan.

The exile with which Deqing started his life in Lingnan was significant, both symbolically and in practice, and helped pave the path for him to Nanhua temple. For one thing, the political elements inherent in the exile forced people, within the samgha and without, both in Lingnan and beyond, to reevaluate Deqing and, paradoxically, encouraged them to move closer to him. For the second, and more importantly, the hardness that accompanied his exile greatly improved Deqing's spiritual achievements in an unexpected way, as capsulized by the phrase "entering the Dharma Realm because of the king's law." Eventually, a positive feedback loop formed to further promote Deqing's reputation and influence, thereby preparing him to be well-received in Lingnan.

Externally, the ups and downs Deqing experienced in Nanhua temple were affected, to varied degrees, by factors and elements related to Lingnan as a unique region in multiple ways, to the Wanli court that had been plagued by court strife, and, most unexpectedly, to the advent of the early global age that was beyond the sight of contemporary Chinese. Decided by the fact that for centuries Nanhua had been geographically and culturally isolated from central China while open to the ocean, and that Deqing was one of the few leading masters trained in Jiangnan and Beijing, the two Buddhist centers of the time, their encounter was nothing but a clash that was closely related to visions and directions. As far as court politics is concerned, not only did Deqing's standing with Cisheng positively contribute to his positive reception in Lingnan society in the first place but, negatively, it also interrupted his undertaking in Nanhua by implicating him in the "evil pamphlet event". Timing mattered as well, and the results could weaken or strengthen the impact politics had on Deqing's life and career. This was especially true with the support Deqing received from Dai Yao. The exceptional length of Dai's term as the General-Governor of

Guangdong and Guangxi—as long as twelve years—simply resulted from court strife that brought about Emperor Wanli’s delinquency, while his abrupt removing from office was, partly and unexpectedly, due to events that were restructuring the powers in East Asia and that harbingered the advent of early modern times. These elements worked together to bring onto the stage key figures that played crucial roles in Deqing’s experiences in Lingnan, including military officials, eunuchs, scholar-officials, and ordinary people. Eventually, these people, who would have otherwise known very little of each other, by virtue of their interactions with the now-further-spiritually-enhanced master in complicated networks, such as the one between the eunuchs and Dai Yao in which Deqing served as an interlocutor, transmitted the shockwaves to impact Deqing’s endeavors in Nanhua temple.

Within Nanhua temple, Deqing faced a fundamental trade-off that we may call the reformist’s dilemma in a hereditary temple: a group of elite monks that could collectively strengthen Deqing as the coordinator of the reform could also overthrow him. This dilemma emerged because, although Deqing had an edge in Nanhua given the strong backing from his powerful patrons or friends in the secular world, keeping him in power for longer required different social networks in which existing elite monks were embedded and their cooperation was required. Deqing failed to get the existing forces involved in the reform largely because of structural weaknesses inborn in the hereditary temple, especially the tension between the public interest of Nanhua temple as a whole and sectarian interests of those long-established households. Deqing’s failure in this regard reflects how entrenched and how polarized the forces within Nanhua were. In addition, it was also because Deqing’s presence in the temple did not resolve the inherent institutional problems but added one more layer of complexity and subtlety to them. Despite the announced flexibility as demonstrated by his learning of “the lion drilling his sons” (*shizi tiaoe* 獅子調兒), Deqing did not budge in the face of pressure from Nanhua’s monks. Without their cooperation, however, even if Deqing managed to seize the initiative in the first place, he still lacked the leeway to reform the temple institutionally. Eventually, no matter who won control, the temple would be effectively split down the middle and locked in an angry stalemate.

Against this backdrop, although the lawsuit that Yuanzu filed against Deqing was accidental, the failure of the reform caused directly by the lawsuit was actually inevitable. For the long-term benefit of Nanhua as the ancestral temple of Chan Buddhism, Deqing aimed at revoking what elite monks had conventionally taken as their own interest and cutting off their connivance with local powerful families (or the so-called ruffians) and corrupt local officials. But unfortunately, he was essentially an outsider of Nanhua, and never in the position of taking full control of the temple. As his conflicts with those elite monks intensified, his reform was doomed sooner or later. Finally, Dai Yao’s abrupt release from office made tensions surface and erupt in a deadly way. Meanwhile, the fact that conflicts within the samgha turned into a legal affair deserves particular attention, for it further deteriorated the already-weak autonomy of the Ming samgha by facilitating the infiltration of the state into Buddhist affairs. How to handle a legal case is a kind of cultural narrative.⁴³ Like many cases in traditional China including the one Geng Yilan had filed against him in Shandong, this lawsuit against Deqing was far from a pure civil case in the modern sense. Since the judicial system simply could not operate independently, its investigation and sentencing were all intervened by official or even royal forces. As demonstrated by the twists in the sentencing process, the results of Deqing’s case, at least to some extent, reflected negotiations of these forces behind the scenes.

In the broader context, Deqing’s stories with Nanhua temple cannot be fully understood unless we understand them as imbedded in stories of Lingnan society in the late Ming period, through which Deqing eventually obtained his identity as one of the three greatest Buddhist masters of the time. Furthermore, Deqing and the large-scale but eventually failed efforts he made in Nanhua demonstrated both the vitality and the high volatility of the late-Ming Buddhist renewal which, as demonstrated by Yunqi temple in Jiangnan and Qingyun temple similarly in Lingnan, could manifest themselves in very different forms.⁴⁴

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Notes

- 1 For studies on Hanshan Deqing, see Hsu (1979); Epstein (2006); Struve (2012); Shi (1998); Wang (2010). For studies on Deqing's reform in Nanhua temple, see Jiang (2006, pp. 69–190); Hasebe (1979); Long (2009).
- 2 For a survey of Buddhism in late Ming China, see Yü (1998), “Ming Buddhism”. In the past forty years, the late Ming Buddhist revival has attracted much scholarly attention. For most important studies in the field, see Yü (2021); Brook (1993a); Zhang (2020). Also see Chen (1995, 2011); Shengyan (1993); Wu (2008); Wang (2022).
- 3 In 1589, Deqing requested Cisheng to restore the monastery by saving expenditures on food in the palace, which Cisheng accepted. For a detailed discussion about the possibility of this proposal, see Chen (2011, pp. 129–32).
- 4 For Geng Yilan's complaint, see Geng (2022).
- 5 The sixteenth century saw the advent of the global age, and the 1570s was a critical moment for China to interact with the world. For studies on this great age, see, for example, Blussé (2008); Brook (2008); Frank (1998).
- 6 For the Manila galleon trade, which created the first global route network centered in South China Sea, see Britannica (2022) and Han (2013).
- 7 Pei-Yi Wu (1970, p. 81) has noticed that “Te-ch'ing's (i.e., Deqing's) punishment seems to have solidified his alliance with the leading Neo-Confucians of his day, and the journey south looked more like a triumphant march.”
- 8 Wanli 23 and 24 entries of (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990).
- 9 Deqing was among those who should have been pardoned when Emperor Wanli announced a general amnesty in the eighth month of Wanli 34 (1606) following the birth of his first grandson, the future Taichang emperor (r. 1620). The list must have been imperially sanctioned through the Provincial Surveillance Commission (按察使司) of Guangdong before it could take effect, but it seemed that the process would not take long. So, in the third month of following year, thanks to the support of Dai Yao, then the General-Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi, Deqing was restored his status as a monk (*huiji* 回籍) and then placed in Nanhua temple. In reality, however, the necessary imperial sanction was much postponed because of a long-term vacancy of the Provincial Surveillance Commissioner of Guangdong. It was not until the third month of Wanli 39 (1611) when Deqing had left Nanhua temple after the failed reform attempt that he was released from the military registration (*kaiwu* 開伍) and thus officially free.
- 10 Hanshan (1975–1989, 15:565a). This impending threat was real. Ruguang 如廣 (?–1596), one of the two disciples who escorted Deqing from Nanjing to Leizhou, died of the pandemic shortly after their arrival at the destination. See Hanshan (1975–1989, 32:690a).
- 11 Hanshan (1975–1989, 14:554a). Deqing repeatedly stressed how beneficial this disaster was for his religious achievements. See, for example, two letters in (*ibid.*, 14:554).
- 12 For more letters Deqing sent to his friends regarding the *Lengqie biji*, see the 15th fascicle of Hanshan (1975–1989).
- 13 Hanshan (1995–2000, 15:607). This letter can also be found in Hanshan (1975–1989, 14:553b), but some sentences including the one quoted here are missing. The Hanshan (1995–2000) was first printed in Shunzhi 17 (1660) under the sponsorship of Geng Jimao 耿繼茂 (?–1671), Prince of Jingnan (靖南), who was one of the most powerful Chinese warlords in the early Qing dynasty. I am currently working on a paper to discuss this version which, when compared with Hanshan (1975–1989) compiled by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664; *jinshi*, 1610), seems to be richer and more original in contents.
- 14 For a poem Zhou Rudeng composed for Deqing, see Nanhua (2021, p. 919): 已覺晴空盡，何當此日心。欣從龍窟遠，話別虎溪深。雨榭開蓮卷，風橈過寶林。共攜千里道，臨發更沈吟。
- 15 The word “mleccha” was used in Indian history starting in the late Vedic period to the start of Islamic invasions (ca. 1000 BCE–ca. 900 CE). It is essentially a combination of non-follower of Vedic philosophy and culture, non-speaker of Indic languages, barbarian, nomad, etc.
- 16 For the so-called *bailiang* 白糧 which, as extra fine grains on top of normal land taxes, were transported by *baicao* boats from five prefectures in Jiangnan to the imperial capital, See Hu (2012).
- 17 During the late Ming dynasty, the jurisdiction and power of Governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi (*lianguang zongdu* 兩廣總督, literally Supreme Commander of Military Affairs and Director-general of Grain and Salt Supplies in Guangdong and Guangxi, and Grand Coordinator in Guangdong (總督兩廣軍務兼理糧餉帶管鹽法兼巡撫廣東地方) was not completely fixed. In addition to military affairs, it was possible for them to concurrently administer civilian affairs of one or two provinces or/and the

salt monopoly. They were allowed to appoint civilian officials inferior to magistrate (*zhixian* 知縣) and military officials lower than Assistant Regional Commander (*canjiang* 參將) directly. In addition, thanks to their right of evaluating the performance of such high-ranking officials as Prefects (*zhifu* 知府), Regional Commanders (*zongbing* 總兵), and Surveillance Commissioners (*ancha shi* 按察使), they had significant effects on the latter's career life as well.

- 18 For the rebellion caused by Li Jing's abuse of power in Xinghui 新會, Guangdong, see Wen (1986, 5:698).
- 19 Hanshan (1975–1989, 54:842b). For a revisit of the people called *kou* 寇, as seen in the riots and trades in China's southeast coastal regions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Chen (2019, 2001).
- 20 At the core of Deqing's relationship with Dai Yao was not a one-sided patronage but mutual support. In order to help Dai Yao to handle the rebellion, for example, it was said that Deqing once risked his life as Dai's envoy to persuade the rebels and the result was positive. See (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990, 2:49–50).
- 21 For example, see two poems Deqing composed for a General surnamed Du 杜 in Hanshan (1975–1989, 49:805b): 鐘鼓胡笳總道場，旌旗影裏坐焚香。思君力破羣魔壘，自許心空見法王。 Interestingly, Qian Qianyi removed most of this kind of poems when compiling the received version of the Hanshan (1975–1989).
- 22 For Deqing's conscious choice of this strategy by modelling on the way of a mother lion training baby lions (獅子調兒法) in an attempt to get along with local people, see (Fushan and Fuzheng 1990, 2:7–8).
- 23 Hanshan (1975–1989, 50:808b). Similarly, the art of Chinese geomancy was taken as a first step when Shang Xexi 尚可喜 (1604–1676) and Master Xuyun 虛雲 (1840?–1959) attempted to renovate Nanhua temple in the 1660s and in the 1930s, respectively. Interestingly, these two had distinctly different interpretations of the temple's layout when compared with Deqing. See Mo and He (2014, pp. 84, 177–79).
- 24 For regulations regarding public and private properties in Chinese Buddhist temples, see He (2010a, 2010b).
- 25 For another legal case related to Nanhua's monastic lands that took place a few years earlier, see Liu (2016).
- 26 During the period from Wanli 26 to 38 when Deqing had connections with Nanhua temple in one way or another, for example, Nanhua temple had as many as twelve generations of abbot. See Nanhua (2021, pp. 519–20).
- 27 For negative effects caused by sectarian interest on the public interest of Nanhua temple, for example, see an interesting epitaph composed in Shunzhi 17 (1660) in memory of the rebuilding of the abbot's residency (*fangzhang* 方丈) of Nanhua temple: “蓋曹溪自慈師中振，層軒紺宇，踵事增華，至今十房禪院未改舊觀。獨方丈為眾共公之長，高賢之地，情好不系，其廢其興，功罪可諉，故視之漫不經心，宜其傾圮剝落，以至於斯也。” (Mo and He 2014, p. 77). For discussions on differences in the ways of running the hereditary temple and the public temple, see Welch (1967) and Zhang (2015).
- 28 Little is known about the ten households in Nanhua temple, but they probably appeared in the early or mid-Ming dynasty. It was in Hongzhi 14 (1501) that Guangxiao temple 光孝寺 in Guangzhou, a major monastery in which both Huineng and Deqing were involved in one way or another, instituted its own ten households. See Gu et al. (2015, p. 19).
- 29 Deqing was conscious of his rare status as an exiled monk in the entire history of Chinese Buddhism. See, for example, Hanshan (1975–1989, 47:786b).
- 30 For the land properties belonging to Nanhua temple and those belonging to the households, see, Nanhua (2021, pp. 115–19). Dangui Jinbao 澹歸金堡 (1614–1680) once commented on different attitudes of those people involved towards each other, which is revealing: 非常住與眾僧分彼此，蓋眾僧與常住分彼此也。 (Nanhua 2021, p. 123)
- 31 For the effectiveness in Deqing's training, see, for example, a letter to Zhou Rudeng in Hanshan (1975–1989, 16:571c): 比雖入室者希，而知有者眾，歸依者日益漸佳。如菩提樹下，與曹溪諸僧，最難調伏。近來回心信向者，蓋已十之二三矣。
- 32 This system can be traced back to the Song dynasty and became popular both in Jiangnan and in such coastal regions as Fujian and Guangdong. For studies on this system, see Zhang (2017); Long (2018); Cao and Liu (2014).
- 33 It was mandatory for people to pay deed taxes when selling fields and/or houses or else they would be harshly punished. See Jiang (2012, pp. 79–80). For legal issues associated with monastic fields, see Chai and Han (2017).
- 34 Starting in the mid-Ming dynasty, there was a newly emerging movement that sought to enforce Confucian agendas in local society. For the rapid development of local lineages in south China after the sixteenth century, see Szonyi (2002); Brook (1989); Ebrey (1986).
- 35 Although Yunqi temple was acclaimed as an exemplar by contemporaries and later generations, Zhuhong himself was suspicious about how far it would go and how successful it would be.
- 36 For Daoqiu's explanation of the rationale behind this decision, see Shi et al. (2015, pp. 60–61). Michael Walsh (2009, p. 9) has pointed out that “one of the great ironies of monastic Buddhism was that renouncing materiality and the self through a series of metaphysical and bodily strategies resulted in the accumulation of material wealth in abundance and a communal identity forged through discipline and practice. Buddhist monks and nuns were often represented as being poor and socially withdrawn, but we know that reality in Asia was quite the opposite.”
- 37 See, for example, Deqing's preface to the twenty-eight poems he composed shortly after arriving in Mount Heng in Hunan province from Lingnan in Hanshan (1975–1989, 49:805c).
- 38 Hanshan (1995–2000, 16: 639). This letter is missing in Hanshan (1975–1989).

- ³⁹ For the competition between Nanhua temple and Fayun temple 法雲寺 at Mount Lu for the right to house Deqing's body, which would later prove to be a mummy, see Jiang (2006, pp. 176–77).
- ⁴⁰ Hanshan (1995–2000, 16: 671). Also see Hanshan (1975–1989, 16:572a).
- ⁴¹ Similarly, in a 1622 letter responding to Zhu Xingcun's invitation back to Nanhua temple, Deqing started it with the phrase "dream and illusion" (夢幻泡影) (Hanshan 1975–1989, 52:830c). In retrospect, Deqing's disillusion was not unfounded. In Wanli 47 (1619), fewer than ten years after his departure of Nanhua temple, for example, once again Nanhua was bullied by ruffians and its land rents were postponed. See Nanhua (2021, pp. 124–25).
- ⁴² See, for example, Hanshan (1975–1989, 15:568a, 22:624c).
- ⁴³ Some anthropologists have come up with the extended-case method and situational analysis in which a lawsuit is understood by considering social relationships or social situations. See Barton (1967) and Gluckman (1955).
- ⁴⁴ It is worth noting that by Kangxi 49 (1710), when more than seventy years had passed since the founding of Qingyun temple, it was still run smoothly in that way. See Shi et al. (2015, p. 24).

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Article

The Number and Regional Distribution of Chinese Monks after the Mid-Qing Dynasty

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Abstract: The total number of ordination certificates issued between 1736 and 1739 was 340,112. Analyzing the amount and regional distribution of ordination certificates during the early Qianlong period is helpful for us in clarifying the amount and regional distribution of Chinese monks since the mid-Qing Dynasty. The total number of Buddhist monks did not change measurably during the two hundred years from Qianlong's reign until the Republic period, remaining between 600,000 and 700,000. Although the census in the 1930s did not cover Taoist monks, as previously discussed, their number may have been similar to that during Qianlong's reign. As a result, the number of monks (both Buddhist and Taoist) did not change much after the mid-Qing Dynasty, despite many historical changes since the 19th century, such as population growth, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement, the promotion of education with temple property, and the warlord conflicts. The number of Buddhist monks in Northern China declined significantly from 1742 to 1936, while that in the regions along the midstream and downstream of the Yangtze River and in Southwestern China, it increased significantly. However, the geographical layout of Chinese Buddhism did not change much, as there was neither a noticeable decline nor a noticeable revival in the number of monks and nuns.

Keywords: Buddhist monks; Buddhist geography; ordination certificate

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Preface

At the beginning of the study of modern Buddhist history, some Christian publications, such as *The Chinese Recorder*, and missionaries, such as Karl Ludvig Reichelt (艾香德, 1877–1952), began paying great attention to what they called the “revival” of Buddhism in China. After the widespread use of Christian missionaries, the modern “revival” of Buddhism became a well-known concept. In particular, the “revival” paradigm of modern Chinese Buddhism put forward by Holmes Welch has had a great influence in academic circles (Welch 1968). Although some scholars thought that the innovation of modern Buddhism in China failed in the 1960s and 1970s,¹ the “revival” paradigm has always been in a dominant position, which has influenced the research of mainland scholars after 1979.² In the new century, with the deepening and refinement of research, the general works on the history of modern Buddhism in China have gradually decreased, and the focus of research has shifted from whether or how modern Buddhism itself was “revived”.³

Many people debate the decline of Buddhism in modern China and believe that there are various causes for this decline. However, the reasons they have found are often contradictory. On the one hand, some of them think that the decline in the number of monks in China (with some even claiming that the number of monks in China dropped from one million to ten thousand) is a sign Buddhism's decline. On the other hand, others believe that the abolition of the system of the ordination certificate is responsible for the decline of Buddhism in China. Without this system, the number of monks was out of control, and there were too many monks, which attracted a large number of social idlers into Buddhism.

The sharp increase in the number of monks, however, caused a serious decline in the quality of monks, and the original temple economy could not afford these new monks, leading to further deterioration of the temple economy.

However, the number of monastics and Buddhist monasteries in a particular place and period is the most significant indication for gauging the evolution of Chinese Buddhism. The mid-18th century repeal by the Qing dynasty of the ordination certificates, which had been in effect for more than a millennium, was a pivotal moment in the evolution of the modern Buddhist institution. The introduction of ordination certificates was perhaps one of the most significant means by which the government administered monasticism during the entire time of imperial China. It reflected the subjugation of ecclesiastical power to the monarchy and brought the monastic community under effective secular rule.

The complete abolishment of the ordination certificate (度牒) during Qianlong's reign, which had lasted for over one thousand years, was a milestone in the administration of the Chinese government towards monks. Emperor Qianlong tried to reinforce the administration of the ordination certificate before he abolished it. In the year 1738, in one of his imperial edicts, Emperor Qianlong proclaimed the aim of issuing ordination certificates to monks: "Just as the Tithing System (保甲), ordination certificates can verify the legitimacy of a monk, in this way, no one can pretend to be a monk" (令有所稽考, 亦如民間之有保甲, 不至藏奸。 *Daqing huidian shili*, 大清會典實例, V501).

According to the traditional view, the abolishment of the ordination certificate was directly related to the policy of abolishing the head tax in the mid-Qing Dynasty. However, as pointed out by Mr. Yang Jian (楊健) in his new book *Qing wangchao fojiao shiwu guanli* (清王朝佛教事務管理, Administration of Buddhist Affairs in the Qing Dynasty), "the ordination certificate is related to the head tax, as it has the economic function of exempting the head tax, but this economic function is secondary and subsidiary. The ordination certificate is the product of the contest between the feudal dynasties and Buddhism, the manifestation of the relationship between kingship and Buddhism, and one of the typical symbols of the Sinicization of Buddhism. The most fundamental thing about an ordination certificate is the relationship between politics and religion, which is the first and foremost thing. The economic relationship embodied in the ordination certificate is peripheral. It can be assumed that, if the Qing Dynasty could still effectively manage the monks and nuns through the ordination certificate, that is, even if there was 'a reform that abolished the head tax and merged it into the agricultural tax' (攤丁入畝), the ordination certificate system may not be abolished because the most fundamental function of the ordination certificate to manage the monks and nuns has not disappeared. In other words, abolishing the head tax and merging it into the agricultural tax is not a sufficient condition for the abolition of the system of the ordination certificate" (J. J. Yang 2008). Mr. Yang Jian believes that, apart from the causes such as "a reform that abolished the head tax and merged it into the agricultural tax" and losing the economic function of the ordination certificate, the external reasons for the abolishment of the ordination certificate are two: one is that the administrative system of Buddhist affairs in the Qing Dynasty was basically determined, and the other is the perfunctory actions of local officials. In my opinion, the main principle that Mr. Yang has stated is very reasonable. Regardless of whether there is an ordination certificate or not, unless it is specially approved, the Qing Dynasty levied taxes on monasteries and estates, but there is still room for further discussion on the analysis of the specific reasons for the abolition of ordination certificates.

Mr. Yang Jian believes that during Qianlong's reign, the monk official system had matured and could fully utilize role of 'ruling monks by monks'. Additionally, the secular regime had extensively intervened in Buddhist affairs through the Tithing System, enabling the Qing Dynasty to manage monks and nuns at the most basic level of society. Finally, after more than a century of efforts, the *Daqing Loli* (大清律例, The Case Summaries of Laws of the Great Qing Dynasty) had been formulated and served as the core of all laws, and the legal system of the Qing Dynasty was fully established by 1740. Mr. Yang Jian be-

believes that the rulers of the Qing Dynasty did not worry about any adverse consequences following the abolition of the ordination certificate system” (J. Yang 2008, p. 157).

The points raised by Mr. Yang Jian, such as the mature monk-official system, the dynasty’s intervention in Buddhism with the Tithing System, and the consummate legal system, were not unique to the Qing dynasty. These are all stories from the previous dynasties, yet they did not abolish the ordination certificate. Moreover, current academic research on the history of the legal system depends not only on the formulation of rules and regulations but also on their implementation, feasibility, and to what extent they can be executed. Based on historical data, it is challenging to assert that “the Qing Dynasty could implement the administration of monks and nuns to the most basic level of society”⁴ Additionally, if these statements were true and the management of monks and nuns were fully implemented in the Qing Dynasty, there would not have been any “perfunctory actions of local officials” that Mr. Yang also noticed.

As a matter of fact, the abolition of the ordination certificate system was not an active choice of the Qing Dynasty, but rather a helpless one. It was the result of the complete failure and collapse of the ordination certificate system and its collapse. To some extent, it can be said that the religious policy of the Qing Dynasty failed. Nonetheless, the number and geographical distribution of the last ordination certificate issued by the Qing Dynasty are still useful for studying the overall situation of monks in China during that period.

The total number of ordination certificates issued between 1736 and 1739 was 340,112. Analyzing of the quantity and geographical distribution of the first few years of Qianlong’s reign, and comparing it with the investigation and statistics of Buddhism in the Republic of China, will help us understand the amount and regional distribution of Chinese monks since the mid-Qing Dynasty and even later.

Using geographic information systems (GIS) and data statistics to study the development and evolution of Buddhism can provide a rough quantitative evaluation of religion. Although this method has limitations due to the data itself, it can objectively reflect the hidden rules of data compared to speculation. Scholars have started to use GIS and data statistics to study the geographical distribution of monks in China. For instance, Yang Fenggang edited an atlas that used GIS and data statistics to produce more than 150 full-color maps, including six case studies analyzing the distribution of major religions in China at the national, provincial, and county levels, describing the main organizations, beliefs, and ceremonies of major religions in China, as well as the social and demographic characteristics of their followers (F. Yang 2018). Zhong Yexi et al. used religious site data in China and analyzed the temporal and spatial changes of the distribution of religious sites in China, taking the city as the research unit and Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity as the research objects. They applied the methods of statistics and spatial analysis to explore the distribution and development trends of major religions in China (Zhong and Bao 2014). Huanyang Zhao et al. investigated the spread processes of Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity in the coastal areas of China, taking Zhejiang Province as an example since 1949. They proposed and discussed the spatial distribution dynamics and diffusion processes of religious institutions, using GIS (Zhao et al. 2017). Additionally, Marcus Bingenheimer used GIS to visualize the pilgrimage routes recorded in the 19th century book *Knowing the Paths of Pilgrimage* (*Canxue zhijin* 參學知津) written by Ruhai Xiancheng (如海顯承), showing the pilgrimage network of temples (Bingenheimer 2016).

1. Comments on the Studies of Goossaert and Chang

According to my understanding, the most notable studies on the number and distribution of ordination certificates during the early Qianlong period are those conducted by the French scholar Vincent Goossaert and the Chinese scholar Chang Jianhua (常建華). Goossaert’s “Counting the Monks: The 1736–1739 Census of the Chinese Clergy”⁵ and Chang’s “On the Administration of Monks in the Early Qianlong Period” (*Qingshi luncong* 2002), have provided valuable insights into this topic with abundant resources.

1.1. The Research of Goossaert

Goossaert discovered two incomplete annual reports (Huangce, 黄册) by the Board of Rites (禮部) to the throne, which were located in the Number One Historical Archives (第一歷史檔案館). These reports covered the periods Qianlong 2.10.1 to Qianlong 3.10.29 (22 November 1737 to 9 December 1738) and Qianlong 4.10.30 (29 December 1738 to 30 November 1739), respectively. They recorded the number of monks and nuns reported by some counties in Shuntian (順天府), Zhili (直隸, now Hebei Province), Shengjing, Shandong, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hunan, Sichuan, Fujian, Guangdong and Guizhou provinces at that time; However, there were no records or too much missing data to file in Shaanxi, Hubei, Jiangxi, Yunnan, Henan, Shanxi, Gansu, Guangxi, and other provinces in these provinces. Nevertheless, Goossaert found the total number of monks and nuns reported by Shaanxi, Hubei, Jiangxi, Yunnan and other provinces in *Daqing huidian shili* (大清會典實例), so that only Henan, Shanxi, Gansu and Guangxi are completely unknown. Based on the data provided in these two official reports, together with those in *Daqing huidian shili*, Goossaert extrapolated the amount and regional distribution of monks during that period as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Professor Goossaert’s estimated numbers of monks and Taoists in each province in 1737 and 1738.

	Documented Counties	Total Counties	Total from Two Extant Huangce	Extrapolated Total	Taoists to Clergy %
1. Documented provinces					
Shuntian	11	25	3656	8309	13.4%
Zhili	94	119	10,950	13,862	20.8%
Shengjing	22	23	4034	4217	21.1%
Shandong	46	107	13,284	27,469	35.3%
Anhui	42	56	22,481	25,576	7.0%
Jiangsu	20	66	9334	28,030	15.7%
Zhejiang	33	78	19,886	39,428	4.0%
Hunan	34	69	9279	11,426	16.0%
Sichuan	37	125	2839	9591	9.3%
Fujian	58	65	11,443	12,824	4.2%
Guangdong	54	88	12,525	20,411	7.8%
Guizhou	51	60	1708	2009	0.5%
2. Provinces for which the total is known					
Shaanxi	0	79		7911	
Hubei	0	69		29,152	
Jiangxi	0	78		31,099	
Yunnan	0	81		3750	
Total				275,065	
Remaining				65,047	
3. Completely undocumented provinces					
Henan	0	106		26,318	
Shanxi	5	96		19,479	
Gansu	0	57		11,696	
Guangxi	23	98		7554	
Grand Total	531	1545		340,112 (340,111 in fact)	13.4%

The main task of Goossaert was to divide the total of 340,112 ordination certificates into different portions and distribute them to each province. According to my understanding, the provinces can be categorized into three groups: (A) those about which he knew the accurate reported amount of ordination certificates at that time; (B) those with incomplete data, only a few from some counties; and (C) those with little detailed information. Shandong (27,469), Anhui (25,576), Hunan (11,426), Shaanxi (7911), Hubei (29,152), Jiangxi (31,099) and Yunnan (3750) were all in Group A. Group B included Shuntian, Zhili, Shengjing, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Sichuan, Fujian, Guangdong, and Guizhou. And Group C included Henan, Shanxi, Gansu and Guangxi.

For the last two groups, Goossaert calculated the total number of ordination certificates in each province by extrapolation. For group B, he extrapolated using the following formula:

Extrapolated total = total from two extant Huangce/documented counties * total counties

For group C, he deducted the total of the first two groups (275,065) from the grand total (340,112). The remainder (65,047) is the total amount in the relevant provinces. Then, Goossaert portioned out this total of 65,047 into the four provinces according to their population ratios at that time: Henan (12,847,909), Shanxi (9,509,266), Gansu (5,709,526), Guangxi (3,687,725). As a result, the numbers of ordination certificates he obtained for the above four provinces were 26,318, 19,479, 11,696, and 7554 respectively.

By adding the numbers of ordination certificates in each province, we can get 340,111. In this way, Goossaert almost accomplished his proposed task. His analysis and extrapolation were impressive. However, we should also be aware of the following two points:

The extrapolation of the total number of ordination certificates in a certain province based on the rate of documented and undocumented counties, may result in inaccuracies due to the differences among counties.

The distribution of 65,047 ordination certificates to the four provinces in the last group according to the population ratio may probably lead to even greater inaccuracy. This is because the extrapolated number of 65,047, as the remainder based on the extrapolation of Group B, may itself be inaccurate itself, as explained ahead. Moreover, the distribution of monks in these four provinces, including the Central Plains and remote frontiers, would not be so even because of different topographical features. In particular, the extrapolated number of monks—11,696 in Gansu and 7554 in Guangxi—seems to be huge. Even when compared with the figure of 1047 shown in the Huangce that Goossaert mentioned, the number of ordination certificates in Guangxi still seems to have been exaggerated.

1.2. The Research of Chang

In addition to common historical resources, Chang's research involved in *The written official reports stored in the palace during Qianlong's reign*, edited by the Palace Museum in Taipei. However, Huangce, the main resource used by Goossaert, was not involved in Chang's research. The distinguishing feature of Chang's research is the statistics on the number of monks based on the data revealed in 37 official written reports from different provinces, as shown in the Table 2 below.⁶

Having issued 340,112 ordination certificates from the years 1736 to 1739, the policy of the central government is gradually reduced the number of certificates. In accordance with this policy, local officials reported fewer ordination certificates each year. As a result, the later the certificate, the fewer certificates issued, and the greater the gap between the existing and the original number of certificates.

Table 2. Professor Chang’s estimated numbers of monks and Taoists in each province from 1750 to 1753.

Area	Original ⁷	1750	1751	1752	1753
Zhili			9205	9151	
Jiangsu	24,687 (issued in 1749)	24,299	23,981		
Anhui	25,576		20,250	19,928	
Shandong	27,469	19,876	19,489	19,004	
Shaanxi	7911		5491	5343	5284
Gansu		1119	1088	1075	
Zhejiang	52,566			40,300	39,926
Jiangxi	31,099 (including those issued afterwards)		23,450	23,168	22,857
Hubei	29,152		21,312	21,013	20,861
Hunan	11,426		9146	8971	8861
Sichuan				7006	6933
Fujian				7305	7147
Guangdong		10,310	10,177	9904	9782
Guangxi		640	629	616	608
Yunnan	3750	2495 + ?	2413 + 2	2338 + 11	2298 + 9
Guizhou			1172	1158	1145
Total				176,291	

Notes: ? means unclear.

1.3. Comparison of Goossaert with Chang

In the comparison between Goossaert and Chang, I compared the number of certificates between 1736 and 1739 that Chang found in the official reports with the number extrapolated by Goossaert, as follows (Table 3):

Table 3. A comparison of the similarities and differences in the estimated numbers of monks and Taoists in each province in the mid-18th century by Professors Goossaert and Chang.

Area	Goossaert’s Extrapolation on the Number of Ordination Certificate during 1736–1739	Chang	
		Number of Ordination Certificate Closest to 1736–1739	Time of Report
Shuntian	8309 ⁸		
Zhili	13,862	9205	1751
Shengjing	4217		
Shandong	27,469	27,469	Original
Anhui	25,576	25,576	Original
Jiangsu	28,030	24,687	1749
Zhejiang	39,428	52,566	Original
Hunan	11,426	11,426	Original
Sichuan	9591	7006	1752

Table 3. Cont.

Area	Goossaert's Extrapolation on the Number of Ordination Certificate during 1736–1739	Chang	
		Number of Ordination Certificate Closest to 1736–1739	Time of Report
Fujian	12,824	7305	1752
Guangdong	20,411	10,310	1750
Guizhou	2009	1172	1751
Shaanxi	7911	7911	Original
Hubei	29,152	29,152	Original
Jiangxi	31,099	31,099	Original (including those issued in 1742)
Yunnan	3750	3750	Original
Henan	26,318		
Shanxi	19,479		
Gansu	11,696	1119	1750
Guangxi	7554	640	1750
Grand Total	340,112		

From the above table, we can see that the number of certificates from 1749 to 1752 that Chang found in all provinces is less than the number extrapolated by Goossaert from 1736 to 1739. From this point of view, Goossaert's extrapolation is generally reliable. However, we may also notice the case of Guangdong province: the gap in figures between the two groups is much too great, with the extrapolated number almost twice the number recorded in the official reports, which is likely closer to reality. This may imply that the figure for Guangdong province is exaggerated. Furthermore, in the case of Zhejiang province, the extrapolated number of 39,428 appears to be too far from the 52,566 that Chang has found, with a difference of 13,138. According to Goossaert's formula, the total number of ordination certificates in the four provinces of Henan, Shanxi, Gansu, and Guangxi in Group C should be revised from 65,047 to 51,909 ($=65,047 - 13,138$).

Chang found that totals for Gansu and Guangxi in 1750 were 1119 and 640 respectively, while Goossaert found the total for Guangxi in Huangce was 1047. Though there are differences, we can assume that the total number of ordination certificates issued in both Gansu and Guangxi between 1736 and 1739, would not exceed 3000. Additionally, the total for Henan and Shanxi during that period was around 49,000. Based on the close location of Henan and Shanxi, adjacent to each other and both in Northern China, we could assume that the densities of monks in these two provinces are equal. Then, if we divide the number of ordination certificates in Henan and Shanxi based on the population ratio, the number for Henan would be 28,000 and 21,000 for Shanxi. This result is quite close to that extrapolated by Goossaert.

Based on the data that Chang found in the official reports, especially the originally issued number of ordination certificates in Zhejiang province, we can conclude that Goossaert's extrapolations were generally reliable, and some amendments should be made towards Zhejiang, Gansu, and Guangxi.

The following part will continue to discuss the amount and regional distribution of Chinese monks after the mid-Qing Dynasty.

2. The Number and Regional Distribution of Chinese Monks after Mid-Qing Dynasty

After 1739, Emperor Qianlong aimed to limit the number of monks through strict control over newly issued ordination certificates, rather than abolishing the Certificate altogether. Qianlong's policy involved no longer issuing new ordination certificates, in the

hope that the already issued Certificates could be passed down from one generation of ordained monks to the next. Each monk, whether Buddhist or Taoist, could only recruit one disciple, and the ordination certificate would be passed to the disciple after the master's death, rather than issuing a new Certificate to them. As a result, one ordination certificate effectively covered two monks, the master and their disciple. While local Buddhists and Taoists were theoretically not allowed to adopt disciples, in reality, this was not the case. The government at that time estimated that around 300,000 ordination certificates had been issued by the Board of Rites, and only one disciple was allowed among those monks who owned the Certificate. According to this estimate, the total number of monks (including both masters and disciples) was around 600,000 (*Qing Gaozong shilu* (清高宗實錄) V94).

Based on the above reasons, it is believed that there were at least 680,224 (=340,112 * 2) monks in China between 1736 and 1739, given the 340,112 ordination certificates that were issued during that period. Based on the research of both Goossaert and Chang, the following conclusion can be drawn (Table 4):

Table 4. The author's estimation of the actual number of monks in each province in the mid-18th century.

Rank	Area	Extrapolation of the Ordination Certificate during 1736–1739
1	Zhejiang	105,132–
2	Jiangxi	62,198 ⁹
3	Hubei	58,304
4	Jiangsu	56,060
5	Henan	?56,000
6	Shandong	54,938
7	Anhui	51,152
8	Shanxi	?42,000
9	Guangdong	40,822
10	Zhili	27,724
11	Fujian	25,648
12	Hunan	22,852
13	Sichuan	19,182
14	Shuntian	16,618
15	Shaanxi	15,822
16	Shengjing	8434
17	Yunnan	7500
18	Guizhou	4018
19	Gansu	?3600
20	Guangxi	?2220
	Total	680,224

Notes: ? means unclear.

(The number for Jiangxi in the above table should be slightly lower, but since it is only a rough estimate, so the estimated number of renewal certificates for the year 1742 will not be revised. Additionally, the estimate for Guangdong Province may be slightly inflated).

From the table above, we can categorize the regional distribution of monks in the mid-Qing Dynasty as follows:

(1) Zhejiang Province has over 100,000 people; (2) Provinces such as Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Hubei, Anhui, Shandong, and Henan have over 50,000 people; (3) Provinces such as Guangdong, Shanxi, Zhili, Hunan, Fujian and Sichuan have between 20,000 to below 50,000 people; (4) Provinces such as Shaanxi and Shuntian have around 15,000 people; and (5) Provinces such as Shengjing, Yunnan, and Guizhou have only a few thousand people.

It is revealed that the Yangtze River’s southern area (the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River: Jiangsu and Zhejiang) is the center of Buddhism, from which it radiates westward (the middle reaches of the Yangtze River: Hunan, Hubei and Sichuan, etc.), northward (North China: Anhui, Henan, Shanxi, Shandong, Zhili, etc.) and southward (Jiangxi, Fujian, etc.); Meanwhile, southwest China (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi and other provinces), northwest China (Shaanxi, Gansu), and northeast China (Shengjing), which are farther away from the southern area of the Yangtze River, have fewer monks or nuns.

Regarding the proportion of monks and nuns, Mr. Chang Jianhua has only sorted out a few data points for reference. Only the proportion of monks and nuns in Jiangsu Province from 1749 to 1751 and the proportion of monks and nuns originally issued by Hunan Province from 1736 to 1739 can be calculated (Table 5):

Table 5. The proportion of monks and Taoists in Jiangsu and Hunan provinces in the mid-18th century.

Number of Monks	Area
More than 100,000	Zhejiang
Between 50,000 and 100,000	Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Hubei, Anhui, Shandong, Henan
Between 20,000 and 50,000	Guangdong, Shanxi, Zhili, Hunan, Fujian, Sichuan
Around 15,000	Shaanxi, Shuntian
Less than 10,000	Shengjing, Yunnan, Guizhou, Gansu, Guangxi

In this sense, the religious center of China is situated in the Jiangnan Delta, along the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, especially in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. From this religious center, the influence of religion radiated westward to Hunan, Hubei, and Sichuan, along the middle reaches of the Yangtze River; northward to Anhui, Henan, Shanxi, Shandong and Zhili, in northern China; and southward to Jiangxi and Fujian. Meanwhile, in the areas far from the center, such as the southwestern part (including Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi), the northwestern part (including Shaanxi and Gansu), and the northeastern part (Shengjing), the number of monks decreased significantly.

Regarding the ratio of monks to clergy, Chang’s data provides only limited information. Only the ratio of monks to clergy in Jiangsu between 1749 and 1751 and that in Hunan between 1736 and 1739 can be determined (Table 6).

Table 6. The proportion of monks and Taoists with ordination certificates in Zhejiang, Shanxi, and Gansu provinces in the mid-18th century.

Area	Year	Buddhists	Taoists	Taoists to Clergy % (by Chang)	Taoists to Clergy % (by Goossaert)
Jiangsu	1749	20,674	4013	19.4%	15.7%
	1750	20,353	3946	19.4%	
	1751	20,069	3912	19.5%	
Hunan	Original (1736–1739)	9603	1823	19.0%	16.0%

Additionally, they are valuable in figuring out the variations in both the number of monks and the number of ordination certificates in Zhejiang, Shanxi, and Gansu (Table 7).

Table 7. The distribution of Buddhist temples in each province in the second half of the 18th century.

Area	Year	Buddhists	Taoists	Taoists to Clergy % (by Chang)	Taoists to Clergy % (by Goossaert)
Zhejiang	1751 (number of newly issued certificates)	2575	183	7.1%	4.0%
	1751 (number of monks without certificates)	6177	287	4.6%	
	1752 (number of newly issued certificates)	2804	196	7.0%	
	1752 (number of monks without certificates)	6082	274	4.5%	
Shanxi	1751 (reduced number of certificates)	277	38	16.7%	
	1752 (reduced number of certificates)	226	46	20.4%	
Gansu	1751 (reduced number of certificates)	26	8	30.8%	

Goossaert believed that ratio of Taoist monks to clergy was around 13.4% during that period, which may be accurate. In other words, there were at least 600,000 Buddhist monks and 100,000 Taoist monks during Qianlong’s reign.

In the following section, my discussion will delve deeper into the regional distribution of Buddhist monks, taking into consideration the number and regional distribution of Buddhist temples during Qianlong’s reign. The reasons for leaving Taoist monks aside is twofold: first, Buddhist monks outnumbered Taoist monks; and second, many Taoist monks did not live in temples, making the relationship between Taoist monks and temples was looser than that between Buddhist monks and temples. Additionally, resources on Taoist monks are limited, so further extrapolation and comparison on them may result in inaccuracy, if not outright error.

Between 1764 and 1784, the *Daqing yitong Gazetteer* (大清一統志) was compiled and edited. According to the statistics compiled by the Japanese scholar Kanayama Shōkō (金山正好), this series of books recorded 2396 Buddhist temples at that time. Based on his data, I categorized them based on province as follows (Table 8):

Table 8. The distribution and gender ratio of monks in each province in the first half of the 20th century.

Rank	Area	Average Number of Temples in Each Prefecture	Total Number of Temples in the Province
1	Jiangsu	18.6	205
2	Zhili	16.3	294
3	Hubei	15.9	143
4	Zhejiang	13.7	151
5	Henan	13.5	175
6	Shanxi	11.4	228
7	Shaanxi	10.7	128
8	Guizhou	10.2	122
9	Jiangxi	9.9	139

Table 8. Cont.

Rank	Area	Average Number of Temples in Each Prefecture	Total Number of Temples in the Province
10	Hunan	9.2	119
11	Shandong	8.9	107
12	Anhui	8.2	106
13	Fujian	6.8	82
14	Guangdong	6.0	72
15	Yunnan	6.0	121
16	Sichuan	5.5	122
17	Shengjing	5.0	26
18	Guangxi	3.6	36
19	Gansu	2.5	20

From the table above, the provinces with an average of more than 15 included Jiangsu, Zhili, and Hubei. Those with an average between 11 and 14 were Zhejiang, Henan and Shanxi. Provinces with an average between 8 and 11 included Shaanxi, Guizhou, Jiangxi, Hunan, Shandong, and Anhui. Those between 5 and 7 included Fujian, Guangdong, Yunnan, and Sichuan. Provinces with average below 5 included Shengjing, Guangxi and Gansu. Therefore, during Qianlong's reign, officially authorized Buddhist temples were highly centralized along and around the downstream of the Yangtze River, such as Jiangsu, Hubei, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, and Anhui. They were also found in northern China, such as Zhili, Henan, Shaanxi, and Shanxi, as well as coastal areas in the southeast, like Fujian and Guangdong, and the southwestern part, like Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan. However, there were even fewer temples in northeastern, Gansu and Guangxi.

The conclusion drawn from the *Gazetteer* about the regional distribution of Buddhist temples is quite similar to that of monks between 1736 and 1739 that we previously analyzed previously, particularly the overall layout. That is to say, the regions along the midstream and downstream of the Yangtze River ranked first in both the number of officially authorized Buddhist monks and temples. From this point of view, it was the center of Chinese Buddhism. The southwestern and southeastern regions came in second and third, respectively. The influence of Buddhism became weaker in the northwestern regions and Guangxi. However, there were some divergences. For instance, the number of Buddhist temples in Northern China ranked high, but that was not the case for the number of Buddhist monks there. In the southwestern regions, such as Guizhou, the number of temples outnumbered monks. Such divergence might be the result of statistics and the policy of the central government. In the Jiangnan Delta where Buddhism was popular, the central government would limit the number of Buddhist temples, and in order to adapt to this policy, the local officials in these regions might have made false reports about the number of monks. While Buddhism was not as popular in the remote regions, the central government would allot more temple quotas of temples there to balance the influence of Buddhism in different regions. The northern regions might be allotted more quotas than other regions due to historical and geographical factors because they were close to the political capital.

In short, though the ordination certificate and the Buddhist monks and temples discussed here were limited to the officially authorized ones, it is still meaningful and valuable for us to understand the development of Buddhism throughout China during Qianlong's reign. It is clear that during that period, Buddhism flourished most along the midstream and downstream of the Yangtze River. The northern regions ranked second, the coastal areas in the southeast and the southwestern regions were third; while the influence of

Buddhism was even weaker in the northwestern regions, the northeastern regions, and Guangxi province.

3. Further Comparison

There has been no nationwide census on monks, whether Buddhist or Taoist, since the system of ordination certificates was completely abolished in the mid-Qianlong period, until the Society of Chinese Buddhism conducted one in the 1930s. According to its data, there were more than 267,000 Buddhist temples and 738,000 Buddhist monks all over China in the 1930s. In the case of Taoism, there was no nationwide data about Taoist monks and temples even during the Republic Period. Goossaert has noted that there were about 50,000 Taoist monks were living in temples in 1949 (Goossaert 2004). Since China had experienced many wars before 1949, and many Taoists did not live in temples, there should have been more Taoists during the Republic Period than in 1949 (about 50,000), but the number may have been similar to the figure during Qianlong’s reign (more than 100,000), as I extrapolated in the previous section. Because of the low percentage of Taoist monks and the lack of resources, the focus of the next section is still on Buddhist monks.

With the help of other resources, Holms Welch has sorted the statistical data compiled by the Society of Chinese Buddhism, which was published in the 1936 edition of the *Shen-pao Yearbook* (Shanghai) (*Shen-pao Yearbook* 1936). I will compare the number of Buddhist monks during Qianlong’s reign with that in the 1930s in different provinces and figure out their trends of change (Welch 1967) (Table 9):

Table 9. The distributional changes of the number of monks in each province in China in the past 200 years (from the mid-18th century to the first half of the 20th century).

Province	Extrapolated Number of Ordination Certificate between 1736 and 1739	Census of Buddhist Monks in the 1930s	Trend
Zhejiang	105,132	107,700	
Jiangxi	62,198	2640	Obviously down
Hubei	58,304	76,040	Up
Jiangsu	56,060	171,760 (excluding 6200 in Shanghai)	Obviously up
Henan	256,000	2960	Obviously down
Shandong	54,938	4730 (excluding 1490 in Qingdao)	Obviously down
Anhui	51,152	29,540	Obviously down
Shanxi	242,000	16,640	Obviously down
Guangdong	40,822	19,120	Obviously down
Zhili	27,722	2100 (Hebei)	Obviously down
Fujian	25,648	33,360	
Hunan	22,852	62,400	Obviously up
Sichuan	19,182	158,610	Obviously up
Shuntian	16,618	1340 (Beijing)	Obviously down
Shaanxi	15,822	1010	Obviously down

Table 9. Cont.

Province	Extrapolated Number of Ordination Certificate between 1736 and 1739	Census of Buddhist Monks in the 1930s	Trend
Shengjing	8434	1480 (including 770 in Liaoning and 710 in Heilongjiang)	
Yunnan	7500	37,180	Obviously up
Guizhou	4018	810	Down
Gansu	73600	490	Down
Guangxi	72218	460	Down
Grand Total	680,224	738,200	Maintaining in a stable level with slight raise

Notes: ? means unclear.

According to the available resources, the total number of Buddhist monks did not change significantly during the two hundred years from Qianlong's reign to the Republic Period, staying within a range between 600,000 to 700,000. Although the census in the 1930s did not cover Taoist monks, as previously discussed, their numbers may have been similar to those during Qianlong's reign. As a result, the total number of monks (both Buddhist and Taoist) remained relatively constant since the mid-Qing Dynasty, despite significant historical changes in the 19th century, such as population growth, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement, the promotion of education with temple property, and the warlord conflicts.

The table above also shows that the number of Buddhist monks in Northern China, including Shandong, Henan, Anhui, Shanxi, and Shaanxi, declined significantly from 1742 to 1936, while the number in the regions along the midstream and downstream of the Yangtze River and in southwestern China, including Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Yunnan increased considerably. However, the geographical distribution of Chinese Buddhism remained relatively unchanged. Regions along the midstream and downstream of the Yangtze River continued to be the epicenter of Chinese Buddhism, accounting for more than half of all Buddhist monks in China. Zhejiang province previously had the highest number of Buddhist monks, but after the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement, Jiangsu became the top province, and Zhejiang province's population decreased by half. Nevertheless, the number of Buddhist monks in Zhejiang province did not change significantly due to the movement.

4. Conclusions

Emperor Qianlong did not intend to abolish the ordination certificate but stopped issuing new ones in the hope of reducing the number of monks. However, he later found that this policy was futile in controlling the population of monks, as it only increased the number of monks without an ordination certificate. This led to difficulties in selecting Senglu Si (僧录司) and Daolu Si (道录司) officials, as candidates for these positions were required to have their own ordination certificate. According to a source, "since the emperor stopped issuing ordination certificates, there are few monks who fit the position (of Senglu Si and Daolu Si)" (自牒照停止頒給以來，選充無人). This difficulty prompted the emperor to adapt his policy to the needs of administration. He planned to reissue the ordination certificate in 1771 but changed his mind due to the trouble it would cause, ultimately leading to the complete abolition of the ordination certificate. After this abolishment, the number of monks did not increase rapidly, instead maintaining a stable level until the Republic Period. Regardless of the existence of the ordination certificate, the number of monks has never exceeded one million, and it did not change rapidly after the abolishment of the ordination certificate. Therefore, the system of ordination certificates, which had lasted for

over a thousand years, lost its efficacy during Qianlong's reign and was abolished at the end. From this point of view, the system of ordination certificates is not an effective way to control the number of monks. Attention should be paid to the regional distribution disequilibrium of Chinese monks, with the majority located along the Yangtze River and the sharp reduction in the number of monks in Northern China from the Mid-Qing Dynasty to the Republic Period.

The number of monks did not change much before and after the abolition of the ordination certificate system during the Qianlong period. Even from the middle of the Qing Dynasty until the Republic of China, the number of monks in China remained surprisingly stable. This stability was manifested not only evident in the number of monks but also in their regional distribution. While it is commonly known that Buddhism thrived in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, academic research must rely on data to substantiate this view, including the distribution of monks and monasteries. This data can also provide a basis for explaining many modern Buddhist events. The further decline in the number of Buddhist monks in the north after the mid-Qing Dynasty can only be explained by the rise of folk secret sects¹⁰ and the Boxer Rebellion (義和團運動), which is also a valuable academic issue. Additionally, North China has more farmers and South China has more tenants. The traditional temple economy in China is better suited to the environment in South China, which may be one of the important reasons why Buddhism is weaker in North China than that in South China. Furthermore, during the late Qing and early Republican eras, Nanjing's position as the political capital and the emergence of Shanghai, initially part of Jiangsu province at this time, had a catalytic influence on Buddhism in Jiangsu.

Nevertheless, this article cannot address all the issues mentioned above. It does, however, reveal the impressive stability of traditional Buddhism in China. Many systems and operational modes in China's traditional society demonstrate astonishing resilience, and they are often effective if they are not severely impacted by external forces.

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Notes

- ¹ For example, Shi Dongchu's (釋東初) *Zhongguo fojiao jindaishi* (中國佛教近代史, the Modern History of Buddhism in China, 1974).
- ² Scholars' research on the history of modern Buddhism was initially derived from the research field of the history of modern thought, such as Ma Tianxiang's (麻天祥) *Wanqing foxue yu jindai shehui sichao* (晚清佛學與近代社會思潮, Buddhism in the Late Qing Dynasty and Modern Social Thoughts, 1992), Li Xiangping's (李向平) *Jiushi yu jiuixin: zhongguo jindai fojiao fuxing sichao yanjiu* (救世與救心: 中國近代佛教復興思潮研究, Saving the World and Saving the Hearts: A Study on the Revival of Modern Buddhism in China, 1993), He Jianming's (何建明) *Fofa de jindai tiaoshi* (佛法的近代調適, Modern Adjustment of Buddhism, 1998), and Chen Bing (陳兵) and Deng Zimei's (鄧子美) *Ershi shiji zhongguo fojiao* (二十世紀中國佛教, 20th Century China Buddhism).
- ³ The concept of "revival", proposed by Holmes Welch, has been a topic of controversy in recent years. In the special issue on "Revisiting the Revival: Holmes Welch and the Study of Buddhism in Twentieth-Century China" in *Studies in Chinese Religions*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2017, pp. 197–300, many scholars have examined modern religious issues in relation to politics and other social forces with the goal of uncovering how religious changes have shaped modern political, economic, and social life in China (Goossaert and Palmer 2012). Others have sought to address important historical facts and possible threads of modern Buddhism's development that were overlooked in the previous "revival" paradigm by using concepts such as "restoration", "adaptation", "reconstruction", and "revitalization" (Kiely and Jessup 2016).
- ⁴ To a certain extent, there existed a situation of "monks ruling monks" in the Qing Dynasty, but the system that played a crucial role was not the "bureaucratic" style or the top-down monk official system, but rather the patriarchal clan system.
- ⁵ *Late Imperial China*, vol. 21, no. 2(2000), pp. 40–85.

- ⁶ Similar to the research materials and methods used by Mr. Chang Jianhua, Mr. Yang Jian also compiled a table showing the number of monks and Taoist priests in all provinces during the Qianlong period. This table is contained in Gongzhongdang qianlongchao zouzhe (宮中檔乾隆朝奏摺, the Memorial of the Qianlong Dynasty in the Palace, Series 1–7, Taipei: National Palace Museum, May–November, 1982). The table is basically the same as the one listed by Mr. Chang Jianhua, with the same number in Zhili, Anhui, Shandong, Shaanxi, Gansu, Jiangxi, Sichuan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou. However, Fujian province is not listed, and Shuntian is supplemented with other materials instead. The data of Jiangsu and Hunan provinces listed in Mr. Yang Jian’s table differ from those in Mr. Chang Jianhua’s table, with 20,674 people, 20,353 people, and 20,069 people in Jiangsu Province in 1785, 1786, and 1787, respectively. There were 9603 people before 1785, and 7600 people, 7444 people, and 7349 people in 1786, 1787, and 1788, respectively, in Hunan Province. The data of Jiangsu and Hunan provinces in Mr. Yang Jian’s table are slightly lower than those in Mr. Chang Jianhua’s table. In addition, in the data of Zhejiang Province in 1787 and 1788, Mr. Yang Jian’s table indicates that “there are 6464 people who have no certificate” and “there are 6356 people who have no certificate”. There are two groups of data in Hubei Province in 1786, 1887, 1788, one group is the same as that listed by Mr. Chang Jianhua, and the other group is slightly less, with 21,245, 20,936, and 20,771 people, respectively. I believe that Mr. Yang Jian’s table differs slightly from Mr. Chang Jianhua’s table, and this slight difference in the original data is caused by the constant “reduction” of the data by the officials of the Qing Dynasty when they counted and reported. Because this kind of “reduction” is usually to meet the requirements of Emperor Qianlong, officials at all levels constantly artificially “reduced” the number. Therefore, in the following analysis, I use Mr. Chang Jianhua’s tables, which contain a large number of statistical results.
- ⁷ The term “Original” in the table means the number of ordination certificates issued from the year 1736 to 1739.
- ⁸ According to Zhang (1988). This figure is also decreasing year by year “artificially”, which is smaller than the original data checked by Goossaert. The further analysis below uses the data listed by Goossaert, which are more reliable.
- ⁹ This number may be slightly smaller, but since it is estimated roughly, I will not revise it by taking into consideration the number of certificates issued in 1742.
- ¹⁰ Dr. Liu Dianli (劉殿利) from Renmin University of China used four indicators to analyze the development of folk religions in the Qing Dynasty: (1) the frequency of religious conflict events, (2) the frequency of religious conflict events per one million people, (3) the frequency of activities of religious leaders, and (4) the frequency of activities of religious leaders per ten thousand people. She found that Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Sichuan, Hubei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, and other provinces were the most active areas of folk religions, which has a certain corresponding relationship with the decline of institutional religions such as Buddhism and Taoism in North China and other northern regions discussed in this article. See Liu Dianli, *Mingjian zongjiao de jieshoudu: dui qingdai mingjian zongjiao de yige lianghua yanjiu* (民間宗教的接受度：對清代民間宗教的一個量化研究, Acceptance of Folk Religion: A Quantitative Study of Folk Religion in Qing Dynasty) presented at the Summit Forum on Chinese Religion and Society, sponsored by Peking University, and published on 8 October 2008.

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Article

A Study on the Literacy Rate of Buddhist Monks in Dunhuang during the Late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Early Song Period

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Abstract: Among the Dunhuang documents, when examining some of the monk signature lists, name list of monks copying scriptures and name list of monks chanting scriptures in monasteries, we can estimate a relatively accurate literacy rate of the Buddhist sangha. Generally speaking, the literacy rate of the sangha during the Guiyi Army 歸義軍 period (851–1036) was lower than that during the Tibetan occupation period (786–851). The reason for this change is closely related to each regime's Buddhist policy, the size and living situation of the sangha, and the Buddhist atmosphere. The decrease in the literacy rate of the sangha had great negative consequences, but when viewed under the context of the stay at home monks and the secularization of Buddhism, the number of literate monks had actually increased. They were more closely integrated with the secular society and their functions in the regional society were more pronounced. At the same time, the changes in the literacy rate of the monks in Dunhuang can also serve as an important reference for understanding the development of Buddhism in the Central China.

Keywords: Dunhuang; Buddhism; literacy rate; literate monks

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1. Introduction

In the Middle Ages, the Buddhist sangha served an important function in regional societies. This influence is manifested through their religious authority on the one hand and their cultural knowledge on the other. For this reason, it is very important to understand their level of education—the literacy rate of the sangha.

Although there are many studies on literacy rates, research on the literacy rate of religious groups such as the sangha have always contained misunderstandings, and these groups were often rashly directly classified as literate groups (Mote 1972). The reason scholars have this impression may be related to the group's cultural activities. However, at least since the Northern and Southern Dynasties, there have been many illiterate monks and nuns in the sangha. *The Sūtra of the Dharma's Complete End (fa miejin jing 法滅盡經)*, an apocryphal sutra dated to the end of the 5th century, revealed that many monks at that time “did not chant scriptures” 經不誦習 and “did not know characters and sentences”. 不識字句¹. At the time that Wudi of Northern Zhou 北周武帝 (543–578) tried to exterminate Buddhism, he once required those who were illiterate to return to laity. Although the monk Tanji 曇積 strongly opposed this, he admitted that there were many monks who were “obtuse, and lacking a gift for reading. They study hard but have not learned a single character”. 受性愚鈍, 於讀誦無緣; 習學至苦, 而不得一字. “They are not smart and they cannot read more than one phrase”. 無聰力, 日誦不過一言. Some monks practicing asceticism were also incapable of “chanting”.² It can be seen that the number of illiterate monks in the sangha in the late Northern and Southern Dynasties was obviously sizable enough to attract the attention of those in power. After the Tang and Song periods, illiterate monks still existed, and Cheng Minsheng even believed that as many as one third of the monks in the Song period might have been illiterate.³ Although he did not give the basis for his estimation, it should be true that there were a considerable number of illiterate monks in the Song period.

Both Western and Chinese academics have attempted to examine literacy rate in history, especially before modern times. However, due to the limitation of materials, these always end up as speculations at the end. As far as the research on literacy rate in ancient China is concerned, the materials used are mostly limited to handed down documents, so it is indeed difficult to discuss the problem of ancient literacy rate in depth. However, unearthed documents, especially the Dunhuang documents, have preserved a large number of source materials regarding contemporary life, including a bunch of materials that enable discussions on the literacy rate of Buddhist monks in the late Tang, Five Dynasties and early Song periods.

First, there is a wealth of information for this period on the total number of Buddhist monks in Dunhuang that is preserved in Dunhuang.⁴ It should be noted that data on the size of the sangha is not available for each year, and in many cases there are discrepancies on dating between different data and sources on literacy. However, the ordination of monks were not held every year, and sometimes they would not be held for many years. Hao (1998) has observed that, like the Central China, where monks were not ordained annually, the “mahāyāna altars” (*fangdeng jietan* 方等戒坛) set up by the monks in Dunhuang to grant novice monks upasampada were also not set up every year, but only once every few years or even decades. In addition, during the Tibetan and Guiyi Army periods, there may also have been relatively strict government control over the sangha, and the total size of the sangha grew very slowly. For example, according to S. 2729 (1) “Report on Population Statistics Book of the Sangha Tribe of Shazhou under the Mi Jingbian in the Third Month of the Year of Dragon (788)” (辰年[788年]三月沙州僧尼部落米淨辯牒上算使勘牌子曆) (hereinafter referred to as “Report on Population Statistics Book”) and P. 3060 “Record of Scripture Chanting by the Sangha on the Third Month of the Year 788” (788 *nian sanyue dunhuang sengtuan zhuanjing li* 788年三月敦煌僧團轉經歷). It can be seen that in the third month of 788, the number of male monks reached about 198. According to S. 5676V “Number of Monks and Nuns in the Monasteries of Shazhou Around the Year 825,” (825 *nian zuoyou shazhou zhushi sengni shu* 825年左右沙洲諸寺僧尼數), we know that there were 218 male monks around 825 CE. In other words, in nearly forty years, the number of monks has increased by 20, and an average of one person has been added for each two years; if there were an average of twelve monasteries, each monastery increased by less than two people within forty years. Therefore, the size of the sangha would have remained roughly stable for a certain period of time and might have even decreased as the old monks passed away. As a result of this, the size of the sangha in a time period close to the one in question is also data that can be used as source material for literacy.

Second, during this period there are still a relatively large number of source materials available for an accurate estimate of the number of literate monks. An estimation of the number of literate people is one of the most important and difficult problems pertaining to ancient literacy. Due to the limitation of materials and methods, there is still a lack of discussion on the subject in academic circles. There are two premises to study this question, one of which is to determine a method for screening literate people. Research on literacy in recent times provided a method for screening literate texts, that is, the ability to “write” and “read” is always the key basis for confirming whether a person is literate. The second premise is that the basic social unit for research needs to be determined. Literacy rates require statistical treatment of a specific group rather than an individual. The social unit for the activity of the sangha is the monastery, so the smallest unit to discuss the literacy rate of the sangha is also that of the monastery. As far as the above conditions are concerned, there are three types of texts in the huge Dunhuang literature that can be used: the name list of monks copying scriptures organized by the monastery, the signature list left by all the monks in the monasteries when they participated in the decision-making of monastic affairs, and the scripture chanting name list for scripture chanting activities organized by the monastery.

The three types of source materials have different degrees of accuracy in calculating literacy rates. The “signature list” has been widely used in research on western literacy,

but in the view of modern literacy research, signature is just a “functional” expression of literacy, and cannot fully describe the literacy level of the writer. In contrast, the name list of monks copying scriptures and the scripture chanting name list are relatively unique source materials on the literacy rate of the sangha in the Middle Ages of China. Copying and chanting scriptures are literacy activities that last for a long time and dealing with more complex texts, so it can indicate that the participants are fully literate, which can better reflect the education level of the participants compared to signatures.⁵

Combining the aforementioned three types of source materials pertaining to literacy with other source materials, not only can we obtain a relatively accurate table for changes in the literacy rate of monks, but the factors affecting these changes in the literacy rate of monks in Dunhuang and the impact of these changes on different things can also be analyzed in depth. The implications of the changes in the number of literate monks for the local society can then be deeply explored. Moreover, although the form of Buddhism in Dunhuang during this period was different from the Buddhism of the Central China, it can still be used as a reference to understand Central Plains’ Buddhism

2. List of Buddhist Scriptures and Signature List

The name list of monks copying scriptures is a list of people who are paid to copy Buddhist scriptures, and the signature list is a list of all the monks’ signatures regarding some matters related to the collective interests of the monks in a monastery. These two types of source materials can reflect the writing ability of the monks, so they can be the basis for judging their competence in literacy.

First, let us look at the name list of monks copying scriptures. During the periods of Tibetan and Guiyi Army rule, the monasteries frequently organized Buddhist activities such as scripture chanting, and the damage and wearing on the scriptures were significant. As a result, activities for copying scriptures were frequently organized. Each time there was an organized activity, a name list of monks copying scriptures was made. Among the Dunhuang documents, there are a lot of source materials regarding copying scriptures, but only one of them has value for the estimation of literacy rate, namely the document S. 2711 “Name List of People Writing Scriptures in the Jinguangming Monastery and other Monasteries from the 810s to 820s” (810 zhi 820 niandai jinguangming si deng si xiejing renming lu, 810至820年代金光明寺等寺寫經人名錄).⁶

The beginning and end of this document is complete, and it records the name list of monks and some lay people who participated in copying scriptures at the Jinguangming Monastery. There are twenty two people who participated. They are: Jieran 戒然, Hong’en 弘恩, Rongzhao 榮照, Zhang Wuzhen 張悟真, Fazhen 法貞, Xianxian 賢賢, Sijia 寺加, Jinshu 金樞, Daozheng 道政, Fayuan 法緣, Liming 離名, Dong Fajian 董法建, Yizhen 義真, Huizhao 惠照, Qikong 瞿空, Fachi 法持, Dao’an 道岸, Daoxiu 道秀, Chao’an 超岸, Tanhui 曇惠, Lisu 利俗, and Jingzhen 淨真. Also related to this document is P. 3205 “Report on Distribution of Work on Copying the Scriptures,” (*chaojing fenpei li* 抄經分配曆) which records the specific tasks of copying the scriptures assigned to everyone on the basis of the document S. 2711.⁷ The difference is that in P. 3205, there was an additional monk by the name of “Xiangyou” 像幽 from the Qianyuan Monastery 乾元寺. Copying scriptures is a fairly important source of income for the monks in Dunhuang, so on this occasion, the Jinguangming Monastery may have tried its best to call upon as many monks as possible to participate in copying scriptures. Under the circumstance that there was a shortage of people, some lay people and monks from other monasteries were also gathered. Therefore, I tend to think that the number of monks involved in writing scriptures here is relatively close to the number of literate monks in the Jinguangming Monastery at this time. The most recent data on the number of monks in the Jinguangming Monastery is found in S. 5676V “Number of Monks and Nuns in the Monasteries of Shazhou Around the Year 825”. At that time, there were 26 monks in the Jinguangming Monastery. Therefore, the literacy rate of the monks in the Jinguangming Monastery at that time was roughly 84.6% (22/26).

Next, let us look at the signature list of the monks. The use of a signature list to discuss literacy rates has been used in the study of literacy rates in the West. For example, François and Jacques (1982) have used marriage registers to estimate changes in the literacy rate in France. They believe that in the 100 years from 1680 to 1780, the literacy rate of French adults increased from 40% to 70%. With the gradual deepening of the discussion on the literacy rate in recent times, the source materials used to analyze literacy rates have become more and more abundant, and the number of words people know has gradually become one of the central issues in the discussion of literacy. Therefore, whether signatures can be used for the study of literacy have given rise to some controversies.⁸ Nevertheless, signatures can at least partly reflect the education level of the writer. Furthermore, as Liu (2017) said, writing Chinese characters is difficult to master without a long period of training; at the same time, the main writing utensil in ancient China was the soft brush, which required a higher level of control. Therefore, written Chinese characters (including signatures) can be used as evidence of literacy. Of course, some signatures are blunt and immature, indicating that the writer is not proficient in moving the brush, so such signatures should not simply be equated with literacy.

The signature lists used in this article are mainly those manuscripts that are collectively signed by monks in a monastery. The appearance of such manuscripts is related to the system by which important affairs of the sangha require internal co-determination. During the Sui and Tang periods, in the selection of the three directors (*san gang*) responsible for various affairs in the monastery, the state once stipulated that:

Only those who use virtue and their abilities to transform their disciples, have the respect of both the clergy and the laity, and maintain the monastic rules can hold the position of the three directors. For all those who were nominated, their names need to be signed by themselves in a report and send to the officials.

凡任僧綱，必須用德行能化徒衆，道俗欽仰，綱維法務者。所舉徒衆，皆連署牒官。⁹

During the periods of Tibetan and Guiyi Army rule, although the method of managing the monks in Dunhuang was adjusted, the system of co-determination within the monastery was still maintained. When there were matters in the monastery pertaining to the interests of all the monks, such as the election of monk officials and the settlement of income and expenditure, it was necessary to convene a general meeting of the whole monastery to make a resolution, and finally to collectively sign the report documents. This kind of source material can reveal at the same time the number of people who should have signed and the number of people who actually arrived. Therefore, this is one of the most ideal sources pertaining to statistics on literacy rates.

However, it should be noted that because speculations on writing abilities may be relatively subjective, when analyzing such materials, I do not intend to make a detailed classification, but simply divides them into two categories: those with writing ability and those with no writing ability. The ability to write is easy to understand; those without the ability to write are ones who cannot write names, which is mainly revealed in their clumsy brushwork. The reason for this determination is that if a person who does not practice writing often, his “brushwork will be very immature and rusty”. (Liu 2017, pp. 107–8). On the other hand, if one’s own signature is already very immature and rusty, then it can also be determined that the signer has almost no ability to write with the brush, and must be excluded in the estimation of literacy rates. Moreover, according to the following analysis of the documents P. 2049V (2) “Expenditure Record of the Head of Accountant on duty during a year (直岁 *zhisui*) of Jingtu Monastery for the Second Year of Changxing in the Later Tang (931)” (*houtang changxing er nian* [931] *jingtu si zhisui ruo li* 後唐長興二年 [931] 淨土寺直歲入破曆 and P. 2680V “Record on Distributing Scriptures Regarding Singing on the ‘Mahāpranāpāramitā Sutra’ by the Jingtu Monastery in the Bingshen Year (936),” (*bingshen nian* [936] *jingtu si kai ‘da bore’ fujing li* 丙申年 (936) 淨土寺開(大般若)付經曆) it seems that it is more appropriate to exclude them from those who were literate. At the

same time, there is also the phenomenon of “empty space without writing” in this type of signature list, the reasons for which need to be analyzed in detail.

In the Dunhuang documents, I have found six such source materials,¹⁰ which will be analyzed below:

(1) P. 3730 “The Report Pertaining to the Karmadāna Huaiying of the Jinguangming Monastery Inviting the Monk Huaiji to Fill the Position of Elder Along with the Verdict of Hongbian in the First Month of the Year of the Rooster”. (*Tubo younian zhengyue jinguangmingsi weina huaiying deng qing senghuaiji buchong shangzuo Zhuang bing Hongbian pan* 吐蕃酉年正月金光明寺維那懷英等請僧淮濟補充上座等狀並洪誓判)

The beginning of this document is complete whereas the end is incomplete, and it recorded the Karmadāna Huaiying 懷英 of the Jinguangming Monastery inviting the monk Huaiji 淮濟 to fill the position of abbot in the first month of the Year of the Rooster under Tibetan rule. There was also a verdict of the head monk Hongbian 洪誓, and there was the signature of all the disciples agreeing to elect Huaiji and others at the end. According to the judgment of Tang and Lu (1990, p. 38), the “Year of the Rooster” of this document may be 829 or 841. However, the verdict in this document came from Hongbian, indicating that he was already the head monk of Dunhuang at that time. According to P. 4640 “Inscription of the head monk Wu” (*wu sengtong bei* 吳僧統碑) and the Tibetan inscription in Cave 365 of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Wu Hongbian was appointed as chief instructor around 832. Therefore, the “Year of You” here should be the year 841.

Analysis of the writings of monks (see Table 1):

Table 1. Calligraphy of monks of Jinguangming Monastery in 841.

	1淮濟 Huaiji	2智明 Zhiming	3懷英 Huaiyin	4善惠 Shanhui	5智通 Zhitong	6義藏 Yizang	7神□ Shen □	8□□	9勝□ Sheng □	10法印 Fayin	11談測 Tance	
Picture												
writing ability	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
	12玄秘	13法憲 Faxian	14法顯 Faxian	15智浪 Zhilang	16靈秀 Lingxiu	17法雲 Fayun	18靈覺 Lingjue	19法□ Fa □	20惠綱 Huigang	21迥秀 xiu	22法象 Faxiang	23□□
												
	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

The end of this document is incomplete, so it is impossible to know for certain the number of monks in the Jinguangming Monastery at this time, and in the remaining part still show 23 people. Except for Huaiji and Zhiming, who were elected as monk officials and did not leave their signatures, the others left relatively nicely written signatures. However, since the former two were elected as the elder and abbot of the monastery, respectively, their ability to handle monastic affairs should be evident, and their writing skills should also be above the level of the typical monk.











The time period closest to this where we have data on the number of monks in the Jinguangming Monastery is in document S. 5676V “Number of Monks and Nuns in the Monasteries of Shazhou Around the Year 825”. At that time, there were 26 monks in the Jinguangming Monastery. However, the two time periods are about 16 years apart, so the number 26 only has limited value as a reference. If the number 26 is used as the basis for estimation, then the minimum literacy rate of the Jinguangming Monastery in 841 should be above 88.5% (23/26).

(2) P. 3100 “The Report Pertaining to the monks of Lingtu Monastery inviting the master of Vinaya Shancai to Fill the Position of Abbot Along with the Verdict of Wuzhen in the the Second Year of Jingfu in the Tang Dynasty (893) (*Tang jingfu ernian lingtusi tuzhong gongying qing lvshi shancai chongsizhu zhuang ji dusengtong wuzhen pan* 唐景福二年 (893) 靈圖寺徒眾供英等請律師善才充寺主狀及都僧統悟真判)

The beginning and end of this document are both complete. It records that in 893 CE, the disciples offered the master of Vinaya, Shancai to be the abbot of the monastery, with the head monk Wuzhen making the judgment. Afterwards, there was a signature of agreement by everyone in the monastery to recommend Shancai. Although this document does not indicate the monastery’s name, according to P. 3541 “*Epitaph to the portrait of Zhang Shancai*” (張善才邈真讚), we know that the abbot Shancai here is a monk of the Lingtu Monastery, so we know that the monastery in this document is the Lingtu Monastery.

A statistical analysis of the writings of the monks in the monastery is as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2. Calligraphy of monks of Lingtu Monastery in 893.

	1善才 Shancai	2供英 Gongyin	3龍弁 Longmou	4	5	6慶□ Qin	7	8	9靈龍 Linglong	10張 Zhang	11忠信 Zhongxin	12慶□ Qin □	13道□ Dao □	14	15惠通 Huitong
Pictures															
writing ability	yes	yes	yes			yes			yes	no	no	yes	no		no

In this document, there are generally two monks’ signatures in one column, but only one monk’s signature was found in the last column, indicating that nothing is missing in the signature portion; the spaces below some of the “disciples” are left empty. It should be noted that these reserved spaces were not always at the end, implying that when the disciples were listed at that time, a certain format was followed (perhaps based on seniority or the status of the monks in the monastery). Even if some of the monks did not sign, others could not easily sign in his space. This also shows that this document should have listed all the disciples who needed to sign at that time; that is to say, at that time, there were probably 15 monks in the Lingtu Monastery, and 5 of them left empty spaces and did not write anything. According to the document that is 12 years later than this document, S. 2575 (3) “The Report Pertaining to the monks of Lingtu Monastery inviting Daxing to Fill the Position of Abbot in the August of the 5th year of Tianfu (905)” (*tianfu wunian* [905] *bayue lingtu si tuzhong qin daxing chong sizhu zhuang* 天復五年 (905) 八月靈圖寺徒眾請大行充寺主狀), which will be discussed below, it can be seen that in 905, the five monks “Daxing 大行, Yishen 義深, Lingjun 靈俊, Linglong 靈龍, and Zhengxin 政信” are not seen in this document, and Daxing is the new abbot, whereas Yishen is the elder of the monastery. They are both respected senior monks and not likely to have been new entrants from 893 to 905, so they are probably the ones with the five empty spots in this document. We also know from S. 2575(3) that with the exception of “Zhengxin,” although the other four people varies in their writing abilities, they all had the ability to write their own names.






The writing style of people such as “Zhang 張, Zhongxin 忠信, Dao □道□, Huitong 惠通” in this document is very crude, which means their writing abilities were relatively low, maybe even at the level of beginners. The fact that even their own names were written so awkwardly indicates that their literacy is almost nonexistent. Therefore, the literacy rate of the monks in the Lingtu Monastery at that time was 66.7% (10/15).

(3) S. 2575 (3) “The Report Pertaining to the monks of Lingtu Monastery inviting Daxing to Fill the Position of Abbot in the August of the 5th year of Tianfu (905)” (*tianfu wunian* [905] *bayue lingtu si tuzhong qin daxing chong sizhu zhuang* 天復五年 (905) 八月靈圖寺徒眾請大行充寺主狀)

The beginning of this document is complete whereas the end is incomplete. It records that in the fifth year of Tianfu (905), the disciples of Lingtu Monastery asked Daxing to be the head of the monastery. They send in their report to the director of monks; the back of the report has the joint signatures of the monks who agreed to nominate D.

A statistical analysis of the writing of the monks in the monastery is as follows (see Table 3):

Table 3. Calligraphy of monks of Lingtu Monastery in 905.

	1大行 Daxing	2義深 Yishen	3靈俊 Lingjun	4	5政信 Zhengxin	6惠 Hui	7	8靈龍 Linglong
picture								
writing ability	yes	yes	yes		no	no		no


















The text of the report is partially incomplete, but there are no missing parts pertaining to the signatures of the disciples, so we know that in 905, there may have been eight monks in the Lingtu Monastery. In the report, there are two monks who left empty spaces and did not write. According to the above analysis, we know that those who left empty spaces but not writing do not necessarily mean that they did not have the ability to write. There is only one monk (Linglong 靈龍) from this document that is also seen in P. 3100. If the “Huitong” in P. 3100 is the “Hui” found in this document, there are still only two monks. In 893, there were still ten people who were literate in the Lingtu Monastery, so it is unlikely that only the two of them were left. Therefore, the disciples who left empty space with no writing in this document are probably also found in P. 3100 and had the ability to write. In the signatures from this report, Zheng Xin’s handwriting is rather crude, implying that his knowledge is quite limited. Similar to this is the monk “Hui”. The fact that they write their own names so crudely shows that their literacy level was very low. Excluding the “Zhengxin” and “Hui”, the ratio of those who are literate would be 75% (6/8).

(4) P. 2049V (1) “Expenditure Record of the Head of the Jingtū Monastery for the Third Year of Tongguan in the Later Tang (925)” (*houtang tongguang sannian jingtusi ruo li* 後唐同光三年 (925) 淨土寺入破曆)

The beginning and end of P. 2049V are complete, and there are two copies of the expenditure record, namely P. 2049V (1) and P. 2049V (2) “Expenditure Record of the Jingtū Monastery for the Second Year of Changxing in the Later Tang (931)” (*houtang changxing ernian jingtusi ruo li* 後唐長興二年 (931) 淨土寺入破曆) Both Expenditure Record keep the signature list.

A statistical analysis of the writings of the monks based on P.2049V (1) is as follows (see Table 4):

Table 4. Calligraphy of monks of Jingtu Monastery in 925.



















	1保護 Baohu	2淨Jing	3保保 Baobao	4道會 Daohui	5寶Bao	6道Dao	7應Ying	8法深 Fashen	9願達 Yuanda	10保達 Baoda	
picture											
writing ability	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	
	11因會 Yinhui	12功 Gong	13願真 Yuanzhen	14淨戒 Jingjie	15古Gu	16	17	18願濟 Yuanji	19紹宗 Shaozong	20	21
											
	no	no	yes	yes	no			yes	yes		

Therefore, according to the statistics of this document, we know that in 925, there were probably 21 monks in the Jingtu Monastery, of which four left empty spaces and did not sign, and eight had crude and clumsy handwriting. If these eight people were excluded from the literate group, then at this time, the literacy rate of monks in the Jingtu Monastery is 61.9% (13/21). In fact, according to the following analysis of P. 2680V “Record on Distributing Scriptures Regarding Singing on the ‘Mahāpranīpāramitā Sutra’ by the Jingtu Monastery in the Bingshen Year (936),” these people were not competent enough for the activities of reading the scriptures, that is, their literacy is very limited, and they should be excluded from being considered as part of the literate group.

(5) P. 2049V (2) “Expenditure Record of the Jingtu Monastery for the Second Year of Changxing in the Later Tang (931)”. (*houtang changxing ernian jingtusi rupo li* 後唐長興二年(931)淨土寺入破曆)

The statistical analysis of the signatures of the monks in the monastery mentioned in P.2049V (2) is as follows (see Table 5):

Table 5. Calligraphy of monks of Jingtu Monastery in 931.

	1願達 Yuanda	2	3	4	5	6道會 Daohui	7寶Bao	8道Dao	9法深 Fashen	10應Ying	11保達 Baoda	12因會 Yinhui	
picture													
writing ability	yes	no	no	no		yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	
	13	14願真 Yuanzhen	15淨戒 Jingjie	16保護 Baohu	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24願濟 Yuanji	25紹宗 Shaozong
													
	yes	yes	yes	yes	no							yes	yes

According to the statistics of this document, in 931, there may have been twenty five monks in the Jingtu Monastery, an increase of four compared with the year 925. Among them, there are fifteen people who also appeared in the previous document. There are seven people who left spaces and did not sign this document, but the names “Shanhui, Baohui, Baosheng, Jingsheng, Yuansheng, and Guangjin” contained in P. 2680V (8) that will be discussed below are not seen in this document. Furthermore, they are all monks who

are capable of chanting scriptures for a long time and have a high level of literacy. They are unlikely to be novice monks who were newly ordained during the five years from 931 to 936, so they are probably the six people who have not signed this document. In addition, the monk “Gong □” in P. 2049V (1) who had very poor hand writing is also not found in this document, and may also be one of those who did not sign. Including him, there are nine people whose hand writings are crude at this time. Therefore, overall, the literacy rate of the monks in Jingtū Monastery at this time was 64% (16/25).

(6) 羽52 “Expenditure Record of the Dayun Monastery in the Second Month of the Third Year of Yongxi of the Song Dynasty(986)”(*song yongxi sannian eryue dayunsi rupoli* 宋雍熙三年 (986) 二月大雲寺入破曆)

This document is incomplete at the beginning and complete at the end. At the end of the fascicle, there are the signatures of the disciples of the monastery.

The statistical analysis of the writings of the disciples in the monastery is as follows (see Table 6):

Table 6. Calligraphy of monks of Dayun Monastery in 986.

	1定惠 Dinghui	2	3	4	5	6	7祥Xiang	8右You	9	10	11
Picture											
Writing Ability	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no		yes
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18定惠 Dinghui	19僧正 Sengzheng	20惠Hui	21僧正 Sengzheng	22護戒 Hujie
											
	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

According to the statistics of this document, in 985 CE, there were probably 22 monks in the Dayun Monastery, of which 2 left empty spaces and did not sign, and 5 had crude and clumsy handwriting. Excluding them, the literacy rate was 63.6% (14/22). It is worth noting that at least 14 people in the signature list of this document used *huaya* 畫押 which is a kind of non-literal signature symbol instead of formal characters, accounting for as high as 70% (14/20) of the monks who signed. Although some economic documents in Dunhuang often uses *huaya* signature rather than standard characters, this signature list is indeed very unique compared to the previous ones.

3. The Scripture Chanting Name List of the Monastic Members

The monastery’s scripture chanting name list records the list of monks who participated in the activity of reading scripture with rhythm. Scripture chanting is an activity of chanting and praying for blessings, and it is one of the most important and frequently held Buddhist activities of the sangha. When participating in chanting scriptures, especially when chanting major works such as the 600 fascicles of the *Mahāpranīpāramitā Sūtra*, reading is the most common method, which requires monks to be literate. The scripture chanting in the Dunhuang region includes the scripture chanting of all the monks of the Dunhuang sangha, and also the scripture chanting involving mainly one monastery along with some monks from other monasteries. There are also cases of the chanting of scriptures within a single monastery, and also cases of several people or even one person participating. Among the scripture chanting name list, there are only five documents that have value for estimating the literacy rate.¹¹ The analysis is as follows:

(1) S.10967 “Record of Scripture Chanting among Monks in the Lingtu Monastery and Other Monasteries Around the Year 789” (789 nian qianhou lingtusi deng si sengzhong zhuanjing li 789年前後靈圖寺等寺僧眾轉經歷)

The beginning and the end of this document are both complete, and it is the scripture chanting record of all of the monks of Dunhuang. According to this document, there were thirty four people who participated in scripture chanting by the names of Fayou 法幽, Biankong 辨空, Jinding 金頂, Weiji 維濟, Jieying 戒盈, Tanbian 曇辯, Baoyi 寶意, Rijun 日俊, Jintian 金田, Zhiyin 志殷, Abbot Ji (寂寺主), Elder Zhan (湛上座), Jianxin 堅信, Fajun 法濬, Xiuhui 修惠, Rigan 日幹, Fa Xing 法行, Zhi Cheng 至澄, Zheng Qin 正勤, Fa Quan 法詮, Hui Guang 惠光, Zhi En 智恩, Guang Zhao 光照, Wen Hui 文惠, Xiang Hai 像海, Esoteric Master (*mi fashi* 秘法), Jingu 金鼓, Huai'en 懷恩, Tanyin 曇隱, Jiao faxing 交法行, Liming 離名, and Fazhou 法舟. Other than “Zhi'en” who can be found in P. 3060 “Record of Scripture Chanting by the Sangha on the Third Month of the Year 788” and will be discussed below, the other monks' names are all found in S. 2729 (1). This indicates that this documents are also probably dated to around the year 789. Furthermore, except for the “Esoteric master” whom we cannot determine with certainty whether he is from the Qianyuan Monastery 乾元寺 or the Bao'en Monastery 報恩寺, we can determine the monastic affiliation of all the other monks. Among them, Lingtu Monastery had 13 monks, while the other monasteries had at most only 3 monks. It can be seen that this activity of chanting scriptures was organized with the Lingtu Monastery as the center. Among the monasteries, since only the Lingtu Monastery had a sizable number of monks, so when estimating the literacy rate, the estimates for the Lingtu Monastery are more valuable. According to P. 3060, it can be seen that after the third month of 788, the Dunhuang sangha increased by 79 monks and nuns, and the Bao'en Monastery and other monasteries increased the number of monks by 61. Since we cannot determine the increase in the number of monks in each monastery, it is not possible to discuss the literacy rate of the Lingtu Monastery and other monasteries at this time based on S.10967; however, the document can be used to discuss the literacy rate of the Lingtu Monastery in the third month of 788. According to this document, we know that the literate monks in the Lingtu Monastery are (the corresponding monk names in S. 2729 in parentheses):

Fayou (Jing Fayou 法幽), Abbot Song (Song Zhiji 宋志寂), Elder Zhan (Cao Zhizhan 曹志湛), Zhengqin (Song Zhengqin 宋正勤), Faquan (Chen Faquan 陳法詮), Guangzhao (Zhang Guangzhao 張光照), Zhicheng (Suo Zhicheng 索志澄), Tanbian (Ma Tanbian 馬曇辯), Wenhui (Zhang Wenhui 張文惠), Liming (Cao Liming 曹離名), Guangzhao (Zhang Guangzhao 張光照), Jingu (Li Jingu 李金鼓), Zhiyin (Zhang Zhiyin 張志殷).

According to S. 2729 (1), it can be seen that in the third month of 788, there were 17 monks in the Lingtu Monastery, so the literacy rate of the monastery at that time was 76.5% (13/17).

(2) P.3060 “Record of Scripture Chanting by the Sangha on the Third Month of the Year 788” (788 nian sanyue Dunhuang sengtuan zhuanjing li 788年三月敦煌僧團轉經歷)

The beginning and end of this document are both complete. It records a scripture chanting activity that involved the entire sangha. The end of the document recorded that there were “one hundred and three monks and seventy seven nuns”. This meant that the total number of people who read scriptures on this occasion is 180.

Among the 180 people who chanted scriptures on this occasion, 100 (44 male monks, 56 nuns) were found in S. 2729 (1) and 80 people (59 male monks, 21 nuns) were not found in S. 2729 (1), indicating that this scripture chanting should have occurred shortly after the third month of 788. In the third month of 788, the size of the Dunhuang sangha was 310, which means that in just a few months, the size of the sangha increased by 25.8% (80/310). They were probably the result of the Tibetan regime bringing monks from other conquered areas and concentrating them in Dunhuang. Furthermore, according to S. 2729 (1), it can be seen that the “Fada” 法達 who participated in the scripture chanting died on the first day of the fourth month of the year of the dragon (788). “Jingfa 淨法, Chujing 處淨, and

Zhiming 智明” died in the first month and the eleventh month of the year of Horse (790), so this scripture chanting should have taken place in the third month of 788, and after the creation of the population statistics book to count the monks. S. 2729 (1) shows that there were 139 monks and 171 nuns in Dunhuang when the population statistics book was made. Therefore, during the third month, the number of male monks was about 200 (61 + 139), and the number of nuns was about 189 (18 + 171). In sum, the ratio of male monks chanting scriptures was 51.5% (103/200), and the ratio of nuns chanting scriptures was 40.7% (77/189).

However, comparing this document to S. 2729 (1), we can also find that not all the monks in the latter participated in this scripture chanting. The participation rate of male monks in S. 2729 (1) is 31.7% (44/139). In regard to the specifics of individual monasteries: Longxing Monastery 龍興寺 21.4% (6/28), Jinguangming Monastery 43.8% (7/16), Dayun Monastery 43.8% (7/16), Lingtu Monastery 35.3% (6/17), Bao'en Monastery 22.2% (2/9), Yong'an Monastery 9.1% (1/11), Liantai Monastery 蓮臺寺 27.3% (3/11), Qianyuan Monastery 31.6% (6/19), Kaiyuan Monastery 30.7% (4/13); the participation ratio of nuns is 32.7% (56/171), and the literacy rate figures for each convent is as follows: Lingxiu Monastery 靈修寺 35.8% (24/67), Puguang Monastery 普光寺 31.9% (15/47), and Dacheng Monastery 大乘寺 38.6% (17/44). According to the analysis of S. 10967, there were as many as 13 people in the Lingtu Monastery at that time, however, on this occasion, only 6 monks appeared. Therefore, the list here obviously did not include all the literate monks in each monastery; Dayun Monastery and the Jinguang Monastery had the highest rates, but even these monasteries only had 43.8%. Compared with the monasteries for monks, the number of new nuns added to convents was relatively less, with an average of 6 people per monastery; there were also many people involved in scripture chanting in each monastery, so the literacy level for document S.10967 may be closer to the literacy level of nuns in the third month of 788.

(3) P.3947 “Record of Thirty One Monks Chanting Scriptures at Longxing Monastery in the Year 831 or 843” (831 *huo* 843 *nian longxing si ying zhuanjing sanshi yi ren fenfan lu* 831或843年龍興寺應轉經冊一人分番錄)

The beginning and end of this document are both complete, and it is recorded by Cai Yin 蔡殷, the minister of Longxing Monastery. The monks who participated in the scripture chanting activity are: Abbot Li 李寺主, Abbot Zhai 翟寺主, Du *Faliu* 杜法律, Guizhen 歸真, Zhihai 智海, Changxing 常性, Huihui 惠歸, Zhenyi 真一, Faqing 法清, Judge Yong 顛判官, Boming 伯明, Shaojian 紹見, Fazhu 法住, Shengui 神歸, Lingzhao 靈照, Ling'e 靈萼, Guangzan 光讚, Huihai 惠海, Fuzhi 福智, Fazang 法藏 Bajie Duan 八戒段 (?), Abbot Duan 段寺主, Zhenmin 貞湊, Yingxiu 英秀, Fazhi 法智, Guo Fatong 郭法通, Huisu 惠素 (?), Huichang 惠常, Zhizhen 志真, Bi'an 彼岸, Haiyin 海印, Weiyong 惟英, Farong 法榮, Fali 法利, Guangxi 光燦, Shenzang 神藏, Lingying 靈應, Daozhen 道珍, Lingxiu 靈秀, Fayin 法印, and Judge Deng 鄧判官, 41 monks total. The time of this scripture chanting is in a certain “year of Pig”.

None of the monks in this document were seen in S. 2729 (1) of 788, so we know that there is a long gap in time between the “year of Pig” in this document and the year 788. At the same time, the monks in this document are often found in other documents. For example, Abbot Li, Du *Faliu*, Guizhen, Zhihai, Faqing, Shaojian, Boming, Lingzhao, Huihai, Fazang, Zhenju, Fatong, Bi'an, Haiyin Weiyong, Farong, Guangxi, Daozhen, Lingxiu, Fayin,” twenty total, were also seen in P.t. 1261V “Record on Distributing the payment for performing ritual activities to Monks under the Tibetan Period” (*tufan shiqi sengren fenpei zhachen li* 吐蕃時期僧人分配齋條曆) (Zheng 2001, p. 129). Therefore, the “the year of Pig” in this document may be the year 843, 831, or 819. Regarding the size of the sangha of the Longxing Monastery, among the source materials we have, the ones with the closest time period are S. 5676V “Number of Monks and Nuns in the Monasteries of Shazhou Around the Year 825,” and S. 2614V “Monks and Nuns of the Monasteries in Shazhou at the End of the Ninth Century and the Beginning of the Tenth Century” (*jiu shiji mo shi shijie chu shazhou zhushi sengni mingbu* 九世紀末十世紀初沙州諸寺僧尼名簿). The number of people in

the Longxing Monastery in the former is 23, which is much lower than the 41 people in this document, so the date of this document is unlikely to be the year 819. The number of people of the Longxing Monastery in the latter is 50, although the date is a little later. Considering that the number of the monks in the Tibetan and Guiyi Army periods generally showed a trend of continuous growth, so in the “the year of Pig” when the scripture chanting took place, the size of the sangha at the Longxing Monastery is unlikely to have exceeded 50. Therefore, if 50 is used as the base of calculation, then the literacy rate of the Longxing Monastery at this time is roughly 82% (41/50).

(4) S. 11352 “Board Pertaining to Scripture Chanting of the Anguo Convent from the End of the Ninth Century to the Beginning of the Tenth Century” (*shi shiji mo shi shiji chu anguo nisi zhuanjing bang* 九世紀末十世紀初安國尼寺轉經榜)

The beginning and end portions of this document are both complete, and the content pertains to scripture chanting at a certain monastery. The text is as follows:

1. 心 政心 延惠
2. 政惠 妙定 戒乘
3. 忍 堅藏 真惠 圓智 妙林 真如
4. 嚴 如意 如吾 無性
5. 政信 朱(殊)勝過(果) 真頂 真行 能修 照
6. 心 妙嚴 能寂 政思
7. 第二番: 慈藏 真願 妙行 濟實 朱勝智 如惠
8. 明會 堅忍
9. 右件, 國家轉經福田攘災, 宜宿
10. 不得寬口, 如有故違, 必照重
11. 罰。 謗(榜) 示。
12. 今月廿三日法律道哲

1. Xin 心 政心 Zhengxin 延惠 Yanhui
2. Zhenghui 政惠 Miaoding 妙定 Jiecheng 戒乘
3. Ren 忍 Jianzang 堅藏 Zhenhui 真惠 Yuanzhi 圓智 Miaolin 妙林 Zhenru 真如
4. Yan 嚴 Ruyi 如意 Ruwu 如吾 Wuxing 無性
5. Zhengxin Shushengguo Zhending Zhenxing Nengxiu Zhaoxin
6. Xin Miaoyan Nengji Zhengsi
7. Second Part: Cizang Zhenyuan Miaoxing Jishi Shushengzhi Ruhui
8. Minghui Jianren
9. On the right, the state organizes scripture chanting for fortune to avoid disasters, everyone should strict adherence to the requirements.
10. No leniency is allowed. If there is any violation, there will be serious
11. penalty. displays on board.
12. On the 23rd of this month, the *Faliu* Daozhe

According to the recorded text, each line is about 6–7 people when complete, so the number of people may be around 40. The nuns in this document are all found in the Anguo Convent in S. 2614V. At that time, there were 100 nuns in the Anguo Convent, 23 śikṣamāṇās and 16 śrāmaṇeri, totaling 139 people. In this way, the ratio of those participating in this scripture chanting is roughly: 28.8% (40/139).

(5) P. 2680V “Record on Distributing Scriptures Regarding Singing on the ‘Mahāpranīpāramitā Sūtra’ by the Jingtu Monastery in the Bingshen Year (936),” (*bingshen nian* [936] *jingtū sī kai ‘da bore’ fujing li* 丙申年(936)淨土寺開《大般若》付經曆).

This document is complete at the beginning and incomplete at the end. It was a record for distributing scriptures pertaining to read the *Mahāpranīpāramitā Sūtra* by a certain monastery in the Bingshen year. It involves monks: the governor of sangha (*Du Sengz heng* 都僧正), monastery governor Wu (*Wu Sengzheng* 吳僧正), Shanhui 善惠, Jingjie 淨

戒, Yuanzhen 願真, Baoda 保達, Yuanda 願達, Fashen 法深, Song Falü 宋法律, Baohui 保會, Baosheng 保勝, Jingsheng 淨勝, Yuansheng 願勝, Guangjin 廣進, 14 monks total. Of those, at least 5 monks are “Jingjie, Yuanzhen, Baoda, Yuanda, and Fashen” in P. 2049V (2) “Expenditure Record of the Head of Farming of the Jingtū Monastery for the Second Year of Changxing in the Later Tang (931),” so it can be confirmed that this monastery is the Jingtū Monastery, and the year of Bingshen here is the year 936, so this document titled “Record on Distributing Scriptures Regarding Lecturing on the ‘Mahāpranāpāramitā Sūtra’ by the Jingtū Monastery in the Bingshen Year (936)”.

The size of the Mahāpranāpāramitā Sūtra is 600 volumes, and since 14 monks read 310 volumes, so although this document is not complete, we know that there should only be 14 monks responsible for chanting on this occasion. According to P. 2049V (2) which recorded the signatures of the disciples of the Jingtū Monastery, we know that in 931, the number of monks in the Jingtū Monastery was 25. The size of the monastic establishment in 936 did not change significantly from that. Therefore, the proportion of those participating in the scripture chanting is about 56% (14/25).

In comparison, when analyzing the notes in the signature list of P. 2049V (2) above, at least seven monks with crude writing, such as “Bao”, “Dao”, “Ying”, and “Yinhui”, did not appear in the scripture chanting list on this occasion. This shows that their literacy level is indeed limited, and they are not competent enough for the religious activities that require a long time to read the scriptures. The monks who had a high level of hand writing in the Jingtū Monastery in 931 and the monks who were able to read the scriptures in 936 should be of the same group. This is no coincidence, and it also shows that they should be all the literate people in the Jingtū Monastery at that time.

(6) P. 3365 “Record on Distributing Scriptures to the Monks of the Jingtū Monastery for the Minor Illness of the Great King, Lord of the Prefecture on the Tenth Day of the Fifth Month of the Jiaxu Year (974)” (*jiaxu nian wuyue shiri jingtusi sengzhong wei fuzhu dawang xiaohuan fujing li* 甲戌年 (974) 五月十日淨土寺僧眾為府主大王小患付經歷).

The beginning and end of this document are both complete. It records the distribution of scriptures to the monks of a certain monastery praying for the Great King for his well being. The monks involved in the scripture chanting include Monk Zhou 周和尚, Monk Li 李和尚, Suo Falü 索法律, Wang Falü 王法律, Li Falü 李法律, Jie Falü 捷法律, Master Tan 譚法師, Master Gao 高法師, Gao Falü 高法律, Tan Sheli 譚闍梨, Fuman 福滿, Luo Laosu 羅老宿, Sengnu 僧奴, Jieyong 戒顛, Jieguang 戒光, Jiesong 戒松, Baofu 保福, Yingqi 應啓, Zhangsan 章三, Fajin 法進, Zhifa 智法, monastery governor Zhou (*Zhou sengzheng* 周僧正), 21 monks total.

In 974, Cao Yuanzhong 曹元忠, the Military Commissioner of the Guiyi Army, died of illness. Before his death, the Dunhuang monasteries held a scripture chanting activity to pray for him. This document is a record of the distribution of scriptures for the monks of a certain monastery who chanted the scriptures for Cao Yuanzhong in 974. Among them, “Monk Zhou (monastery governor Zhou), Tan Falü, Li Falü, Suo Falü, Jie Falü (Choujie), Zhangsan” are also found in S. 6452 “Expenditure Record of the Jingtū Monastery from the Xinsi Year to the Renwu Year (981–982)”. Therefore, the monks in this document should be the disciples of the Jingtū Monastery. S. 6452 records the economic activities of the Jingtū Monastery from the twelfth month of the Xinsi year to the twelfth month of the Renwu year. Based on this, we can find the people who have economic relations with the monastery. In the expenditure record, if monks in other monasteries were recorded, the simplified name of the monastery to which the monk is affiliated will be added before the monk’s name. For example, on the sixth day of the third month of the Renwu year, some millet “were loaned by Baotong 保通 of the Dacheng Monastery,” so those monks who did not add the name of their monastery should have been the monks of the Jingtū Monastery. According to my estimates, there are at least 33 monks in the Jingtū Monastery who were involved.

There are a total of 21 monks in this case, so if the 33 people are used as the benchmark, the ratio of those who read the scripture is 63.6% (21/33).

We obtained 16 pieces of data based on the 13 source materials above. Here, taking the monastery as the unit, arranged by order of time, is as follows (see Table 7):

Table 7. The literacy rate of monasteries and convents in Dunhuang.

Monastery	Time	Literacy Rate	Source	Type of Source
Lingtu Monastery	788	76.5%	S. 10967	name list for scripture chanting
	893	66.7%	P. 3100	Signature list
	905	75%	S. 2575 (3)	Signature list
Jingguangming Monastery	Around 810s–820s	84.6%	S. 2711	name list of monks copying scriptures
	841	88.5%	P. 3730	Signature list
Longxing Monastery	831 or 843	82%	P. 3947	name list for scripture chanting
Dayun Monastery	985	63.6%	羽52	Signature list
Jingtū Monastery	925	61.9%	P. 2049V (1)	Signature list
	931	64%	P. 2049V (2)	Signature list
	936	56%	P. 2680V (8)	name list for scripture chanting
	974	63.6%	P. 3365	name list for scripture chanting
Lingxiu Convent	788	34.3%	P. 3060	name list for scripture chanting
Puguang Convent	788	31.9%	P. 3060	name list for scripture chanting
Dacheng Convent	788	43.2%	P. 3060	name list for scripture chanting
Total for Nuns	788	32.7%	P. 3060	name list for scripture chanting
Anguo Convent	End of 9th Century to the Beginning of the Tenth Century	28.8%	S. 11352	name list for scripture chanting

Here, we also need to discuss two issues. The first is the reliability of the data, and the second is how representative are the data.

First, let us look at the reliability of the data. Judging from the above statistical table, although the literacy rate data of a specific monastery within a short period were obtained from different source materials, the data were still very similar. For example, in the relevant data of Jingguangming Monastery, S. 2711 and P. 3730 were the name lists of copying the scriptures and the signatures respectively. The figures we obtained are relatively close, being 84.6% and 88.5% respectively; in the ten years from 925 to 936, in the three sets of data from Jingtū Monastery (61.9% in 925, 64% in 931, and 56% in 936), two of the sets were gotten from the signature and one set of data from the name list for scripture chanting, which belong to different types of source materials, but the data are also relatively similar. The similarity of the data obtained from different source materials shows that the above statistics are relatively reliable.

It should be pointed out that signature is only a kind of “functional” literacy, while copying and reading scriptures is “full literacy”. There are more monks who have the ability to sign than those who can copy and read scriptures. This explains why the data obtained from different materials in the same period are relatively close, but the data obtained from the signature list is higher than the data obtained from the name list of monks copying scriptures and the name list for scripture chanting. For example, regarding the three sets of data from the Jingtū Monastery, the data for the years 925 (61.9%) and 931 (64%) obtained from the signature lists were higher than the data for 936 (56%) obtained from the name list for scripture chanting.

Second, we will take a look at how representative are the data. Among the 16 pieces of data obtained, only 1 is the data pertaining to all the nuns, and the others are all data of individual monasteries; and the distribution of data for different monasteries

is also unbalanced. During the Tibetan and Guiyi Army periods, there were as many as 18 monasteries and convents in Dunhuang. However, this paper only used the data for 6 monasteries, especially the Jingtuo Monastery (4 data) and the Lingtu Monastery (3 data). The discussion in this article is based on a specific monastery, so, can the data of a single monastery represent the literacy level of the entire Dunhuang sangha during the same period?

Among the data obtained from different materials, there are four sets of data involving Lingtu Monastery (76.5%), Jinguangming Monastery (84.6% and 88.5%), and Longxing Monastery (82%) in the middle and early stages of the Tibetan rule. They are very close in number and were all around 80%. This shows that the literacy level of monks in all the monasteries at that time was very high, and it also shows that 80% may also be the basic level of most of the monasteries with monks. During the Guiyi Army period, the seven data figures of different monasteries were all around 60%, which also showed that the literacy levels of these monasteries were very close to each other.¹² Therefore, if the overall literacy rate of male monks in Dunhuang during the same period is estimated based on the literacy rate of one monastery, even though there might be some deviation, the deviation may not be very large.

On the basis of the above analysis, the literacy rates of male monks in Dunhuang in the late Tang, Five Dynasties and early Song periods are arranged as follows (see Table 8):

Table 8. The literacy rate of Dunhuang monks in the period of Tibetan occupation and the period of the Guiyi Army.

		Time	Literacy Rate
Period of Tibetan Occupation	1	788	76.5%
	2	Around 810s–820s	84.6%
	3	831 or 843	82%
	4	841	88.5%
	5	893	66.7%
Period of the Guiyi Army	6	905	75%
	7	925	61.9%
	8	931	60%
	9	936	56%
	10	974	63.6%
	11	985	63.6%

Regarding nuns, we have also only collected 6 pieces of data, of which there are fairly numerous data from 788, including the data on the Lingxiu Monastery, Puguang Monastery and Dasheng Monastery. If the overall figures of the three monasteries are taken, they can be arranged in chronological order as follows (see Table 9):

Table 9. The literacy rate of Dunhuang nuns in the period of Tibetan occupation and the period of the Guiyi Army.

		Time	Literacy Rate
Period of Tibetan Occupation	1	788年	32.7%
Period of the Guiyi Army	2	End of 9th Century to the Beginning of the Tenth Century	28.8%

And We can put the above data in a chart (see Chart 1):

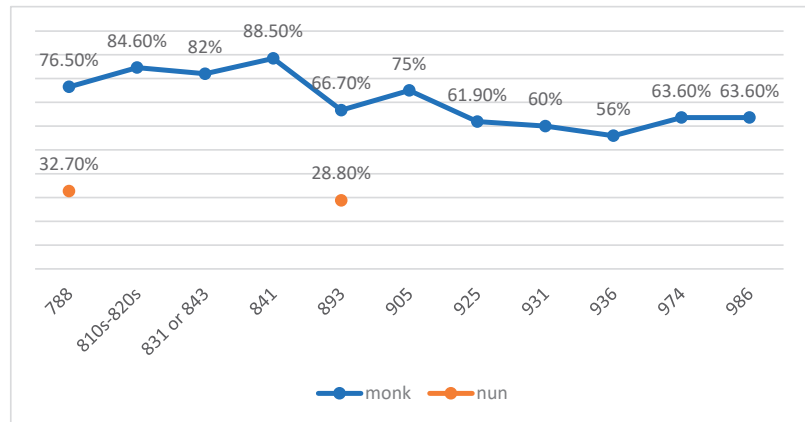


Chart 1. The literacy rate of Buddhist monks and nuns in Dunhuang during the late Tang, Five Dynasties, and early Song Period.

Although there may be deviations between the estimations of specific years and the real situation, and the specifics may be adjusted with further research, while the general trend is very clear: that is, the literacy rate of the sangha during the Tibetan period was significantly higher than that of the Guiyi Army period, and the literacy rate of the monks was higher than that of the nuns. At the same time, no matter how the state policy changed, the sangha could guarantee a certain number of literate monks, and this ratio was fairly high.

4. Reasons That the Literacy Rate of the Sangha in Dunhuang Declined under the Guiyi Army Period

During the Tibetan occupation period and the Guiyi Army period, the environment for the development of Buddhism was very different. During the Tibetan occupation period, Buddhism in Dunhuang was isolated from the Central Plains and was relatively closed off, gradually showing a different development from Buddhism in the Central Plains. During the Guiyi Army period, with the return of Dunhuang to the Tang Dynasty, communication between Dunhuang and Central China became intensified, and Dunhuang Buddhism gradually converged more and more with Buddhism in the Central Plains. The changes in the literacy rate of the sangha should be considered under this historical context. Here, we focus on three factors. The first is the change in the policy of ordaining monks and the expansion of the size of the sangha. The second is the change in the number of eminent monks, and the third is the change in the Buddhist ethos.

(1) The Change in the Policy of Ordaining Monks and the Expansion of the Size of the Sangha.

To a great extent, the state's Buddhist policy, especially the policy of ordaining monks, determines the education level of the Sangha. For example, in the early Tang period, the policy of "test on the sutras to ordain the monks" (*shijing* 試經) was widely implemented.¹³ That is, monks were required to read hundreds of scriptures to obtain the qualification of ordination. Furthermore, from the time of Emperor Gaozong, daily examinations were often practiced (Meng 2009, pp. 136–43). When the policy is effectively implemented, the official can guarantee the quality of the Sangha. If monks were ordained indiscriminately, especially when monk identifications were sold excessively, the education level of the Sangha will drop sharply.

Although it is not clear what the local policy pertaining to ordaining monks in Dunhuang was during the Tibetan occupation period and the Guiyi Army period, it can still be inferred from the analysis of the changes in the size of the Dunhuang sangha that the government of the Tibetan period strictly controlled the monks, while the Guiyi Army

gradually loosened the control. Before the third month of 788, the size of the sangha was 310. Later, due to the immigration of monks outside of Dunhuang, the size may have reached 389; by 825, it was 427 (218 male, 209 female). Although the size was also increasing at the time, it was not a very large increase. During the period of the Guiyi Army, the size of the sangha expanded rapidly. The size was 1169 at the beginning of the 10th century. Among them, there were 392 male monks, which almost doubled in the size compared to the year 825. The number of nuns reached 777, an increase of more than three times. In 933, the size of the sangha had reached 1500, 3.5 times that of 825. During the period of the Guiyi Army, it was obvious that the quality of the sangha could not be effectively controlled through the policy of the ordination of the monks.

The relaxation of restrictions on the size of Buddhist sangha meant that the quality of the sangha at the institutional level cannot be guaranteed. At the same time that this caused the expansion of the size of the sangha, education within Buddhist institutions would have taken a huge hit. During the period of the Guiyi Army, the expansion of the size of the sangha far exceeded the speed of growth in the other various fields of the monasteries' construction. This increasingly limited the resources of the monastery for matters such as Buddhist practices and monks' livelihood.

For example, in terms of monastic education, the educational resources of monasteries may not have achieved the same growth as the size of the sangha. Although some monks in Dunhuang received a good family education before they became ordained, for the vast majority of monks, their education training in aspects such as reading and writing was completed in the monastery. During the Tibetan and Guiyi Army periods, there were some male monks' monasteries, such as temple schools (*sixue* 寺學), which could be open to some male monks, and the new monks, *śrāmaṇeri*, and *śikṣamāṇās*, could learn from older monks and nuns, but many source materials show that during the Guiyi Army period, the cultural training received by many monks was very inadequate. The document P. 6005, "Announcement About the Summer's Three-month Retreat During the Guiyi Army Period" (*guiyi jun shiqi shimen tie zhushi gangguan ling xiaanju tie* 歸義軍時期釋門帖諸寺綱管令夏安居帖) mentioned that many monks, *śrāmaṇeri*, and *śikṣamāṇās* "did not have teachers yet" (*weiyou qing yizhi* 未有請依止) at that time, that is, there was no elder monks to guide them in their cultivation. In such an environment, the condition of their training in cultural matters can be imagined. In the signature lists of the later periods of the Zhang family's Guiyi Army and the Cao family's Guiyi Army period analyzed above, there are a lot of crude signatures, and this phenomenon is not seen in the signature lists of the Tibetan period. In another example, for the year 925, six monks in the Jingtū Monastery, including "Bao", "Dao", "Ying", and "Yinhui" have their own signatures in the document P. 2049V (1). At this time, their hand writing was very crude, and they were obviously beginners. Judging from their signatures on P. 2049V (2) in 931, in six years, only the hand writing of "Bao" has improved slightly, and the writing ability of the five other people did not improve compared to before. Some of their writing abilities even regressed, which means that these five monks had little to no writing training in the past six years. (See Table 10).

Table 10. A comparative table of calligraphy by Bao and five others in 925 and 931.

	Bao寶	Dao道	Ying應	Baoda保達	Yinhui因會	Gu古(?)
925						
931						

The rapid expansion of the size of the sangha has also far exceeded the construction speed of the basic infrastructure of the monastery such as dormitories. As a result, a

large number of monks cannot live in the monasteries and can only return to their secular families (Hao 1991, pp. 836–37; 1998, pp. 74–112; Wu 2018, pp. 14–21). Staying at secular home meant that the studies in the Buddhist subjects of sutras, vinaya, and Buddhist treatises were in a very bad situation. S. 371 and P. 3092V are “An Announcement about the Examination from the Monastery Education Establishment in the Tenth Month of the Wuzi Year (928)” (*wuzi nian* [928] *shiyue shibu tie* 戊子年 (928) 十月試部帖), which recorded that in 928, the monastery education establishment ordered the monastery managers to supervise their disciples twice a month (the first and last day of the month) in reading and reading sutras, vinayas and Buddhist treatises. In order to ensure these requirements are carried out, regulatory measures such as setting up “teaching masters” to teach, having “Karmadāna making reports” and having “examination on scriptures” were implemented. Even so, the chanting that resulted from the remaining 20 people found in P. 3092V show that 8 people participated in all the activities, 3 people participated in half of the activities, and 9 people did not participate. Nearly half of the disciples ignored the announcement. The appearance of this phenomenon indicates that the monks at that time might not take this kind of scripture examination very seriously. This attitude will inevitably lead to a sharp drop in the monks’ education level compared to the past. At the same time, it is worth noting that the proportion of monks who participated in chanting in 928 was 55% (11/20), which is almost the same as the above statistics of 56% (P. 2680V [8]) of the proportion of those chanting in the Jingtu Monastery in 936.

(2) Decrease in the Number of Eminent Monks and the Transformation of the Buddhist Ethos

The literacy rate of the monks in Dunhuang during Tibetan rule was much higher than that during the Guiyi Army period, which was also closely related to the level and atmosphere of Buddhist studies in Dunhuang.

The rulers of Tibetans placed great emphasis on Buddhism, and once adopted the policy of besieging and not attacking the city of Dunhuang for more than ten years. This allowed Buddhism in Dunhuang to avoid a military disaster to the greatest extent. At the same time, Dunhuang also obtained a large number of Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist monks from places such as Ganzhou. It was also during this period that famous monks such as Tankuang 曇曠, an eminent Vijñānavāda monk from Ximing Monastery in Chang’an, retreated to Dunhuang to spread the Buddhist teaching. As Rong (2015) has already pointed out, “during the period of Tibetan rule (786–848), Buddhism in Dunhuang developed rapidly. The number of monasteries, monks and nuns continued to increase. Organized scripture copying led to the enrichment of scriptures stored in monasteries. Eminent Han and Tibetan monks such as Tankuang, Mahayana Hoa-San 摩訶衍, and Facheng 法成, either concentrated on writing, on spreading meditation methods, or on translating scriptures and lecturing, which lifted the level of Buddhist teaching in Dunhuang to an unprecedented level”. (Rong 2015, p. 268). In the early period of the Zhang family’s Guiyi Army, under great monks such as Facheng, Hongbian, Wuzhen, and Fajing 法鏡, Buddhist studies in Dunhuang were maintained at a relatively high level. Examples include Cheng’en’s *Commentary on the Mahāyāna-śatadharmā-prakāśamukha-śāstra*, (*baifa lunshu* 百法論疏) which was even approved by the great monks of Chang’an. However, during the period of the Cao family’s Guiyi Army, there was never another eminent monk who could compare with Tankuang and Facheng, and there was never another work that could be compared with the *Commentary on the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (*yujia shouji* 瑜伽手記) and *Commentary on the Mahāyāna-śatadharmā-prakāśamukha-śāstra*, and even the scene where “one monk taught the Dharma, and all the monks gathered together (to listen)” was rarely seen.

There may also be some connections between the decline of the education level of monks and the strength of the influence of different Buddhist schools in the Dunhuang region. Monks like Tankuang and Facheng took Vijñānavāda learning as their doctrine, and with their passing away, Vijñānavāda learning gradually declined. At the same time, during the Guiyi Army period, with the strengthening of the connection between Dunhuang and the Central Plains, the influence of Buddhism from the Central Plains became increasingly

prominent. The more simple and easy to practice Pure Land Buddhism from the Central Plains, featuring chanting rhythmic Buddhist songs and the name of Buddha, is increasingly becoming the mainstream teaching in Dunhuang.

Compared with the Vijñānavāda school's emphasis on knowledge of Buddhist theories, the Pure Land school pays more attention to the mastery of techniques such as lecturing and singing. Such as many hymns collected in S. 2945 "*Rituals of Pure Land on Chanting Buddha, Chanting Scriptures through Five Pronunciation Techniques*" (*jingtu wuhui nianfo songjing guanxing yi* 淨土五會念佛誦經觀行儀) are marked with harmony terms such as "How happy the pure land is (*jingtu le* 淨土樂)". From this, it can be seen that in the ritual of Pure Land Buddhist, the great master leads the singing, and the disciples sing harmonious terms along in unison. In this way, ordinary monks only need to memorize some simple words for chanting. Furthermore, the Pure Land rituals used mostly Buddhist songs. They have rhythms and rules, which are catchy when chanted, and their theories are easy to understand and convenient to memorize. Therefore, it is easier for the monks to operate this, and they only need to listen and sing constantly without the need to read the texts to master it. In reality, for some performing monks, though they may not be literate, they can still master enough performance songs to meet the needs of the Buddhist rituals. This reduces their demand for profound knowledge of Buddhism, which also lowers their level of education.

5. The Significance of the Decrease in the Literacy Rate of the Sangha during the Period of the Guiyi Army from the Perspective of the Monks Staying at Home

During the Guiyi Army period, the decrease in the literacy rate of the Dunhuang sangha obviously had huge negative consequences. For example, it would cause the sangha's status in the relationship between the government and religion to further decline,¹⁴ and the gap between the rich and the poor within the sangha would widen.¹⁵ However, under the background of the rapid expansion and the secularization of Buddhism, the number of literate monks was also increasing. They were more closely integrated with the secular society, and the literate monks were obviously of positive significance to the regional society.

When the policy of "test on the sutras to ordain the monks" failed, and it was impossible to ensure the education level of the monks from the administrative system of the state, the maintenance of the literacy rate of the monks at a certain level was largely the result of the self-sustaining effort of the monks themselves. The sangha is a religious group as well as a cultural group. Internally, there was an educational system that crossed over with ancient secular education, but is quite independent of it. Even if the state could no longer guarantee the quality of the sangha from the outside, this system can still ensure that some illiterate groups can grow into qualified monks after entering the monastery. The cultural resources of the monasteries can even meet the needs of many secular scholars. Even up to the middle and late Tang period, there were still many secular scholars who went to study in monasteries (Yan 1969, pp. 367–424). Dunhuang was even more obvious in that the monastic schools opened by monasteries even became the most important education center in the prefecture at one point (Li 1986, pp. 39–47; Gao 1986, pp. 231–70). Therefore, even when the sangha group was viciously expanded and the overall education level of the ordained monks was very low, the monastery could still support the development of a considerable number of disciples. Specifically in Dunhuang, the resources of monasteries with monks can also maintain the development of a good half or more of the monks, and it is reflected in the fact that the literacy rate of the monks was still about 50–60%. Although the resources of convents were more limited, it could also ensure that about one-third of the disciples obtained a certain degree of knowledge.

Therefore, although the size of the Dunhuang sangha during the Guiyi Army period was expanding rapidly, the number of literate people was also increasing; furthermore, in the context of the decline in the total population coupled with the expansion of the sangha at this time, the proportion of literate monks in the total population is actually also

rising. In the early days of Tibetan rule, Dunhuang had a total population of more than 30,000 people (Qi 1989, pp. 73–97), although there were only 180 literate monks (including 103 monks and 77 nuns), accounting for 0.6% of the total population. By the Guiyi Army period, this proportion continued to rise. At the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth century, the literacy rate of monks mostly remained at about 50–60%, and even the literacy rate of nuns, whose growth had been out of control by the beginning of the tenth century, was about 28.8%. If the literacy rate of the monks in 893 was 66.7%, and the literacy rate of the nuns in the early tenth century was 28.8%, based on the data on the size of the Buddhist establishment of Dunhuang in the early tenth century (392 monks and 693 nuns) obtained from S. 2614V, the number of literate people in the Buddhist establishment may be 261 ($392 \times 66.7\%$) + 224 ($777 \times 28.8\%$), which is 486. Compared with the early days of Tibetan rule, the number of literate monks increased by 158, and the number of nuns also increased by 142; both of them more than doubled. At the end of the ninth century, the population of Dunhuang under the rule of Zhang Chengfeng was more than 10,000, and the literate people in the sangha accounted for nearly 5% of the total population! Considering that before modern times, the literacy rate of the total population was only about 10% (See Jack 1963, pp. 304–5; John 1983, pp. 572–99), this figure is very high. Of course, the reason why this value looks so surprising is due more to the frequent wars during the Zhang Chengfeng period, which resulted in a large loss of population. However, even using the population of 30,000 during the Cao family Guiyi Army period for estimation, the proportion of literate monks can still reach about 1.5%, which is much higher than that during the Tibetan period. Erik Zürcher once described the ancient Buddhist sangha as “the Secondary Elite” (See Erik 1989, pp. 19–56). From the scale of the literacy rate, his description is very accurate. The increase in the number of literate monks and their increase in proportion in the total population means that the size and proportion of the population they can influence with their knowledge has also increased.

Although the literate monks of the sangha during this period were likely to increase in quantity rather than in the level of their literacy, it can not be denied that these literate monks played the dual role of holding religious authority and cultural authority at the same time. In local societies, they are among the most important users of knowledge. In fact, judging from the contents that were studied daily by the Dunhuang monks, in addition to Buddhist knowledge, they also actively learned and mastered knowledge related to secular affairs. From the writing practice texts of the monks in Dunhuang, scholars like Pei Changchun 裴長春 and Shen Shoucheng 沈壽程 found that those documents of social organizations (*sheyi wenshu* 社邑文書), contract documents, and letters accounted for a large proportion of the monks’ daily learning (Pei and Shen 沈壽程 2020, pp. 29–37).

The lifestyle of many monks is to live in secular families, which will allow what they learn in the monastery to influence many secular people who live outside the monastery. So the monks would then play an important role in maintaining the normal operation of the regional society.

For example, the *sheyi* 社邑 was a kind of community organization where people came together voluntarily to help each other in religious and social activities, which played an important role in maintaining the normal operation of rural society. Many of them had the participation of monks. There are 18 *sheyi* articles (*shetiao* 社條) included in the “Compilation and Commentary on the Documents of Dunhuang *Sheyi*”, (*dunhuang sheyi wenshu jixiao* 敦煌社邑文書輯校). Their dates are concentrated after 855, and 10 of them contain the members’ name. Furthermore, 7 out of the 10 documents contain the monks or nuns’ names. This also means that about 70% of the community organizations have monks or nuns in them. Moreover, many monks often play important social roles, not just as ordinary members, but holding the most important position as the “three officials” in a *sheyi* (head of *she* 社長, official of *she* 舍官, and the recorder 錄事). P. 4960 “Articles on Building the Buddhist Hall *she* Concluded after Selection of the Three Officials on the Twenty First Day of the Fifth Month of the Jiacheng Year [944]” (*jiacheng nian* [944] *wu yue ershiyi ri xiu fotang she zaiqing sanguan yue* 甲辰年 [944年] 五月廿一日修佛堂社再請三官約)

are new articles concluded by the Buddhist Hall Association (*fotang she*) after the re-election of the three officials. Among them, the three elected officials were all monks: “Qingdu 慶度 is the official of *she*, Fasheng 法勝 is the head of the *she*, and Qingjie 慶戒 is the recorder”. In S. 6005 “Supplementary Treaty of a *She* in Dunhuang” (*Dunhuang moushe buchong tiaoyue* 敦煌某社補充條約), which was written in the first half of the tenth century, the two elders of the *she* (*shelao* 社老), “Xici 喜慈, Wenzhi 文智”, and others were all monks. Being an official of *she* shows that the monks had prestige in society. On the other hand, it also shows that these monks had sufficient ability, which of course also included knowledge. This is especially true in the position of “recorder”, which was mostly “held by those who are capable, smart and upright. They take care of the daily tasks of the organization, such as posting articles, organizing Buddhist gatherings, managing funerals, and supervising members to abide by the regulations and enforce penalties”.¹⁶ As a result, the knowledge required of them is even more evident.

Monks also played an important role in economic activities that are closely related to the local community such as the establishment of contracts. In the *Compilation and Commentary on Dunhuang Contract Documents* (*dunhuang qiyue wenshu jixiao* 敦煌契約文書輯校), in the “buy and sale category”, there are 17 documents which contain information on things such as signatures, among which 8 documents mention monk participants (not buyers and sellers), making up 47.1% of the total documents (See Sha 1998, pp. 1–81). The monks would act as middlemen (*zhongren* 中人) or witnesses (*jianren* 見人) and would undertake the task of writing contracts. In P. 3394 “Land Contract Between the Monk Zhang Yueguang and Lü Zhitong in the Sixth Year of Dazhong of the Tang (852)” (*tang dazhong* [852] *seng zhang yueguang, lü zhitong yi diqi* 唐大中六年 [852] 僧張月光, 呂智通易地契), the first witness listed is “Monk Zhang Fayuan 僧張法源,” followed by “Monk Shanhui 僧善惠”. Furthermore, Fayuan also signed the contract, indicating that he has a certain level of education. The “contract writing person” (*shuqi ren* 書契人) in S. 1475V “Contract Pertaining to Wheat With the Resident of the Stong sar Tribe, Zhai Milao in the Year of The Year of the Rabbit (823) (*maonian* [823] *xidongsa buluo baixing zhai milao bian mai qi* 卯年 [823] 悉董薩部落百姓翟米老便麥契), is “Monk Zhizhen 僧志真”. The document BD 3925V (11) “Contract Pertaining to the Resident of the township of Mogao, Zheng Chouda Selling Houses in the Ninth Years of Kaibao (976)” (*kaibao jiunian* [976] *mogao xiang baixin zheng chouda mai zhaishie qi* 開寶九年 [976] 莫高鄉百姓鄭丑達賣宅舍契) was also written by Monk Zhijin 僧志進.

In addition, in the Dunhuang documents, there are also many monks’ writings on documents on releasing wives (*fangqi shu* 放妻書), documents on releasing slaves (*fangliang shu* 放良書), wills, documents on brothers dividing property (*xiongdì fenjia shu* 兄弟分家書), texts on rituals for childbirth, and texts on divination, which seem to have covered all aspects involving writing in the daily lives of ordinary people. We can see that although the knowledge of many literate monks was obtained through the Buddhist education system, they can use this knowledge for the livelihood of the people in the local society, and their influence was so comprehensive and deep that they became the maintainers of the normal operations of the local society. When considering this, although the development of Buddhism in Dunhuang during the late Tang and Five Dynasties was relatively bleak, the role the sangha played in regional society, especially the secular society, may have been much greater than that in the early Tang period.

6. Conclusions

Through the signature list of monks, the name list of monks copying scriptures and the name list of monks chanting scriptures, this paper has made a relatively detailed statistics on the literacy rate of the Dunhuang monks in the late Tang, Five Dynasties and the early Song period. Although these data are based on local texts in Dunhuang, they can also serve as reference for the literacy of Buddhist sangha in the Central Plains. For example, in the early days of the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, especially when the S. 2729 (1) was created in the third month of 788, the Dunhuang sangha was actually completely inherited

from the Tang period. This also means that after the An-Shi Rebellion 安史之亂, the literacy rate of the monks in Dunhuang should have been around 76.5%. Before that, Dunhuang was still a standard prefecture of the Tang Dynasty. Zhang Yichao 張議潮 later overthrew Tibetan rule and brought Dunhuang back under the Tang Dynasty. Although the Guiyi Army regime was quite autonomous, the Buddhist policies, trends of Buddhism, and the living situation of the sangha at that time were actually similar to those of the Central Plains. Therefore, the literacy rate of the Dunhuang sangha at this time should also serve as an important reference for understanding the development of Buddhist in the Central Plains.

On this basis, we can put forward a new understanding of the role the sangha played in the development of regional society in the late Tang, Five Dynasties and the early Song period and the development trend of Buddhism after the Song Dynasty.

The rapid expansion of the sangha in the Tang Dynasty appeared after Emperor Daizong 代宗, and reached a size of 260,000 monks and nuns before the Huichang Persecution of Buddhism (*huichang fanan* 會昌法難). This is over twice the size of the 126,000 monks and nuns in the twenty-fourth year of Kaiyuan (736) under Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗.¹⁷ In the period of Xuanzong's reign, even if all monks and nuns were literate, they only accounted for 0.25% of the total population; and even if the 260,000 monks and nuns under Wuzong's reign only had a literacy rate of 50%, the number of literate monks and nuns still reached 130,000, and their proportion in the total population increased to 0.5%.¹⁸

Similar to Dunhuang, throughout the Tang period, the living situation of monks in the Central Plains also experienced great changes. In the early Tang period, the government had strong control over the development of the sangha. The literacy rate of the sangha might have been relatively high, but its scale was limited, and the monks mainly lived in monasteries. Even though there appeared the phenomenon of monks who "lived in the secular disciples' family", (侍養私門)¹⁹ it was quickly rectified. Overall, the degree of integration between the sangha and the life of the secular people was not very frequent and deep. Before Wuzong 武宗 persecuted Buddhism, there were also many monks who lived in secular homes and were neighbors with ordinary secular people in many places in the Central Plains. In a petition during Tang Dezong's 唐德宗 time, it was mentioned that many monasteries were occupied by military personnel at the time. The monasteries also stopped providing food to the monks (所在伽藍, 例無飯僧). Furthermore, a lot of monasteries even did not have a canteen (the content of the petition can be seen in P.3608V and P.3620). In monasteries without a canteen, monks obviously cannot stay there long term, and had to make a living themselves to survive. This is consistent with the characteristics of Dunhuang monasteries where they only "provide food when they have an event", (有事供糧) (Hao 1998, pp. 123–63). During the reign of Emperor Wenzong 文宗, Ennin 圓仁 also saw the phenomenon of "monks all living in secular homes" (僧盡在俗家) in the Beihai County of Shandong and other places.²⁰ When Wuzong persecuted Buddhism, almost all monks and nuns were forcibly returned to laity, allowing literate monks to return to the secular society. There were many highly knowledgeable people among them. The *Biography of Eminent Monks in the Song* 宋高僧傳 records that many eminent monks "wrapped their heads to become commoners" (裹首為民) when Buddhism was persecuted, and lived in secular society for several years, and many monks never returned to the monasteries even after Buddhism was restored in the period of the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗.

Compared with the previous time when they lived in monasteries and devoted themselves to Buddhist affairs, after walking out of the monastic gates and returning to the secular society again, the monks would also apply the knowledge they learned in the monasteries to their everyday secular life when they were at secular home. This is the background under which there was an increase in the secularization of Buddhism during the Song and Ming Dynasty, in which there was more and more involvement of Buddhism in the daily lives of the secular masses (Zhang and Ren 2015, pp. 119–30; Chen 2019, pp. 157–63).

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Notes

¹ T 396: 1119a.

² T 2103, 24: 279a-b.

³ For a study, see Cheng (2019, p. 40).

⁴ Regarding the size of the sangha, please refer to Akira (1959, pp. 285–338). Chuguyevsky (2000, pp. 116–39). Zheng (2004a, pp. 20–30).

⁵ For functional literacy and full literacy, see Evelyn (1979).

⁶ In the entire list, only 8 monks, “Jinshu 金樞, Lisu 利俗, Liming 離名, Jieran 戒然, Fayuan 法緣, Qikong 稽空, Chao’an 超岸, Tanhui 曇惠” are found in S. 2729 (1) and P. 3060. It can be seen that the time here might have been about twenty or thirty years from the records in S. 2729 (1). Therefore, overall, the age of this document is roughly from the 810s to the 820s.

⁷ For the relationship between these two written scrolls, see Zhao (2013).

⁸ For related controversies, see Liu (2017).

⁹ *Ryō no shūge* 8. 232–33. When Zheng (2004b) recovered the article “holding the position of the three directors” in *Regulations of Buddhist Monks and Daoists’ (seng dao ge 僧道格)*, he did not recover the text “their names needs to be signed by themselves in a report and send to the officials”. However, according to the Dunhuang documents, the disciples did jointly sign it.

¹⁰ In addition to the 6 pieces analyzed in this article, P. 5587 (4) “The Report from Kaiyuan Monastery on the Fourth Month of the Year of Ox (809 or 821)” (*chounian* [809 huo 821] *siyue kaiyuan si die ji du sentong pan* 丑年[809或821] 四月開元寺牒) and the 羽 64 “Contract of Li Shanshan Selling His Houses to the Dayun Monastery in the Early Tenth Century” (*shi shiji chu li shanshan mai she yu dayun si qi* 十世紀初李山山賣舍於大雲寺寺契), S. 6417 (20) “The Report Pertaining to the Elder Shenwei and Others of the Jinguangming Monastery Inviting the Shanli to Fill the Position of Elder in the Third Month of the Second Year of Qingtai in the Later Tang Dynasty (938)” (*houtang qingtai er nian* [935] *sanyue jinguangming si shangzuo shenwei deng qin shanli wei shangzui zhuang* 後唐清泰二年 (935) 三月金光明寺上座神威等請善力為上座狀),” S. 1625 “Report on the Estimation of the Expenditure Record of the Dasheng Monastery in the Sixth Day of the Twelfth Month of the Third Year of Tianfu” (*tianfu sannian* [938] *shi'er yue liu ri dasheng si suan hui die* 天福三年 (938) 十二月六日大乘寺入破曆算會牒) and BD 14670 “Report of the Disciples of the Lingtu Monastery Nominating the Head of Registry in the Second Year of Guangshun (952)” (*guangshun ernian* [952] *lingtu si tuzhong ju gangshou die* 廣順二年 (952) 靈圖寺徒眾舉綱首牒), also had signatures from the monks, but the number of signatures are few or there were too many incomplete ones, and they have no reference value, so this article will not discuss them for the time being.

¹¹ P. 3060 “Record of Scripture chanting by the Sangha on the Third Month of the Year 788” (788 *nian sanyue dunhuang sengtuan zhuanjing li* 788年三月敦煌僧團轉經曆), BD 16453 “Record of the Scripture chanting Rearding by the disciples of Lingxiu Monastery in the Early 11th Century” (*shiyi shiji chu lingxiu si zhuanjing li* 十一世紀初靈修寺轉經曆) also recorded the number of people who chanted scriptures in the monastery, but compared with the size of the monks in the monastery at that time, the number of participants was very small, and they do not have much reference value. Therefore, they will not be discussed here.

¹² In the Tibetan and the Guiyi Army periods, the implementation of various policies might have maintained a relative equilibrium in the development of the monasteries in Dunhuang, such as the distribution policy regarding newly ordained novice monks. These newly ordained novice monks will all be given the dharma name and the same group of monks often had the same generation name. This can be seen from P. 3423 “Record of the Mitzvah for the Newly Ascended Monk in the Qianyuan Monastery,” (*bingxu nian* [926] *qianyuan si xindeng jieseng cidai li* 丙戌年 (926年) 乾元寺新登戒僧次第曆). However, they could not choose a monastery based on their own preference, but were most likely uniformly distributed to different monasteries by the government. Therefore, in S. 2729 (1), monks such as “Jinluan 金鸞, Jinyun 金雲, Jingu 金鼓, Jinzhen 金振, Jinye 金液, Jindong 金洞,” were probably also ordained in the same year, but were distributed to different monasteries later. The distribution mechanism is not clear, but this mechanism should not lead to much disparity between different monasteries. In addition to this, the flow of monks between different monasteries also guaranteed to a certain degree of balance in the development of the different monasteries. An example is found in the document P. 4660 (45) “Praise-Text of the Atcharya Xuan,” (*shazhou shimen dujiaoshou Xuan sheli zanbingxu* 沙州釋門都教授炫闍梨讚並序) where Zhang Jinxuan, who already had “many disciples,” when young, resided in the Jinguangming Monastery. Later he was invited by the Qianyuan Monastery and played an important role in the development of that monastery.

¹³ See discussions in Zhou (2008, p. 15).

¹⁴ Rong Xinjiang once observed that since the time of Tibetan rule, due to the increase in the power of Buddhism, the highest monks officials had great power, often ruling Dunhuang society together with local rulers, until the time of Zhang Chengfeng 張承奉, when the Guiyi military regime had completely surpassed the power of the clergy. He also believes that the emergence of

this phenomenon is not unrelated to the termination of the Buddhist teaching activities in Dunhuang, the reduction of the self education of monks and nuns, and the expansion of the size of the sangha. See: Rong (2015, p. 275).

- 15 Participating in ritual activities such as scripture chanting is an important means for monks to obtain an income. Hao (1998, pp. 332–66) has found that the largest number of monks who participated in these activities were often those from the upper echelons of the monastic community. Although this phenomenon may be related to the fact that the older monks have some power to deprive other newer monks of opportunities, it is also likely to be the result of the inability of the sangha to provide enough literate monks. In 936, there were 25 monks at the Pure Land Monastery, but only 14 monks, including the supreme Buddhist chief monk, participated in scripture chanting. Only 14 monks were responsible for reading the 600-fascicle *Mahāprajāpāramitā* Sutra, which was a very heavy task. So why were the monks such as “Bao”, “Dao”, “Ying”, and “Yinhui” not able to participate? An important reason is that they were illiterate. After all, many ritual activities, such as scripture chanting, require the chanting of texts in sutras, and those who are illiterate were excluded. Therefore, the supreme Buddhist chief monk and others had to take turns. Therefore, from this perspective, the reduction of the overall education level of the sangha will also cause the stratification of the rich and poor within the sangha to be more serious to a certain extent.
- 16 For related discussions, see Ji (1998, p. 426).
- 17 *Tang liudian* 4: 125.
- 18 During the time of Wuzong’s 武宗 reign, the number of households was 4,955,151, and the population was about 20 million. See: *Cefu yuangui* 159: 5515.
- 19 *Cefu yuangui* 159: 1775.
- 20 Nittō-guhō-junrei-kōki no kenkyū 入唐求法巡禮行記の研究, pp. 228–349.

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Article

Hongzan's Maitreya Belief in the Context of Late Imperial Chinese Monastic Revival and Chan Decline

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Abstract: This paper shows that the early Qing Chinese Buddhist monk Zaisan Hongzan's belief in Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven pure lands, as reflected in his collection of miracle tales and biographies, should be understood in a broader socio-religious context of Chan decline and monastic revival in late imperial China. It is important to notice that instead of advocating for the combination of Chan and Amitābha's Pure Land of Bliss practice, Hongzan proposed the most severe criticism of the Chinese Chan tradition since the Song dynasty. Through both his personal doctrinal writings and the narrative strategies applied in his Tuṣita Heaven miracle tales, Hongzan vividly displayed his concerns about literary Chan practice and argued for the pivotal and urgent need for Vinaya among monastic communities. Hongzan's personal anti-Chan sentiment and his intention to reestablish the study and practice of Buddhist Vinaya disciplines in a time of alleged "crisis" of Chinese Buddhism strongly influenced how he composed and transcribed eminent monks' biographies related to the cult of Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven. A "hagiographic" reading of Hongzan's miracle tale collections is necessary to understand his religious discourse in this special historical stage in China.

Keywords: Zaisan Hongzan; *Doushuai guijing ji*; Maitreya; Tuṣita Heaven; Chan Buddhism; Qing dynasty Buddhism

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1. Introduction

The tradition of pursuing ascendance to Bodhisattva Maitreya's (Mile pusa 彌勒菩薩) Tuṣita Heaven (*Doushuai tuo tian* 兜率陀天) has a long history in Chinese Buddhism. Originally, certain Theravada and Mahāyāna Buddhist texts depict Maitreya, probably a member of Buddha's monastic sangha community, as the future Buddha after Śākyamuni (or Siddhartha Gautama, the original Buddha and founder of Buddhism). It is believed that Maitreya will descend to the human realm of the Sahā world (*Suopo shije* 娑婆世界) to preach the teaching of Dharma when Śākyamuni's teaching completely diminishes. When this happens, the average lifespan of the people in this world will increase to more than eighty thousand years (Lancaster 2005, pp. 5618–19). In the Mahāyāna belief system, Maitreya is worshipped as a powerful deity like similar Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī. The early cult (in its broadest sense as an ensemble of collective religious worship) of Maitreya resulted in numerous iconographic traditions in India and Central Asia (Kim 1997, pp. 9–32; Granoff 2010). In the later development of the worship of Maitreya the inner pure realm of Tuṣita Heaven, where the "Buddha-to-be" Maitreya resides before his final enlightenment, gradually became a paradise-like "pure land" (*jingtu* 淨土) where believers would reincarnate. These believers would thus avoid the disastrous period of the decline of Dharma and wait for the "golden age" of humanity, during which Maitreya will descend and gain final enlightenment (Nattier 1988, pp. 23–47). South and Southeast Asian Maitreya cults never showed the tendency to treat Tuṣita Heaven as a place of rebirth after a believer's death, however; rather, this aspect of the Maitreya belief system was perhaps confined to Mahāyāna texts and traditions transmitted to the north (Jaini 1988, pp. 54–90). Matsumoto (Matsumoto 1911, pp. 2–9) suspected that the pure land belief of Tuṣita Heaven was only peripheral in the Maitreya cult before it arrived in China. He believed

that it was the Chinese Buddhists who established this pure land understanding of Tuṣita Heaven on a doctrinal level and developed complex practices based on this understanding. Two particular kinds of scriptures translated into Chinese during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (220–589 CE) initiated the cult of Maitreya in China. The first kind, scriptures like the *Sūtra of Visual Contemplation of Ascendance to Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven* (*Foshuo guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuai tian jing* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經) (T14, 418b–420c), promoted the idea of a paradise-like Tuṣita Heaven as a place for meritorious rebirth. On the other hand, scriptures of the second kind, like the *Sūtra of Maitreya's Descent to [the Human Realm] and Attainment of Buddhahood* (*Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經) (T14, 423c–425c), accentuated Maitreya's role as the future Buddha during a golden age of humanity (Chen 1964, p. 405; Kitagawa 1981). One can say that early canonical literatures and sources from indigenous communities do not show a unanimous narrative of Maitreya; however, a strong focus on the pure land of Tuṣita Heaven is already present in these early works (Anderl 2016).

Maitreya worship in China can be understood as divided into two strands: a more orthodox one limited to the educated monastic and lay believers, and a more “popular” and trans-stratum one with conspicuous messianic and eschatological themes (Zürcher [1980] 2013b). The unorthodox strand's influence can be noted in many later Chinese religious “rebellions” and millenarian movements. Scholars have generally paid more attention to the unorthodox, millenarian aspect of the Chinese Maitreya cult (Overmyer 1976, pp. 225–26; Ownby 1999). Some may argue, however, that rather than representing an essentially unorthodox religious symbol the messianic image of Maitreya was only domesticated into the Chinese political cosmology of dynastic change. This argument holds that those who failed their politico-military campaign in the name of Maitreya were labelled “unorthodox” by the establishment (Hughes 2021, pp. 44–60).

Similarly, the religious practice of the orthodox and more monastic-oriented Maitreya cult—and, in particular, the belief of Tuṣita Heaven as a pure land for rebirth—drew interest from both monastic elites and lay believers. Lee (2010, pp. 139–202) argues that based on the visual representations of Tuṣita Heaven in Dunhuang murals, we can assume that the belief in rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven was particularly welcome by lay communities in medieval China. A strong emphasis on monastic practice and systematic doctrinal study can also be detected in some aspects of the medieval Chinese Maitreya cult. The eminent monk of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 CE), Daoan 道安 (312–385 CE), was one of the earliest recorded believers in Tuṣita Heaven in Chinese Buddhist historiography. He saw ascending to Tuṣita Heaven as a way to solve doubts about Buddha's teachings, and was famous for fervently advocating for monastic rules, professional dhyāna meditation, and the understanding of Mahāyāna wisdom (Zhang 2009). Many medieval Chinese and Korean monastic elites—including the master of Chinese Yogācāra, master Kuiji 窺基 (632–682 CE)—linked Tuṣita Heaven to Mahāyāna doctrines and practices. This made belief in the Tuṣita Heaven pure land a contested tradition against Amitābha's (*Ami tufo* 阿彌陀佛) Western Pure Land of Bliss (Sukhavati; *Xifang jile shijie* 西方極樂世界) (Wang 2016, pp. 84–88; McBride 2016). In some scholars' views, however, the monastic Maitreya cult, especially monastic Tuṣita Heaven practice, suffered from gradual decline after the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). According to these scholars, this decline was due to multiple political and religious changes; as a result, belief in Tuṣita Heaven was never as competitive as Amitābha's Pure Land belief among monastic communities (Hou 2014; Wang 1992).

Moreover, unlike Amitābha's Pure Land tradition, the Tuṣita Heaven cult in China lacked an exclusive “rebirth biography” collection (*wangsheng zhuan* 往生傳) until the early Qing dynasty (1636–1912 CE). Although stories of monastic figures' rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven are scattered throughout historical records from different periods, these stories were never collected and edited in the manner of a Tuṣita Heaven hagiography similar to the long and influential textual tradition of Sukhavati rebirth biographies. Only during the early Qing dynasty was a collection of Tuṣita Heaven rebirth miracle tales, *The Anthology of Exemplary Tales of Tuṣita Heaven Rebirth* (*Doushuai guijing ji* 兜率龜鏡集) (X88, pp. 50a–74a)¹,

compiled. The *Anthology* was compiled by a monastic elite, Zaisan Hongzan 在慘弘贊 (1611–1686 CE), from Guangdong. One chapter of this text is exclusively dedicated to the stories of monastic figures who were believed to have successfully attained rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven and to accounts of their miraculous signs before death. This *Anthology* was unprecedented, and it also has had no succession in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Thus, it is the only Tuṣita Heaven rebirth hagiography written in Chinese.

At first glance, one may see this text as a *creatio ex nihilo*—a “creation out of nothing,” produced without reference to the extant religious and cultural tradition—and thus misfit to the broader religious landscape of late Ming (1368–1644 CE) and early Qing dynasty Buddhism. Before and after Hongzan, the cult of Tuṣita Heaven was seldom mentioned or advocated for by monastic and lay authorities. Why would Hongzan attempt to produce such a text? What is so special in his understanding of the Maitreya cult that he had to accentuate and establish it in an early Qing Buddhist context? In this article, I argue that the *Anthology* should not be regarded simply as an isolated creation of Hongzan. Instead, this text should be understood in the context of Hongzan’s “revisionist Chan” sentiment. It reflects Hongzan’s intention to restore Chinese Buddhist monasticism in late imperial China, in contrast to two competing Buddhist schools: the so-called “declining” Chan school and the all-encompassing, lay-oriented Amitābha’s Pure Land belief.

Shinohara (1988) was the first to argue that miraculous stories and biographies of eminent monks in China should not be treated simply as objective historical records or trivial hearsays. Rather, he showed that these works served as a platform for their editors to display their own intentions and religious beliefs, as well as political motives, via meticulous narrative instruments (Shinohara 1988, pp. 94–128). Kieschnick (1997, pp. 1–8) also believed that works like biographies of medieval Chinese eminent monks should be regarded as writers’, editors’, and compilers’ active constructions of ideal images of these eminent figures. Even the less systematic and elitist, more “event-oriented” early Chinese Buddhist miracle tales, as Campany (2012, pp. 17–30) points out, are narrations of memories and ideals instead of mere recordings of empirical facts. Chen (2007), in his study of the hagiographic narrative of the famous Tang Chinese Buddhist Huayan school patriarch Fazang 法藏 (643–712 CE), similarly concludes that

The biography-hagiography dilemma is determined by an intrinsic feature of discursive activity: any description implies a certain kind of prescription, no matter how subtle; and vice versa, any prescription cannot avoid taking on a certain degree of detail. (Chen 2007, p. 3)

This idea was also proposed by Jorgensen (2005, pp. 9–31) in his earlier investigation of the hagiographic construction of the Chan master Huineng 惠能 (638–713 CE). Similar literary and religious strategies can be seen in Hongzan’s *Anthology*. What is particularly interesting in Hongzan’s compilation in late imperial China of this miracle tale collection is the intentions and pursuits behind the work. In this paper I wish to explore how narratives of the stories in the *Anthology* carry certain prescriptive features and how these stories are used by Hongzan as reactions to the “crises” in late imperial Chinese Buddhism. Linking Hongzan’s personal writings to the formation and narrative strategy of the *Anthology*, I aim to show how Hongzan delineated an independent monastic “lineage” of the Maitreya cult to compete with Chan and Amitābha’s Pure Land traditions.

2. Disputes over Chan and the Pure Land in Late Imperial China

It is generally believed that the Southern Sect of Chinese Chan Buddhism established by the Tang patriarch Huineng was gradually divided into five different strands (*zong* 宗) in late Tang and early Song (Linji 臨濟, Caodong 曹洞, Fayan 法眼, Yunmen 雲門 and Weiyang 沚仰), and Linji and Caodong became the two most influential Chan traditions during the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) as recorded in Song dynasty Chan historiographies (Dumoulin 1994, pp. 211–42). In Ming dynasty, Chan Buddhism received more and more negative comments from inside and outside Chinese Buddhist communities. The late Ming/early Qing Neo-Confucian literati Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695 CE) once

commented that “before the Wanli period [1573–1620 CE], the wind of Chan was dying out” (*Wanli Yiqian, zongfeng shuaxi* 萬曆以前，宗風衰息) (Huang 1993, p. 513). The “decline” of Chan Buddhism in Ming and early Qing China had been repeatedly mentioned by late imperial Chan masters; some pointed to the intertwined relationship between Buddhist enlightenment and the practice of Chan meditation using texts and words as a reason for this decline (Wu 2008, pp. 33–45). The famous late Ming dynasty Caodong Chan master Zhanran Yuancheng 湛然圓澄 (1561–1626 CE) reprimanded Chan communities of his time in his well-known critical work *Lament of the Tradition* (*Kaigu lu* 慨古錄), as he believed that the “authentic” practice of Chan had been lost:

The ancient [Chan] masters respectfully held previous Chan patriarchs’ mind seals [印] [of wisdom]², and flexibly and subtly utilized them. [They] used Buddha’s uppermost methods as the ultimate instruction for all sentient beings [to attain wisdom]. When their disciples did not contemplate sufficiently, [the ancient masters] encouraged their disciples to work hard [on understanding the mind seals] day and night, and to [practice incessantly] regardless of months and years, then [the disciples] could successfully be enlightened. Nowadays, Chan masters only talk about Chan according to their own lineage styles, and only speak of the critical commentaries [written on the Chan records]. [They] look like performers in a theatre. Although they wish to add on only half of a character [of their own to the commentaries], [they] fail in the end. Their disciples cannot discern right and wrong [in what these masters say]. They listen to [their masters’ lecture] once, and they claim that they have exhausted the teaching of Chan. If the teaching of Chan is that easy, [then] what were those ancient masters’ decades of study and contemplation for? Is it because people’s intelligence today is better than [that of] the ancient masters? Therefore, today those who talk about Chan are possessed by the devil Māra.³

古之為宗師者，高提祖印，活弄懸拈，用佛祖向上機關，作眾生最後開示。學者參叩不及處，勸其日夜提持，不記年月，然後悟入。今之宗師依本談禪，惟講評唱，大似戲場優人。雖本欲加半字不得，學者不審皂白，聽了一遍，已謂通宗。宗果如是易者，古人三二十年參學，竟為何事。豈今人之根，利於古人耶？由是而推，今之談宗者，是魔所持耳。(X65, 371c)

Yuancheng did not attribute the decline of Buddhism solely to the loss of an “authentic” Chan tradition in his writing. It is clear, however, that in his eyes “crises” from inside the Chan religious community played a major role in diminishing the monastic authority of Chan in addition to the treats posed by the sociopolitical climate. He is not alone in blaming Chan monks for abusing Chan literature and meditation. Other late Ming Caodong masters like Wuming Huijing 無明慧經 (1548–1618 CE) and Yongjue Yuanxian 永覺元賢 (1578–1657 CE) also strongly criticized the “degenerate” Chan communities of the period and the loss of “authentic” Chan practices and teachings (Guo 1982, pp. 119–61). The Linji 臨濟 (a Chan sect) Chan master Hanyue Fazang 漢月法藏 (1573–1635 CE) was another monastic elite who held a negative attitude towards the practice of Chan, lamenting on the loss of the true meaning of Linji and other Chan clans (X65, 106c).

These problems, as listed by Yuancheng, include the obsession with Chan texts and words, contempt for other Chinese Buddhist teachings and practices, and the neglect of Vinaya disciplines, a set of “discipline of Buddhist monastics and the associated literature that guides and regulates those who cultivate that discipline” (Hallisey 2007, p. 807). This led to a kind of “ludicrous Chan” (*kuangchan* 狂禪) that denied the efficacy of any gradual effort toward attaining enlightenment, holding that only “instantaneous epiphany” or “sudden enlightenment” (*dunwu* 頓悟) could lead to enlightenment (X65, 371c–374c; Jiang 2006, pp. 11–20). The strict, abusive use of Chan masters’ enlightening “public cases” (*gongan* or *kōan* 公案) and “critical phrases” (*huatou* 話頭) in Chan meditation had, according to several Chan masters during the Ming dynasty, partially caused problems that led to the decline of Chan and monasticism in China (Chen 2007, pp. 38–60). These literary tools were

traditionally short stories, encounter dialogues between masters and students or phrases used as a meditation tool in literary Chan practice. The cases consisted of recording sayings of Chan masters, which were typically not understood literally since a plethora of these sayings are nonsensical or illogical (Buswell 1991, pp. 321–80; McRae 2003, pp. 74–100). Rather, public cases and critical phrases used allusions, paradoxes, or wordplay to encourage contemplation. Students of Chan were encouraged to reflect on the enigmatic cases, or on a single critical word or phrase from the cases, to transcend mental duality and attain wisdom. Starting from the Song dynasty Linji tradition, this “literary Chan” (*wenzi chan* 文字禪), which focused on the enigmatic and ineffable meaning of prominent Chan patriarchs’ dialogues and words in Chan literature, transformed Chan into an exclusive, “anti-intellectual” practice that was at the same time highly performative and ritualistic. It seems that final enlightenment or “epiphany” became the only priority in this tradition (Schlütter 2008, pp. 107–16; Sharf 2007, pp. 205–43).

Dissatisfactions with the status quo of Chan grew rapidly, and this understanding gradually became unanimous among prominent monks during the late Ming dynasty. Prominent monastic masters without clear Chan lineage, such as Zibai Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603 CE) and Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623 CE), also saw the late Ming period as a time when Chinese Chan Buddhism was in urgent need of reform. These masters attempted to transform and revive Chan in combination with Tiantai/Huayan, Yogācāra, and Pure Land of Bliss teachings, with a strong focus on monastic Vinaya disciplines (Cleary 1985, pp. 137–63; Fan 2001, pp. 223–72; Leong 1994, pp. 95–96). Although many masters offered their criticisms in order to stimulate reform and restore Chan, one consequence of their ruthless attacks was that Chan practice as a whole, and monastic Chan community in particular, became a target attracting more criticism. This vicious circle further sabotaged the very foundation of Chan practice since the Song dynasty: that is, the pursuit of perfect wisdom via understanding the ineffable meanings of Chan literature (Chen 2012, pp. 41–69). Admittedly, the monastic elites’ view of a declining Buddhism might be subjective, given that lay Buddhist movements, the synthesis between Buddhism and Confucianism, and the so-called “unorthodox” Buddhist sects prospered in contrast to the decline of Chan Buddhism (Araki 1979, pp. 11–12; ter Haar 2014, pp. 7–10). Yet these masters’ belief in a declining Chan tradition reflects their strong emphasis on monasticism, monastic authority, and the “authentic” Chan Buddhism of the past (Wu 2015, pp. 21–52).

Because of the long-lasting pessimism and debates in Chan Buddhist communities, as well as criticism from both inside and outside Buddhism, many prominent monastic figures began to seek a revival and transformation of Chan Buddhism from different directions. During the late Ming period, Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 was one of the pioneers who established Amitābha’s Pure Land tradition as a remedy for Chan. He saw rebirth in the Pure Land as the ultimate goal for Chan practitioners, writing:

Therefore [one] could know that although a Chan practitioner should constantly investigate into one’s original heart in one’s mind, it is better that [one] also make of vow of rebirth in the Pure Land of Bliss. What is the reason for this? [Because] although enlightenment could be attained via Chan meditation, [the enlightened one] could not stay in the realm of Eternal Light of Tranquility like Buddha. [One] also could not terminate Saṃsāra like an Arhat.⁴ Therefore, after the death of one’s reincarnated body in this life, there must be a place of rebirth [in the next life]. Instead of being born as a human and learning from the enlightened masters, why not attain rebirth in the lotus [of Pure Land] and learn from Amitābha Buddha? Thus, not only does the *nianfo* [Buddha Name Invocation] not serve as an obstacle to Chan meditation, it is beneficial to Chan.

故知參禪人雖念念究自本心，而不妨發願，願命終時往生極樂。所以者何？參禪雖得個悟處，倘未能如諸佛住常寂光，又未能如阿羅漢不受後有。則盡此報身，必有生處。與其生人世而親近明師，孰若生蓮花而親近彌陀之為勝乎？然則念佛不惟不礙參禪，實有益於參禪也。(J 33, 51c)

According to Zhuhong, the Buddha Name Invocation (*nianfo* 念佛) practice is highly compatible with the practice of Chan. In *nianfo* practice, from the Pure Land tradition, practitioners repeat the name of Amitābha Buddha in pursuit of rebirth in the lotus of Pure Land of Bliss for non-regression on the Bodhisattva path. Araki (2001, pp. 191–200) points out that in Zhuhong’s conscious combination of Chan and Pure Land, he came to believe that Chan practices are of secondary importance compared to those of Pure Land, and that Chan practices should thus never be separated from Pure Land practice. Yü (1981, p. 69) argues that in Zhuhong’s time Chan was seen as almost “incurable” and that, for this reason, Zhuhong tried to replace traditional Chan meditation with *nianfo* practice.

Similarly, Zhuhong’s spiritual Dharma heir, Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), made the most extreme comments criticizing Chan of his day. He turned to Tiantai and Pure Land traditions for salvation, detaching himself from the Chan lineages of his time. Shi (2007, pp. 141–89) argues that Zhixu’s critical and “revisionist” sentiment may have been inherited from certain Caodong masters. Zhixu did not refute all Chan traditions and practices, but he clearly expressed his disappointment with the incorrigible (in his view) Chan community during the Ming dynasty. He intended to exclude this type of Chan from his synthesis of Buddhist doctrines; instead, he reinvented and advocated for a type of Chan meditation in light of the influential *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (*Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經) (Zhang 1975, pp. 355–56). Considering the “authentic” Chan practices from the Tang and Song dynasties to have completely died out by the Ming period, Zhixu believed that Amitābha’s Pure Land *nianfo* practice combined all Chinese Buddhist traditions into one.⁵ So, there was no need to recognize a Chan tradition independent from Pure Land. In this sense, Chan meditation is only a part of *nianfo* (J 36, 342a; Nakayama 1973; Xiao 2013). In the Qing period, the Pure Land monk Chewu Jixing 徹悟際醒 (1741–1810 CE) claimed that Pure Land *nianfo* was a better version of Chan than any other Chan meditations. This means that, for Jixing, there was no need to maintain an autonomous Chan tradition (X62, 333c–334a).

These criticisms of Chan in late imperial China and the endeavors to replace Chan with Pure Land Buddhism did not solve the alleged problem of declining monasticism, however. It is well known that the Chinese Pure Land doctrine does not particularly emphasize monasticism (Andrews 1993). On the contrary, Amitābha’s Pure Land of Bliss tradition is famous for its all-encompassing and “easy” aspects when compared to other Buddhist traditions. This doctrine holds that Amitābha receives sentient beings of all kinds of “capacities” and monastic identity, and that being enlightened is not necessary for the rebirth in the Pure Land of Bliss (Jones 2019, pp. 101–7). Accordingly, a Pure Land authority does not need to be a monastic member. In fact, Yunqi Zhuhong largely relied on the southern lay literati and female Buddhists in the construction of his Pure Land community (Eichman 2016, pp. 219–38). In Zhuhong’s compilation of rebirth biographies, he even compared accomplished lay female Pure Land practitioners to male monks and lamented the regression of monastic males, clearly elevating the position of laity in his Pure Land discourse (Wang 2021). That is to say, if the alleged decline of Chan is closely related to the decline of monasticism in late imperial Chinese Buddhism, the rise of Pure Land tradition as a solution does not guarantee the revival of monasticism. The rise of the double cultivations of Pure Land *nianfo* and Chan practices also attracted certain criticisms, since the combination of the two does not mean that the tension between the belief in a concrete Pure Land and the teaching of emptiness and mind-only wisdom is automatically dismantled (Jones 2019, pp. 143–66).

In addition to the issues of declining monasticism and tensions between Pure Land and Chan beliefs, other monastic masters’ attempts to revive and reform Chan from the inside also created new problems. As mentioned before, since the Song dynasty Chinese Chan practices had been dominated by the Linji tradition. This sect largely depends on the flexible use of Chan literatures. Alleged “crises” of late imperial Chinese Chan practice were believed to have been caused by exactly this kind of Chan meditation. As scholars have shown, Hanyue Fazang’s reforms on the practice of Linji Chan deepened the fissure within the Linji clan, and even caused the later Manchu ruler Yongzheng’s strong opposition to

Hanyue's lineage (Ma 2007; Wu 2008, pp. 163–82). This made the position of Chan in the early Qing period more sensitive than before. Caodong masters during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties tried to criticize the declining Linji clan and restore the old Song-style Caodong Chan. However, some prominent figures supported Pure Land beliefs as well; and, because of the long disagreement between the Caodong and Linji sects, Caodong masters usually denounced any contemporary use of Chan literature for meditation, finding any verbal interpretation of these literatures suspicious (Cai, pp. 146–269).

This left Chan religions leaders with an embarrassing dilemma. Apart from the Linji style of Chan, there seemed to be no predominant methods of practice that looked “purely” Chan. If this style of Chan is incorrigible and the solution is to replace Linji Chan with something that does not look typically Chan at all, how is talking about and teaching “authentic” Chan still possible? Moreover, since Chan Buddhism (in particular, the prominent Linji tradition) became the “culprit” in this discourse of decline and fall, should Chan become a part of monastic revival and the reform of Chinese Buddhism at all? Is Chan still relevant in general monastic practices of Vinaya disciplines, doctrinal study, and meditation? As we shall see, Hongzan's writings reflect a more extreme dimension of this revisionist sentiment to Chan that Chan as a performative act should be excluded from the narrative of monastic revival.

3. Hongzan's “Revisionist” Chan and Monastic Revival Sentiments

Zaisan Hongzan's biographic literatures are included in the *Records of Dinghu Mountain* (*Dinghu shan zhi* 鼎湖山志). This work was compiled by Chengjiu 成鷲 (1637–1722 CE), the remote Dharma heir of Hongzan. Qingyun Temple (*Qingyun si* 慶雲寺) in Dinghu Mountain was the main location where Hongzan resided and preached. According to the *Biography of Monk Zaisan* (*Zaisan heshang zhuan* 在穆和尚傳), Zaisan (birth name Zhu Ziren 朱子仁) was born in Guangdong during the late Ming dynasty to a Confucian literati family. After the death of his parents at an early age, he felt the emptiness of worldly life and started his religious pursuit as a Buddhist (Chengjiu 1717, juan 3, 2). He later founded the Hall of Qingyun (*Qingyun an* 慶雲庵) on Dinghu Mountain, which then developed into Qingyun Temple. Hongzan later met with the Caodong Chan master Qihe Daoqiu 棲道丘 (1586–1658 CE) in Guangzhou and was officially ordained by Qihe. Just before the fall of the Ming dynasty, Hongzan invited Qihe to become the abbot of Qingyun Temple. After Qihe's death during the early Qing dynasty, Hongzan became the second official abbot of Qingyun Temple.

As a prolific writer and Buddhist authority, Hongzan left 24 works. These included works on Buddhist teachings and about his personal experiences (Xian 2016, pp. 183–208). Interestingly, there is a discrepancy between Hongzan's biography and his own works. As Hongzan received his Dharma lineage from a Caodong master, his official identity should have been a Caodong monk. In his biography, it is recorded that during Qihe's period at Qingyun Temple Hongzan travelled to Zhejiang and Jiangsu area to study Chan with several Caodong patriarchs. This indicates that Hongzan was an industrious Caodong Chan disciple (Chengjiu 1717, juan 3, 4–5). His biography mentions nothing about Hongzan's other religious experiences. However, among his 24 works, only four of them look relevant to the study of Chan. Rather, the majority of his works are about the study of Vinaya disciplines and tantric rituals, despite his biography including nothing about his experience studying Vinaya and tantric Buddhism. This might be explained in terms of the tension between the formal Caodong Dharma lineage of Qingyun Temple and Hongzan's personal attitude towards Chan.

Chengjiu saw Hongzan as a member of Qingyun Temple's legitimate abbot line, the actual founder of Qingyun Temple and Chengjiu's own Dharma ancestor. In this sense, the *Records* is compiled to reflect the exploits and glory of Dinghu Mountain and Qingyun Temple as Chan “holy lands” in Guangdong, as well as the intactness of Chengjiu's own Chan lineage (Zhou 2009). This might be seen as Chengjiu's reaction to certain criticism of the loose Dharma inheritance system of Caodong and its legitimacy (Zhou 2009).

Although Hongzan's biography is originally written by one of his lay literati followers, Huo Zonghuang 霍宗理 (n.d.), the only version accessible today is the one edited by Chengjiu, in which nothing outside Hongzan's life as a Chan master is mentioned.

Despite Chengjiu's efforts to depict Hongzan as a Chan master, it is clear that during his life Hongzan did not put much effort into preaching Chan teachings. At least according to what is reflected in his writings, it seems that Hongzan spent most of his time working to reconstruct the study of Vinaya disciplines and spread tantric rituals. Hongzan's advocacy of Vinaya disciplines is a result of his concerns about the fall of monasticism—he believed when most of the monastic members did not obey Vinaya disciplines, the root of Buddhism is endangered. Hongzan once wrote:

What is the Canon of Monastic Disciplines [Prātimokṣa]? It is Buddhist monks' established standard, and the essence of [the path to] nirvana. If the rules are lost, then [one's] heart and mind are in disarray. If the essence is muddled, then the realm of full liberation is difficult to reach. Therefore, the Buddha had been inculcating [the importance of disciplines] from the beginning [of his teaching] in Mrgā-dāva to the end [of his teaching] between the śāla trees to make [Buddha's disciples] treat Prātimokṣa as a teacher and see them in the same way [they see] Buddha. Buddhists today betrayed Buddha's final instructions and slandered Vinaya rules. How is that different from a rebellious son's fight against his compassionate father? [If one] practices [the Buddhist path] in contrast to [the disciplines], then even if [one] attains subtle enlightenment and dhyāna, it is in the end the conduct of the devil Māra.

夫戒本者何？乃比丘之規獲，涅槃之津要。規獲失則心慮無整，津要迷則彼岸難到。故如來首自鹿苑，終乎鶴樹，諄諄誨囑，俾依木叉為師，視同如佛。今人背遺囑，詆毗尼。何異逆子而抗慈父... 違此而修，縱得妙悟禪定現前，終是魔業。(X40, 192b)

Hongzan believed that during the Ming dynasty Vinaya was almost forgotten by monastic communities and that there were few fully ordained monks who did not violate Vinaya disciplines. He claimed that monks in his time were "falsely named bhikṣu [Buddhist monastics]" (*jiaming biqiu* 假名比丘) at most (X60, 703a). He even planned to travel to India to invite Buddhist practitioners there to import a full Vinaya system to China again in order to revive Chinese monastic Buddhism. Unbeknownst to him, Buddhism had almost died out in India at that time (X60, 703a). Moreover, the majority of Hongzan's works is dedicated to the study of translated Chinese monastic *Dharmagupta-Vinaya* (*sifen lü* 四分律) texts and relevant rules. In his *Precise Illustration of Dharmagupta-Vinaya* (*Sifen jieben rushi* 四分戒本如釋), he explicitly claimed that monastic communities obeying full Vinaya disciplines, especially monks, are the most noble according to Buddha's teachings, and all sacred Buddhist teachings and practices are generated by Vinaya:

Bhikṣu's Vinaya is utmost superior. [It] can be the benevolent protection and bless for human beings and celestial beings [who respect and make offering to Vinaya practitioners]. How could [one says] that [Vinaya] only [guarantees] an individual [practitioner's] own salvation from reincarnation? ... Vinaya is the essence of dhyāna meditation, and [non-dual] wisdom is the function of dhyāna meditation. If the essence is not set up, then the function will not work. Therefore, all the [Buddhist] sages and saints accomplished [their cultivation] via [the practice of] Vinaya, and the seven kinds of [Buddhist] communities⁶ are established based on [different kinds of] Vinaya. This is why after the Southern Chan patriarch Huineng gained enlightenment, [he] still needed to ascend to the monastic ordination platform to receive full monastic Vinaya codes.⁷ The [Huaya school master] Qingliang Chengguan was actually [the incarnation of] Bodhisattva Huayan, [and he still] strictly regulated himself with the Ten Precepts [based on Prañidhāna Bodhisattva Precepts].⁸ Among all the patriarchs in history, is there [anyone] who liberated other people as a lay master? All Buddha from

the past, at present and in the future treated Vinaya [and Bodhisattva Precepts] as the primary rules [among Buddhist teachings]. Therefore, immediately after our Buddha Śākyamuni attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi tree, [he] made the vow of Bodhisattva Prātimokṣa with numerous Bodhisattvas.

比丘之戒極尊，能為人天而作良祐福田，豈但自出生死而已... 戒是定之體，慧乃定之用。苟體不立，用無從施。是故一切聖賢咸從戒成，七眾法子悉由戒立。故南宗得法之後，猶須登壇稟受。清涼國師，乃華嚴菩薩，自以十律嚴身。歷代祖師，何有白衣度人？三世如來，皆以戒為首約。故我釋尊初坐菩提樹下，即與諸菩薩結波羅提木叉。(X40, 193b)

Here Hongzan emphasized the absolute authority of monastic community and Vinaya. By saying that no accomplished Buddhist patriarch in history preached Buddha's teaching and taught their students as lay persons, he seemed to deny the possibility of becoming a Buddhist authority only by obeying lay disciplines. Interestingly, he also tried to reconcile Vinaya and Chinese Prañidhāna Bodhisattva Precepts (*pusa jie* 菩薩戒) in the context of monastic superiority. The last sentence in the quoted text actually refers to the establishment of Bodhisattva Precepts from a famous Chinese Buddhist canon *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (*Fanwang jing* 梵網經).⁹ The famous Tang dynasty Huayan School master Chengguan's Bodhisattva Precepts vows are also regarded as an evidence of the superiority of monasticism and monastic codes. Both monastic Vinaya and Bodhisattva Precepts are treated as "Bhikṣu's Vinaya" (*biqiu zhi jie* 比丘之戒) here. In Hongzan's view, the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* Bodhisattva Precepts seem not to contrast the Vinaya system but homogeneous to *Dharmagupta-vinaya*. However, in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, the Buddha clearly stated that for those Bodhisattvas' who vowed to follow this Mahāyāna Precepts system on their Bodhisattva Path, they are forbidden to follow the so-called Hīnayāna Vinaya, and the most popular version of Vinaya in China the *Dharmagupta-Vinaya* is certainly a part of the so-called Hīnayāna Vinaya system.¹⁰ In addition, the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* Precepts system and similar Bodhisattva Precepts in China are sometimes seen as "upgrading" laity and blurring the boundaries between the monastic and lay, since this kind of Mahāyāna Precepts, unlike monastic disciplines, is open to both monastic members and lay practitioners (Zürcher [1980] 2013a, p. 297). But Hongzan saw no contradiction between the two, and at the beginning of his annotation and explanation of *Dharmagupta-Vinaya*, he deliberately juxtaposed these two systems as homogeneous to support his argument on Buddhist monastic members' authority. Hongzan was indeed aware of the discrepancies between the two systems, and made his own apologetic comment to assimilate these two systems. In Hongzan's *Brief Annotation to the Bodhisattva Precepts in Brahmajāla Sūtra* (*Fanwang jing pusa jie lueshu* 梵網經菩薩戒略疏), he composed a long comment to the saying in the canon that Bodhisattvas should not obey Hīnayāna Vinaya; he argued that Buddha's saying only means that a Bodhisattva should not agree with Hīnayāna perspectives and beliefs when obeying those disciplines, but ought to hold on to the Mahāyāna beliefs and perspectives and treat the so-called Hīnayāna Vinaya as fundamental and preparatory path to Mahāyāna cultivation.¹¹ If someone is a monastic Bodhisattva, then one should never abandon and calumniate monastic Vinaya but see it as equal to Bodhisattva Precepts. In other words, Hongzan believed that monastic Vinaya is a "subset" of Bodhisattva Precepts as well as an inevitable "first lesson" for the Bodhisattva Path. As both could systems be called "disciplines" (*jie* 戒), it is impossible that the full Mahāyāna Precepts could be completed by a lay Buddhist without fulfilling the requirements of Vinaya. The particular case of Huineng mentioned in the quoted passage above manifests exactly this kind of logic of Hongzan: Huineng could not start his transmission of Chan teaching before becoming a monk, since without Vinaya and a proper monastic identity, Huineng could not commence his Bodhisattva enterprise.

Hongzan was apparently deeply concerned with the loss of Vinaya among monastic communities. The study of Vinaya disciplines was, for him, the foundation of monastic life and required for successful Buddhist practice. Wen Jinyu argues that based on Hongzan's well-known prose "Instructions on Chan and Vinaya" (*Shi chanlü* 示禪律), Hongzan aimed

at establishing a discourse in which Chan and Vinaya disciplines were inseparable from each other (Wen 2020). Wen's evidence is that, in this prose, Hongzan claimed that

Chan without Vinaya means that the subtle path is difficult to practice; Vinaya without Chan means that the ineffable [wisdom] cannot be revealed. [If] Chan denies Vinaya then the monastic and the lay are confused; [if] Vinaya denies Chan then who could transmit the Chan masters' lamp [of wisdom]?

禪無律，則妙行難操；律無禪，則玄微莫徹。禪非律，而僧俗渾淆；律非禪，祖燈誰續。(J 35, 481c)

It seems that, according to the quotation above, Hongzan wished to treat Chan and Vinaya as equal and indispensable to each other. However, if we continue to read his short prose, we can find that rather than advocating the combination of Chan and Vinaya "practices" as two equal practices, Hongzan explicitly expressed that the wisdom of Chan cannot be practiced at all. Later in "Instructions on Chan and Vinaya," Hongzan writes the "but the heart [of Chan] cannot be manifested, and ordinary sentient beings cannot see [it with dual mind], whereas the conduct [of Vinaya] can be seen by the eyes [of ordinary sentient beings], and [they will] revere [Buddha's teaching henceforth]" (然心無表示，人天靡睹。行可目觀，起生敬仰。) (J 35, 482a). Therefore, Hongzan concludes that Vinaya teaches all sentient beings how to become enlightened without explicitly verbalize enlightenment, which is exactly what Chan is about. In his view, since Chan is about the status of the mind and this status cannot be "manifested" (*biaoshi* 表示) by anything, the only way to attain wisdom is through the practice of Vinaya. This means that, to Hongzan, the only way to practice "authentic" Chan is to cultivate oneself in accordance with Vinaya disciplines. Thus, any exterior "manifestation" of Chan, namely Chan as a sectarian tradition, is highly problematic.

Admittedly, Hongzan did not completely abandon the practice of literary Chan. In the collection of his personal writings and dialogues *Reminiscent Manuscripts of a Wooden Man* (*Muren shenggao* 木人剩稿), however, we see that the majority of Hongzan's Chan communication occurred between him and his lay literati followers; the monastic community was obviously not his major Chan audience.¹² This is the only extant text of Hongzan's own Chan instruction to others, and we can assume that Hongzan's use of Chan literature for meditative instruction might have been a reaction to cater late Ming and early Qing literati Buddhists' passion for Chan literature and philosophy (Zhou 2009) rather than his own voluntary choice. Another saying of Hongzan shows a similar attitude

In my life [whenever I] received and instructed students, [I] only followed the instructions left by Master Yunqi Zhuhong and Master Wuyi Yuanlai, [Which means that I] usually used Vinaya to discipline my disciples, and [I did not let them] practice the flexible meditation of literary Chan. For the occasional and random guidance [on Chan teachings], [I] also [only followed] fixed interpretations and not my personal understanding.

... 平生接待學人，一稟棲和尚與雲棲、博山遺教，多以戒律繩束後學，不事拈椎豎拂。間有隨機指點，亦本分鉗錘，不以自見也。(Chengjiu 1717, juan 3, 5)

Hongzan explicitly expressed that he did not favor the instruction of Chan, especially literary Chan; he preferred to use Vinaya disciplines to educate his disciples. Among his works, he also seemed to neglect the discipline and ritual system within the Chan tradition "Rules of Purity" (*qinggui* 清規) as the principal leading rules for Chan communities. Moreover, whenever he had to use Chan literature for instruction he only used stipulated interpretations of these texts and added absolutely none of his own understandings or interpretations to them. Hongzan even tried to create conflict between Chan and Vinaya communities, and to construct Chan practice in his time as an "enemy" of monastic disciplines. In his biography, one of his criticisms is recorded:

[I] painfully worry that Vinaya is [established] to bring life to wisdom, and [in this time when] the grand Dharma has declined and [become] rare, ludicrous and

blind people are everywhere. Followers of the devil Māra [practicing] blind Chan are blotting out the sky and covering the sun.

痛念戒律為生慧命，大法垂祕，狂瞽交織，盲禪魔民，彌天障日。(Chengjiu 1717, juan 3, 4)

In Hongzan's letter to Bhikṣu (or Monk) Zongfu 宗符, he wrote that he often saw Chan monks of his time ridicule and express contempt toward Vinaya disciplines (J 35, 492b). Hongzan criticized this behavior by pointing out that in the famous Chan legend of the origin of Chan, the Buddha did not entrust the "real teaching" of Chan to Mañjuśrī (Manshu shili 曼殊室利) but to Kasyapa (Jiashe 迦葉) because of Kasyapa's well-known ascetic practice and strict abidance by the Vinaya disciplines. Thus, even according to Chan legend Vinaya is the only way to achieve enlightenment.¹³ In this sense, Hongzan claimed that Vinaya rather than any performative Chan practice is the provenance of Buddha's wisdom. Based on what we have mentioned above, we can see that in Hongzan's discourse he subtly demarcated two kinds of Chan: Chan as a status of ineffable wisdom, and Chan as a performative practice (especially literary Chan). Hongzan believed that Chan as a performative practice in his time had nothing to do with the ineffable wisdom of "authentic" Chan. Moreover, if Vinaya is the only path to wisdom and performative Chan is irrelevant, then Chan as a socio-religious as well as monastic entity is pointless.

Apart from the fact that most of his works are about Vinaya and tantrism, Hongzan's four works traditionally classified as Chan literature are problematic.¹⁴ *Annotations on Master Weishan's Admonition Mottos* (*Weishan jingce ju shiji* 滄山警策句釋記) does appear Chan-relevant based on its title, yet its content contains almost no Chan elements—only the Chan master Weishan Lingyou's 滄山靈佑 admonitions and tips on monastic life and karmic retribution (X63, 232a–259b). Another work of Hongzan's, *A Concise Interpretation of the Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra* (*Yuanjue jing jinshi* 圓覺經近釋), is solely dedicated to the discussion of Huayan and Yogācāra doctrines and related meditation practice. Hongzan's interpretation particularly highlights the importance of gradual cultivation (*jianxiu* 漸修), in opposition to Chan's "instantaneous cultivation" (*dunjiao* 頓修).¹⁵ In this work, Hongzan pointed out that contemplating on Chan literature and using the Linji Chan clan's "sentiment of doubt" (*yiqing* 疑情) to understand enlightened wisdom is nothing but a detour to Buddhahood. This is because, according to *the Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra's* tathāgatagarbha doctrine, all sentient beings are essentially Buddha and already possess full Buddha wisdom (X10, 521c). We can see that this *Interpretation* is at most an inclusive discussion of tathāgatagarbha and does not emphasize or promote Chan at all. Two of Hongzan's other ostensibly Chan works are exegeses of the *Heart Sūtra: Additional Understandings on the Heart Sūtra* (*Bore xinjing tianzu* 般若心經添足) (X26, 868b–875b) and *Comprehensive Meanings of the Heart Sūtra* (*Xinjing guanyi* 心經貫義) (X26, 876a–878b). Yet, again, neither of these works distinctly explains the *Heart Sūtra* from a Chan stance or mentions any Chan element. These two exegeses aim at elucidating the Mahāyāna concept of "emptiness" (*kong* 空) from a Chinese tathāgatagarbha perspective. Thus, it is obvious that the literary Chan tradition is almost absent even in Hongzan's four purportedly Chan works.

We can conclude that, in spite of the narrative of Hongzan as a Chan master in his biography and his recorded Caodong lineage, his works show that he went beyond many sectarian boundaries. In fact, the textual evidence suggests that Hongzan was not passionate about the Chan tradition and the literary Chan practice at all. We can even assume that, based on his scattered criticism of Chan practices in his time, Hongzan doubted the effectiveness and necessity of performative Chan practices. To him, Chan as a goal of ultimate enlightenment and Chan as a path of religious cultivation are two different notions; moreover, the latter is not the only or even "correct" path to the former.

At the same time, Hongzan argued that Vinaya discipline is the foundation of Buddhist practice and the only way to attain the full revival of Chinese Buddhist monasticism. Vinaya is, in short, the "correct" understanding of Chan as Buddha's ineffable wisdom. In

Hongzan's religious discourse, Vinaya is the practice of Chan; and, inevitably, monastic life is central to Chan cultivation. This means that Hongzan's "revisionist Chan" sentiment and discourse did not allow for a Chan religious life independent of strict Vinaya disciplines, nor an autonomous Chan tradition without the study of Vinaya. He strongly disagreed with certain Chan practices in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Furthermore, if any verbal expression of Chan is "deviant"—as he believed was the case—this means that there should not be any form of Chan cultivation beyond monastic life. As we shall see, Hongzan's "revisionist Chan" and monastic revival sentiment strongly influenced how the *Anthology* and Hongzan's Maitreya belief were constructed.

4. Constructing the Lineage of Maitreya Cult in Hongzan's Hagiographic Writing

In the preface of the *Anthology* written by Hongzan's disciple Kaijue 開覺, he mentioned that one day he asked his master Hongzan why there are multiple rebirth biographies of Amitābha's Pure Land, but no Tuṣita Heaven rebirth biography in spite of numerous scattered records of cases of successful rebirth (X88, 50a). Kaijue then invited Hongzan to write a biography solely dedicated to Tuṣita Heaven rebirth. Hongzan agreed to Kaijue's invitation, and said:

Your question is indeed [like] the effective remedy to cure a disease, and the merciful ferry to carry [all sentient beings] across the sea of affliction. The reason is that an ordinary person's one [troubling] thought could confound true [enlightenment] and delusively creep along unreal images. [Thus, a person will] wander between life and death and [there will] hardly be a day for [this person's] return [to true enlightenment]. [How could one] be liberated from the three worlds of reincarnation [trayo-dhātava] [when one] sinks and floats in [the sea of] six realms of karma? [How could one] be exempt from discursive life and death [when one] has not yet stepped into the stages of three worthies and ten sages?¹⁶ Moreover, in this time of the end of Dharma, madcaps [*kuangwang* 狂妄] often take [their own] shade of the heart of consciousness as seeing the Buddha nature and enlightened by the way [of wisdom]. [They] mistakenly take fire between flints and crackles of lightening as the termination of life and death.¹⁷ [These madcaps] indulge their minds and speak of empty [words], and [they] loudly claim the nonexistence of the karmic chain of cause and effect. [These madcaps] calumniated the Vinaya followers as obsessed with appearances and defamed those who study Buddhist doctrines as mindlessly repeating the obsolete books. [They] degraded those who were reborn in the Pure Land as of poor disposition and low intelligence. [These madcaps] never remember that Bodhisattva Aśvaghosa and Nāgārjuna wished to present themselves to Amitābha and Bodhisattva Asanga and Vasubandhu vowed to meet Maitreya. How could [these masters] be of poor disposition and low intelligence? [These madcaps] defamed the saints and arrogantly slandered the scriptures and Vinaya disciplines. Who could be their surrogate in their sins? Although [they] speak of "instantaneous enlightenment," their habitual delusion is not yet removed. Once [they] enter [other women's] wombs [and are reincarnated], their ignorance in [their] new life form cannot be avoided. [Examples of] the Chan masters Jie of Wuzu Temple, Qing of Caotang Temple, the Elder Xun and the Chief Monk Yan are important lessons.¹⁸ [These madcaps'] consciousnesses and minds flutter, [but they] consider [themselves as] ancient saints' equals; [their] vexation is burning, [but they] claim that [they have] superseded the Buddha. [These madcaps] do not attain the anutpatika-dharma-ksānti of non-duality¹⁹, and consequently [they] will drift along [their] karma and mind. Amitābha and Maitreya are truly [our] grand mentors, [but these madcaps] abandoned them and do not [wish] to join them. [If] Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, the Tiantai master Zhiyi 智顛, and Pure Land master Wengu 闍谷 are truly helpful friends, [then] why should [we] not befriend with them [in the Pure Land]?²⁰

子之間也，誠為救病之良藥，渡苦海之慈舟。蓋以凡夫一念迷真，妄緣塵影，流浪生死，渺無返期。六趣升沉，三界奚出？未階三賢十聖，寧免分段生方？況茲末世，狂妄多以識心影子，為見性悟道，錯認石火電光，為了却生死。肆志空談，撥無因果。毀持戒者為執相，詆看教者為鑽故紙，貶往生者為小根下愚。不思馬鳴龍樹願觀彌陀，無著天親誓見彌勒。其為何根何愚哉？妄譏賢聖，輕謗經律，罪將誰代？雖云頓悟，習惑未除，一入他腹，隔陰之昏難免。五祖戒、青艸堂、遜長老、嚴首座，足為前鑒。識想紛飛，擬齊先哲，煩惱熾炎，言超佛祖。未證無生，終隨業識流轉。彌陀彌勒真大知識，捨而不參。觀音勢至天台淨慈，誠為良友，胡不親哉？(X88, 50a)

This is probably one of Hongzan's most straightforward and severe criticism on his contemporaneous Chan communities. The "madcaps" (*Kuangwang* 狂妄) here apparently refers to Ming and Qing period Chan practitioners. He used four cases of Chan masters' failure to terminate the circle of reincarnation to demonstrate that the so-called "instantaneous enlightenment" of Chan teachings is not the ultimate liberation for ordinary people. Accordingly, Hongzan believed that only via successful rebirth in the pure land or Tuṣita Heaven could one continue the path to Buddhahood.

Although here Hongzan presented the Pure Land of Bliss and Tuṣita Heaven as equally extraordinary destination for Buddhists, when Kaijue asked him which land Hongzan preferred, he replied "The blue sky! The blue sky!" (*cangtian cangtian* 蒼天蒼天). Kaijue claimed that he did not grasp the true meaning of Hongzan's reply, and Hongzan refused to explain further. We can infer here that Hongzan is implying his preference of Tuṣita Heaven, since it is believed that Tuṣita Heaven is a pure land in the heaven realms of this world, i.e., in the sky. That is not to say that Hongzan disapproved of Amitābha's Pure Land. In many cases he praised the practice of *nianfo* and the importance of praying for rebirth in the Pure Land of Bliss.²¹ In a text called "Admonition to the Monastic and Lay" (*Jingce zisu* 警策縑素), Hongzan stressed the inclusiveness and "easiness" of *nianfo* practice regardless of its practitioners' gender and identity (J35, 486b). This is a trait that many Pure Land of Bliss apologists used to promote the practice. Moreover, Hongzan mentioned several times that *nianfo* is also an effective way to replace Chan meditation, and that Chan and *nianfo* are essentially the same.²² Yet, as we shall see, in the *Anthology* Hongzan intended to establish an alternative Pure Land belief exclusively for monastic communities in the absence of Chan.

The *Anthology* is divided into three Chapters. Chapter I is named "Resonating Transformations and Incarnations" (*Yinghua chuiji* 應化垂跡), and includes 25 stories connected to the cult of Maitreya or miracle tales of Maitreya statues. 17 stories of Chinese indigenous miracles are included in this chapter. Among the Chinese miracle stories, 15 are about Chinese monastic masters and two about lay Chinese figures. Chapter II is named "Ascending to the Inner Court [of Tuṣita Heaven]" (*Shangsheng neiyuan* 上升內院). This chapter has two sections and is altogether made up of 46 miracle tales Hongzan collected of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven. Apart from six stories directly extracted from Buddhist scriptures and one story of Vasubandhu (an Indian Buddhist monk and founder of the Yogācāra school), in the remaining 39 stories of Chinese rebirth practitioners only two lay figures are recorded: the famous Tang poet and Maitreya believer Bai Juyi (白居易 (also Bo Juyi), and Hongzan's mother Lady Zou. Chapter III contains 11 ritualistic texts and spells of the Maitreya cult, which Hongzan collected from different translated scriptures and Chinese works for his readers to use in their religious cultivation. Compared to Zhuhong's Pure Land of Bliss biography, *Collection of Pure Land Rebirth* (*Wangsheng ji* 往生集), and the mid-Qing collection *Compendium of Pure Land Sages* (*Jingtū shengxian lu* 淨土聖賢錄) compiled by lay literati Buddhist Peng Shaoseng 彭紹升, Hongzan's *Anthology* clearly does not aim at lay audience. Hongzan's work focuses on stories of monastic masters. Both Pure Land of Bliss biography collections, by contrast, contain a significant number of stories of lay figures of both genders in separate chapters.²³ Zhuhong is particularly keen on praising exemplary lay Buddhists as equals to monastic figures (Wang 2021).

The first chapter of the *Anthology* can be seen as a hagiography for the construction of a legitimate Maitreya cult “lineage” as well as a history of the prominent figures in this belief system. In the preface to the *Anthology*, Hongzan wrote that with Maitreya’s miraculous power he could incarnate in numerous forms, and that many famous Buddhist masters, monastic and lay, are actually avatars of Maitreya (X88, 51a). Classifying important and legendary figures without a clear Chan background as unorthodox Chan practitioners is a literary tradition in Chan historiography/hagiography initially seen in *The Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄) during the Song dynasty.²⁴ Later, in another Song dynasty Chan history, *Compendium of the Five Lamps* (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元), a collection of the biographies of unorthodox Chan figures is named “Saints of Resonating Transformations” (*yinghua shengxian* 應化聖賢) (X80, 65b).

Huang (2016) argues that these kind of “peripheral” masters in Chan histories are, on the one hand, absorbed into Chan hagiography to enhance the legitimacy of Chan practice because of their fame and influences. On the other hand, they also represent the “transgressive” and iconoclastic characters of Chan outside the orthodox lineage (Huang 2016). As Huang points out, these figures’ unconventional, mysterious, and transgressive behaviors, especially their violation of Vinaya disciplines and the Chan-style poems they composed, are important literary symbols of Chan’s flexibility in Song texts. These unorthodox figures shared no Chan identity, but they are constructed in these works as patriarchs teaching Chan in a secretive manner. Hongzan obviously borrowed this literary category of “Saints of Resonating Transformations” in the first chapter of the *Anthology* since the cult of Maitreya in China does not have a continuous and accepted Dharma lineage. However, the transgressive style of the unorthodox Chan masters contradicts Hongzan’s intention of monastic revival and his argument that Chan was declining. Therefore, most of the Chinese figures of the Maitreya cult that Hongzan chose to include in this chapter had no connection with Chan tradition at all. In the stories of medieval Chinese monks Huilan 慧覽, Zhiyan 智嚴 (X88, 55a), Huashou 華手 (“Flower Hand”) (X88, 55b), and Zhenbiao 真表 (X88, 57c), Hongzan highlighted the themes of receiving Vinaya ordination from Maitreya and Maitreya’s wisdom to judge the effectiveness of a monk’s ordination and Vinaya practice. For example, he writes in regard to Huilan:

Huilan’s family name is Cheng, and he was from Jiuquan. Once he traveled to the Western Region and [he had the chance to] put Buddha’s alms bowl on his head [for reverent worship]. He received the gist of dhyāna meditation from monk Damo in the kingdom Kophen.²⁵ Damo once entered the dhyāna realm and ascended to Tuṣita Heaven. [He] received Bodhisattva Precepts ordination from Maitreya. Later he passed the way of the Precepts to Huilan. When [Huilan] returned to Khotan, he also transmitted the way of the Precepts to the monastic members there. After he returned to the eastern land [of southern China], Emperor Wen of Song asked [Huilan] to reside in the Dinglin Temple in Mount Zhong. [When] Emperor Xiaowu [of the Song] established the Zhongxing Temple [in the capital, he asked Huilan to move to Zhongxing Temple].²⁶ [The emperor] then ordered the dhyāna monks in the capital city to follow [Huilan] to receive the Precepts ordination.

覽姓成，酒泉人。曾遊西域，頂戴佛鉢。仍於罽賓，從達摩比丘，諳受禪要。達摩曾入定，往兜率天，從彌勒受菩薩戒，後以戒法授覽。還至于填國，復以戒法授彼方諸僧。乃歸東土，宋文帝請住鍾山定林寺。孝武帝起中興寺，復敕令京邑禪僧，皆隨踵受業。(X88, 55a)

This is a story Hongzan extracted from the well-known medieval Chinese text *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳) (T50, 399a). Hongzan tried to highlight Maitreya’s specific role in transmitting Bodhisattva Precepts in order to show that the Mahāyāna ordination and the effectiveness of a monastic member’s practice have their own “divine” legitimacy and supervision. This kind of narrative also implies that, although one may consider the cult of Maitreya to lack a clear and continuous lineage in China, Chinese Bod-

hisattva Precepts itself could have been traced to Maitreya. Considering Hongzan's view of the consistency between Bodhisattva Precepts and Vinaya in terms of monastic superiority mentioned above, it is evident here that this story reiterated the close connections between monastic communities, Bodhisattva Precepts as a part of monastic code, and Maitreya's role in maintaining the integrity of the two. It suggests that the monastic community is, moreover, continuously supervised and protected by Maitreya.

In the story of Bhikṣu "Flower Hand," when Emperor Wen of Wei hosted a Dharma-Assembly of Equal Almsgiving 無遮大會, the emperor asked the elder monks to prove that Chinese monastic members could receive effective ordination of Vinaya. The elders could not answer the question, and one monk asked the emperor to allow him to travel to India so he could consult an enlightened saint on this question. After this monk arrived at India, he encountered an Arhat, and, as the Arhat could not provide the answer, he ascended to Tuṣita Heaven to further consult Maitreya. Maitreya answered that both monks and nuns in China had received effective Vinaya ordination, and the proof is that a golden flower will enter the Arhat's hand and stay in full blossom. Maitreya asked this Arhat to travel to China to show Maitreya's answer and this vision to the monastic communities there. Before the Arhat arrived at China, there was a golden flower floating in the sky in front of the palace of Emperor Wen. The emperor asked the Imperial Historian (*taishi* 太史) the meaning of this vision, and the Historian replied that this is because the authentic teaching of the West is approaching the emperor. After a month, the Arhat arrived at the palace of Wei, and the original text ends with "therefore the bless of Vinaya is passed down forever" (*gu jiefu yongchuan ye* 故戒福永傳也).²⁷ Hongzan's reiterations of this story and similar ones pr a specific picture of Buddhist Vinaya in China: a sacred religious landscape, in which this system of monastic codes are not simply "lifestyles" of monks and nuns in Buddha's time, but also a special lineage of Dharma teaching passed down from Maitreya, the "second" and future Buddha. We can hardly imagine that this narrative is not intentionally constructed by Hongzan as a religious apology of Vinaya discipline and an admonition to his monastic peers.

From the selection of stories and main figures pertaining to the cult of Maitreya we can see Hongzan's endeavor to exclude the practice of Chan in medieval China. However, there are two figures in Chan literature Hongzan could not avoid: Fu Xi 傅翕 (or the Grand Master Fu 傅大士, also known as the Grand Master of Benevolent Wisdom 善慧大士) and Monk Qici 契此和尚 (or the Cloth Sack Monk 布袋和尚). Both the *Jingde Record* (T51, 430a–431a, 434a–434b) and *Five Lamps* (X80, 66c–67b, 68a) contain biographies of these two figures and labeled them as both incarnations of Maitreya and unorthodox Chan masters. Fu Xi had been known in China as a famous lay Buddhist master in the Liang dynasty (502–557 CE) and was worshiped as Maitreya himself, descended to China to spread Buddha's teaching. Zhang Yong's (Zhang 2012, pp. 68–91) comprehensive study of the history of Fu Xi's biography and poems shows that texts about and by Fu Xi were edited and extended several times by the end of the Tang dynasty, and that when they were recorded in Song dynasty Chan histories these texts were drastically modified according to Chan doctrines at that time. In this way, an early medieval legendary lay Buddhist master and alleged Maitreya incarnation was established as a Chan icon during the Song period.

One of the most famous and problematic texts for Hongzan was Fu Xi's *Maxims of the Heart King* (*Xinwang ming* 心王銘). This poetic text was perhaps derived from one of Fu Xi's works as seen in Tang dynasty anthologies, but a more common version in Chan histories is one obviously influenced by Song dynasty Chan elements (Shiina 1968; Zhang 2012, p. 124). Fu Xi's biography in the *Jingde Record* also contains several other poems that later became popular literary Chan "public cases". Most of Fu Xi's stories and works in Song dynasty Chan literatures are extracted from the most comprehensive anthology of Fu Xi's teachings, called *The Collection of Master Shanhui's Sayings* (*Shanhui dashi yulu* 善慧大士語錄) (X69, 104a–130c), which was completed in the late Tang and early Song dynasties. Compilers of Chan literature were apparently highly selective when choosing information from this long collection (Zhang 2012, pp. 42–82). In both the *Jingde Record* and *Five Lamps*

Fu Xi's biographies are much shorter than they are in the *Collection*, and only poems and sayings resembling Chan teachings are included. This is despite the fact that the meaning of Chan 禪 (dhyāna) in Fu Xi's time and the time of the *Collection* is distinct from the later school of Chan (Hsiao 1995, pp. 177–85). For this reason, Fu Xi is often remembered in Chan texts as an unorthodox Chan master who already preached Chan teachings even before the southern school of Chan emerged.

This “anachronistic” situation is utterly reversed in Hongzan's biography of Fu Xi. As the first alleged incarnation of Maitreya in Chinese history, Fu Xi's biography was included as the first text in Chapter I of the *Anthology*, separate from other Chinese figures and even before Indian figures. Monk Qici is the second figure whose story is recorded, and then come Indian figures. This means that Hongzan completely betrayed the taxonomic tradition of Chan histories, which always put Indian figures before Chinese ones. It also means that, to Hongzan, the images of Fu Xi and Monk Qici share a higher importance than the Indian figures and serve special functions in his *Anthology*. Here in Hongzan's discourse of the Maitreya cult, without the need to accommodate the orthodox Chan historical narrative, Fu Xi should stand at the very beginning of the history of Maitreya incarnation and miracles—for he is the earliest recorded incarnation of Maitreya in both Indian and Chinese texts. Therefore, right after Hongzan's preface in which he introduced Maitreya himself in different Buddhist scriptures, Fu Xi appears as the first incarnation. This organization also implies that, in Hongzan's view, Fu Xi is fully qualified as the first “orthodox” master of the Maitreya cult, even before miracle tales in India, since this is the only figure in Chinese Buddhist historiography who directly preached Buddha's “orthodox” teaching as Maitreya in this world.

In Hongzan's biography, however, all Chan-style poems are removed from this first Maitreya incarnation's teachings, including *Maxims of the Heart King*. This means that the most significant aspect of Fu Xi in the literary Chan tradition, namely Fu Xi's Chan-style teachings, is absent in Hongzan's construction of Fu Xi's religious image. Moreover, biographies of Fu Xi in Chan literatures are not the only source Hongzan used to compose his own biography. Instead, Hongzan consulted the original texts in the *Collection* and selected texts missing in Chan biographies as the major works quoted in his version.

In particular, Hongzan's biography of the Grand Master of Benevolent Wisdom includes the vow Fu Xi made at the beginning of his fasting practice (X69, 107b; X88, 52a). But this vow in Hongzan's biography is not a single text directly taken out from the *Collection*; rather, it is a combination of Fu Xi's sayings during his fasting practice and his disciples' vows in response. Hongzan merged two texts into one and put it under Fu Xi's name. This vow mainly focuses on the merit of abstention and how the Bodhisattva's conduct of suffering for all sentient beings could lead to Buddhahood. This contrasts with the Chan-style understanding of the non-duality of one's heart as represented in poems like *Maxims of the Heart King*. As the only major work of Fu Xi quoted in Hongzan's version that did exist in other contemporaneous Chan biographies of the figure, this demonstrates Hongzan's major intention in constructing a “new” image of Fu Xi. Hongzan aimed to show that Fu Xi's teachings are were not germane to Chan practices, but to Buddhist ascetic life.

In addition, two further details Hongzan added from the *Collection* that are absent in the biographies of Chan literatures are worth our attention. One is that master Fu Xi “transcribed more than one thousand scrolls of scriptures and Vinaya codes. [He] prayed that all sentient beings could break away from afflictions and attain liberation” (躬寫經律，千有餘卷。願諸衆生，離苦解脫。) (X69, 106b; X88, 52a). Hongzan specifically stressed here that Fu Xi copied Buddhist scripture and Vinaya texts, which hints that even an accomplished master like him—indeed, an incarnation of Maitreya himself—still held great respect for scriptural texts and Vinaya. The other added detail is that Fu Xi once said to his disciples:

If those who learn the way [of Buddha] do not encounter a teacher [who has attained] anutpattika-dharma-ksānti of non-duality, then they will eventually be

unable to gain the way. I am [the one who has] attained anutpattika-dharma-ksānti of non-duality in this life

學道若不值無生師，終不得道。我是現前得無生人。(X69, 105a; X88, 52a).

According to the Chinese translation of *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* (*Mohe bore boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經), anutpattika-dharma-ksānti of non-duality (*wusheng faren* 無生法忍) is a type of wisdom that only a “seventh stage” Bodhisattva could accomplish (T8, 259a). At this stage, the Bodhisattva has transcended all the realms of Arhat (Shi 2019). Here, by highlighting Fu Xi’s warning about the necessity of an accomplished teacher in the success of Buddhist cultivation, Hongzan seems to suggest that if one does not study the way of Buddha under a teacher like Master Fu Xi, then this person’s claim of enlightenment is dubious. We may assume that this short sentence Hongzan chose to add in Fu Xi’s biography served as a poignant criticism of the “madcaps” he referred to in the preface of the *Anthology* mentioned above. Also, as we have seen, in the preface Hongzan explicitly expressed that anutpattika-dharma-ksānti of non-duality is a fixed requirement of true termination of reincarnation for an enlightened Bodhisattva. This suggests that even true Chan enlightenment is not enough for a Buddhist to be absolved from reincarnation. In the biography, Hongzan reiterated his opinion through Fu Xi’s voice.

Similar narrative preference also appears in Hongzan’s biography of Monk Qici. Qici was an influential figure from the Song dynasty onward not only to Chan communities, but also to unorthodox and sectarian religions in China as the incarnation of Maitreya (Lin 1975). He was known for his iconic image: a laughing, chubby monk carrying a cloth sack. The earliest biography of Qici seen in elitist Chinese Buddhist text is the one included in *Biographies of Song Eminent Monks* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳) (T50, 848b). In this biography, Qici is depicted as an eccentric wandering monk but no distinct Chan background or teaching is mentioned. The only poetic saying recorded here is “Maitreya, the veritable Maitreya, but people naturally do not recognize him” (彌勒真彌勒，時人皆不識)。²⁸ Later, in the *Jingde Record* biography, four literary Chan-style dialogues and two poems are added. One of the dialogues is

Monk Bailu asked [Qici]: What is [your] cloth sack? Qici then put down [his] cloth sack. [Monk Bailu] asked again: “Why did you put down the cloth sack?” Qici [then] put [it back on his shoulder] and left.

白鹿和尚問：如何是布袋？師便放下布袋。又問：如何是布袋下事？師負之而去。(T51, 434b)

In the *Five Lamps* biography, two more poems are included. The two new poems appear less mysterious; contrary to the typical Chan style, they are more oral and direct in preaching moral cultivation as well as tathāgatagarbha doctrine. In later Chan masters’ sayings and public cases, the “cloth sack” (*budai* 布袋) became an important symbol. For example, the cloth sack appeared more than 20 times in the famous founder of literary Chan Dahui Zonggao’s 大慧宗杲 discourse record. Moreover, Dahui Zonggao even composed a poem called “Monk Cloth Sack” (*Budai heshang* 布袋和尚) to explain the enigmatic Chan meanings in Qici’s words and behaviors (T47, 859a).

In Hongzan’s biography of Qici, two poems added in *Five Lamps* are kept, but all the Chan-style dialogues and one longer poem from the *Jingde Record* are omitted. Once more, we see Hongzan’s deliberate avoidance of any involvement with literary Chan practice when adapting these biographies. As the second publicly recognized Maitreya incarnation in orthodox Buddhist historiography in China, Qici is put next to Fu Xi in the *Anthology* not as a peripheral and unorthodox Chan teacher but as a legitimate patriarch in the cult of Maitreya.

5. Hongzan’s Miracle Tales of Ascending to Tuṣita Heaven

The second chapter of the *Anthology* has two parts. Both are dedicated to ascending miracle tales from historical records that Hongzan himself collected. As mentioned in the previous section, all the figures included in this chapter are monastic members apart

from the Tang poet Bai Juyi and Hongzan's own mother. Like in the first chapter, these ascending stories are frequently linked to monastic Vinaya practices and repentance of sin. Twenty-two ascending stories mention the element of Vinaya disciplines and repentance. In these stories, phrases like "holding the rules of Vinaya and never missing any [one of them]" (執持律範，曾無缺焉) (X88, 68b) or "obeying [all] the Vinaya codes without any violation" (戒律軌儀，有持不犯) (X88, 69a) link these representative monastic figures' strict Vinaya practice to their successful rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven. In two stories of Hongzan's disciples Shi Kaizhe 釋開哲 and Kailuo Qiuji 開筭求寂, the priority of Vinaya and proper monastic demeanor are more vividly exhibited than ever:

[Kaizhe] was never daunted by hard labors and affairs [in the temple]. [He always] served the master in absolute respect and discretion; [he always] practiced dhyāna meditation and chanted scriptures day and night. [Kaizhe's] literary talent and intellectual insight share the same quality of the mirror-like reflection on the water's surface. [His eyes] do not see with skewed sight, and inspect like a king elephant. [He] lies down like a lion. [He] does not easily speak, and [he] does not [expose] his teeth when laughing.

執勞服役，未嘗少憚。事師則必敬必慎，禪誦則夜以繼旦。稟識才藻，質同水鏡。目不邪觀，顧如象王，臥類師子。不易言，不齒笑。(X88, 70b)

[Qiuji] served the master kindly and discreetly, and [he] studied and practiced industriously. If [he] was admonished by the master, [he] never [showed] displeasure [on his face]. His daily dignified manner was like a bhikṣu [who] had practiced Pure Conduct [Brahmacaryā] for a long time.

事師淳謹，習學彌勤。倘被師責，迥無不悅之色。進止威儀，若久修梵行之比丘。(X88, 70c)

To Hongzan, these exemplary tributes to proper monk conduct provide examples of Vinaya discipline necessary for ascending to Tuṣita Heaven. Monastic virtues and Vinaya propriety do not merely transform a monastic member's mind, but also his or her exterior appearance and bodily traits.²⁹ This is accompanied by the miraculous physical signs of these figures' death scenes, which are regarded as tangible proof of their genuine cultivation and successful rebirth. For example, in Kaizhe's story, Hongzan wrote: "[After] the cremation [of his body], [his] teeth were like pristine snow, [and his] śarīra bone relics were of four colors" (荼毗，牙如珂雪，舍利四色)。³⁰

As Shinohara (Shinohara 2007, pp. 47–72) notices in his study of the miraculous death scenes of eminent monk biographies in medieval China, miraculous death scenes, especially pure lands rebirth scenes, can be seen as a collective literary creation by the main figure's monastic relatives out of their concerns or anxiety about an eminent monk's result of cultivation. Hongzan employed the same literary strategy to show his audience how merits and effects of Vinaya and Maitreya practices could be embodied in a monastic member's physical transformation and miraculous signs. This affirmation of the connection between Vinaya, the Maitreya cult, and somatic miracles again opposes the idea that active endeavors in Buddhist practice (in particular, rebirth pursuits) is merely a kind of "obsession". This idea had already been disputed in the medieval period (Shinohara 2007, pp. 47–72). Even in the story of the famous lay Buddhist and Tang dynasty poet Bao Juyi, Hongzan utilized Monk Weikuan's 惟寬 instruction to Bai to reiterate the importance of Vinaya:

Master [Weikuan] said: the supreme Bodhi wisdom is embodied as Vinaya, expressed as Dharma, and cultivated in the heart as Chan. Vinaya is dharma, and Dharma is not apart from Chan.

師曰：無上菩提者，被於身為律，說於口為法，行於心為禪。律即是法，法不離禪。(X88, 68c)

This quote is originally from the *Jingde Record*, but the second half of the original instruction dialogue contain a teaching of non-duality and inactiveness of Chan cultivation. This portion of the dialogue is deleted by Hongzan:

[Bai Juyi] asked again: “If [Vinaya, Dharma and Chan] have no differences, then how [does one] fix the heart?” Master [Weikuan] said: “The heart is essentially intact, why [do you] said that [it] needs to be fixed? Do not differentiate your mind no matter [whether it is] filthy or pure”.

[Bai Juyi] asked again: “If [one] does not [actively] fix [the mind] or [use] the mind, the how is this [Chan practice] different from being an ordinary sentient being?” Master [Weikuan] said: “Ordinary sentient beings are obsessed with the ignorances of duality [Avidyā] and Hīnayāna, and moving away from these two kinds of illness [of the mind] means genuine cultivation. Those who genuinely cultivate [the mind] should neither be assiduous nor indolent. Being assiduous is close to obsession, and being indolent means falling to ignorance. This is what is called the gist of mind [cultivation].

又問：既無分別何以修心？師云：心本無損傷，云何要修理？無論垢與淨，一切勿起念。又問：無修無念又何異凡夫耶？師曰：凡夫無明二乘執著，離此二病是曰真修。真修者不得動不得忘。勤即近執著，忘即落無明，此為心要云爾。(T51, 255a)

Hongzan replaced this second half of Weikuan’s Chan instruction with depictions of Bai Juyi’s active and industrious practice of Tuṣita Heaven beliefs. If we read the original Chan instruction dialogue between Bai Juyi and Weikuan, Weikuan clearly did not try to stress the importance of Vinaya disciplines and strict Vinaya practice when he claimed that Vinaya and Chan are “homogeneous”. On the contrary, Weikuan defied industrious Vinaya practice and tried to elaborate on the Chan mediation of non-duality and inactiveness of the mind in order to defend Chan masters’ ostensibly unconventional lifestyles (Poceski 2018). Hongzan’s narrative completely reversed the original meaning of Weikuan’s words. By deleting the actual Chan part of Weikuan’s teaching and adding Bai Juyi’s industrious practice of Maitreya name chanting and Tuṣita Heaven visualization³¹, Hongzan seemed to indicate in this story that—as Vinaya, Dharma, and Chan are essentially the same—active practices like Maitreya name chanting and Tuṣita Heaven visualization are already Chan practices, not the opposite. Therefore, by presenting Chan elements as obsolete in this story, Hongzan attempted to twist Weikuan’s teaching in order to make the narrative of this story coherent with the overall link between Vinaya disciplines and active ascending practices established in the *Anthology*.

Monastic dhyāna meditation is also something Hongzan emphasized in the second chapter’s ascending stories. As mentioned above, dhyāna meditation was also translated as *chan* 禪 before the school of Chan gained prominence and essentially monopolized this term in later periods. Before the enigmatic and flexible Chan School emerged, as Eric Greene (Greene 2021, pp. 21–54) argues, dhyāna *chan* referred to a more normative, concrete, monastic and scriptural meditative technique. In the *Anthology*, the word 禪 predominantly refers to this kind of dhyāna meditation rather than the sectarian Chan practice. In this work, moreover, dhyāna meditation seems to be construed as a vital technique for ascending to Tuṣita Heaven. Hence, the meaning of *chan* as the Chan School is completely absent in the *Anthology*. It seems that, to Hongzan, the only legitimate “technique” of *chan* worth exhibiting is not the sectarian one that became almost iconoclastic in Ming and Qing dynasty but the one that predates the Chan School. Only this type of strict and miraculous meditative technique should be established as a valid method of monastic cultivation.

For example, in Hongzan’s transcription of the biography of the early Tang dynasty Tiantai Buddhist master Zhixi 智晞 (who was also the patriarch Zhiyi’s 智顛 disciple), Hongzan omitted the major part of the original story of Zhixi’s miraculous communication with local mountain gods, and extracted the less significant beginning and ending of his biography in the *Extended Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳) (T50,

582a) to weave an image of a dhyāna virtuoso who successfully ascended to Tuṣita Heaven via strict meditation:

Zhixi of the Chen clan was originally from Yingchuan . . . [Zhixi] first heard [the reputation] of Zhiyi and sincerely admired [Zhiyi] . . . At the age of twenty he finally fulfilled his longtime wish [to meet with Zhiyi]. After [his] encounter [with Zhiyi], [Zhixi] determined [to follow Zhiyi] as [his] mentor. [Zhixi] was sufficiently equipped with Vinaya and monastic demeanors. [He] received secret teachings of dhyāna and further practiced the [meditation] of tranquil fixity [寂定]³² industriously as if [his] head were burning and [he] needed rescue. [One day he] heard the loud echo of a bronze bell from the east mountain [that] shook the valley, and he said: “Alas! It is calling me!” Several days after the disappearance [of the echo], [Zhixi] said to his disciples: “My life is coming to the end”. In the night of the seventeenth day of the twelfth month in the first year of [the reign of Emperor] Zhenguan [627 CE], [Zhixi] sat up straight with legs crossed . . . and told his disciples: “You and I encountered [each other] in the order of karma. Now it is time to say farewell and [there is] not a day that [we will] meet again. After saying [this], [Zhixi] remained silent without a word. After a while, his disciples [started] weeping. [Zhixi] opened his eyes again and admonished that: “Human beings [experience] life and death, and everything has its beginning and inevitably its termination. This is just a vision of this world, why [do you feel] sad about this? [You] can leave and stop disturbing me”. [Zhixi] also said: “I have practiced dhyāna for forty-nine years until today, and not [once] did my back touch a bed. I did not disappoint my patrons’ alms and I did not disappoint [people’s] incense offerings. If you wish to meet me [again], [you] should practice the way [of Buddha] diligently, and the power [of dhyāna] will not let people down”. His disciples consulted him and said: “[We] do not know where [our] monk will be reborn”. [Zhixi] replied: “My karma will retribute in Tuṣita Heaven. Its palaces are turquoise in color and located in the northwest in the sky” . . . In the morning of the eighteenth day, he told his disciples: “You should be prepared for the fasting ritual as soon as possible, [since the end] of my life [is getting] very close”. At noon [Zhixi] sat in a cross-legged position upright and elegantly. [His] breath became weaker, as if [he] entered the realm of dhyāna and henceforth [he] would not return [to this world]. [He died] at the age of seventy-two. At that time [there was] music of strings and pipes from the sky, and all the gathered audience heard [that] it lasted for a long time before it receded. [Zhixi’s body] stayed in public for several days before it was moved into a stone shrine. [His] face and complexion looked full of joy. [His] hands and feet were supple just like [when he was] alive.

晞，姓陳氏，潁川人...伏聞智者...丹誠馳仰...年登二十，始獲從願。一得奉值，即定師資，律儀具足，稟受禪訣，加修寂定，如救頭然。聞東山銅鐘聲，大音震谷，便云：噫！喚吾也。未終數日，語弟子云：吾命無幾...貞觀元年十二月十七日夜，跏趺端坐...告弟子曰：吾將汝等，造次相值。今當永別，會遇靡期。言已，寂然無聲。良久，諸弟子哭泣，便開眼誡曰：人生有死，物始必終。世相如是，寧足可悲？可去，勿鬧亂吾也。又云：吾習禪以來，至於今日，四十九年，背不著牀。吾不負信施，不負香火。汝等欲得與吾相見，可自動策行道，力不負人。弟子諮曰：未審和尚當生何所？答云：報在兜率，宮殿青色，居天西北...十八日朝，語諸弟子：汝等並早須齋，吾命須臾。至午，結跏趺坐，端直儼然，氣息綿微，如入禪定，因而不返，春秋七十有二。時虛空中，有絃管聲，合眾皆聞，良久乃息。經停數日，方入石龕。顏色敷悅，手足柔軟，不異生平。(X88, 66a)

In Hongzan’s narrative, Zhixi’s lifelong devotion to dhyāna meditation apparently led directly to his successful rebirth. By omitting stories of other aspects of Zhixi’s miraculous conduct, it is as if Zhixi’s lifelong dhyāna practice only aimed at a “magical” death and rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven. More than 10 stories in the *Anthology* mention the practice of

dhyāna as an indispensable practice of eminent monastic figures in Chinese rebirth stories, and no Chan practice is present. The only Chan School figure included is the Song dynasty Yunmen clan patriarch Shanben 善本, but Hongzan did not mention any detail of Shanben's Chan teaching. Instead, Hongzan emphasized Shanben's study of the *Lotus Sūtra* (聽習毗尼妙法蓮華), practice of Vinaya, and miraculous dreams (X88, 69b). Since the sectarian meaning of Chan is absent in this collection, it is obvious that Hongzan intended to reinstate the so-called "original" meaning of *chan* as a highly monastic-oriented and concrete skill in the context of the Maitreya cult. This could also be read as an indirect criticism on the "declining" Chan School in Hongzan's discourse, and an implicit argument that this term should return to its older, more skillful and strict meaning.

Meanwhile, other details in Hongzan's ascending stories also imply that Hongzan held different attitudes toward Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven and Amitābha's Pure Land of Bliss. Although we saw in the previous section that Hongzan praised Amitābha's Pure Land and the practice of *nianfo* as the easy way to gain wisdom and as inseparable from Chan, this is not the whole picture of his religious view on rebirth in pure lands. It seems that, to Hongzan, Tuṣita Heaven is superior to the Pure Land of Bliss in that Tuṣita Heaven is not open to sinful believers but only to virtuous practitioners. For this reason, the speed of cultivation in Tuṣita Heaven is much faster than in Amitābha's Pure Land of Bliss. In fact, which of the two pure lands is superior has been a long-lasting argument in the History of Chinese Buddhism (Wang 1992). As previously mentioned, translated scriptures of the Pure Land of Bliss, especially *The Sūtra of the Visualization of Amitāyus* (*Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra*; *Guan wuliang shou jing* 觀無量壽經), present the openness of the Pure Land of Bliss even to extremely sinful people as its advantage—in spite of the unspeakably long time before such a person actually attain enlightenment (T12, 345c). Authorities in the Ming period often stressed this low requirement of rebirth in the Pure Land of Bliss as evidence of the suitability of Pure Land belief in an era of the end of Dharma, while at the same time receiving criticisms of Pure Land beliefs as inferior and against the Buddhist dogma of emptiness (Jones 2019, pp. 103–7).

In his story of Bai Juyi's pure land practices Hongzan provides an intriguing detail of his own view on the two pure lands. He mentioned that although Bai Juyi was dedicated to Tuṣita Heaven, in his final years, after a severe illness, he changed his pursuit to the Pure Land of Bliss due to his physical suffering. This is evidenced by Bai's poetry.³³ Hongzan acrimoniously commented that:

Bai Juyi did not understand that filth and purity come from the heart, and inflictions and joy are [both] delusions. So, he raised the emotion of differentiation and did not concentrate on one aspiration. If [he had] comprehended [the dogma] of heart/mind only, then [he would have known that] the [Tuṣita] Heavenly Palace and the Pure Land of Bliss are both dream-like realms [created by the heart] and [they are] lands located in the same dimension.

易未達淨穢由心，苦樂皆妄，故起取捨之情，志願不一。若悟惟心，天宮淨土，並是化境，皆一同居之土。(X88, 68c)

Therefore, in Hongzan's view, Bai Juyi should not have differentiated between the pure lands and instead have only concentrated on one destination, since his suffering was the consequence of his own differentiating mind. This is obviously an apologetic reaction to Bai Juyi's change of practice in his late years in order to defend Tuṣita Heaven. Hongzan thus suggests that, ultimately, Tuṣita Heaven and the Pure Land of Bliss are the same and that there was therefore no need for Bai to change his pursuit.

Does this then mean that Hongzan tried to advocate for the equality of the two pure lands and that he genuinely believed that they are the same? Interestingly, in the 98 biographies of monastic figures in Zhuhong's *Biographies of Rebirth [in the Pure Land of Bliss]* (*Wangsheng ji* 往生集), there is no mention of these monastic members' Vinaya practice and, in fact, no positive comments about Tuṣita Heaven at all (T51, 127a–137c). Since Hongzan was significantly influenced by Zhuhong and had read his works, the narrative of Vinaya practice conspicuously contradicts with Zhuhong's omission of this

important aspect of monastic life. As mentioned before, Zhuhong's biographies targeted at both monastic and lay readers and to him, the all-encompassing character of the Pure Land of Bliss means that one could "easily" be reborn in this land even without obeying strict monastic regulations. This "easiness" of Pure Land of Bliss practice might have led to the omission of Vinaya practices in Zhuhong's storytelling strategies. However, in contrast to Zhuhong's narrative, Hongzan's connection between Tuṣita Heaven rebirth and monastic figures' Vinaya practices indicates that the standard for entering Tuṣita Heaven is apparently higher than the Pure Land of Bliss. Thus it is an "uneasy" pure land and more suitable for monastic members.

In another story, of Hongzan's female disciple the Nun Chengci 成慈尼, this expert of nun Vinaya whose "Vinaya virtue resembles ice and snow" (*jiede bingxue* 戒德冰雪) (X88, 70a), namely, whose Vinaya practice was clear and pure, heard that those who were reborn in the Pure Land of Bliss on the lowest level could not see Buddha for numerous eons. Upon hearing this, she concluded that based on the scriptures Tuṣita Heaven is a better choice since there are not different levels of rebirth in Maitreya's pure land. Chengci raised this question to Hongzan, and Hongzan confirmed what she said and bestowed one scroll of the *Sūtra of Visual Contemplation of Ascendance to Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven* to her. Later, during her dhyāna meditation, Chengci saw a series of miraculous signs and foresaw her successful rebirth.

Chengci's detailed question in this story and Hongzan's positive confirmation subtly reveals Hongzan's own preference between the two pure lands, and indicates that he too believed Tuṣita Heaven to be a better choice than the Pure Land of Bliss. According to Chengci's logic, because there are no different levels of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven—unlike in the Pure Land of Bliss—anyone who successfully ascends to Tuṣita Heaven should see Maitreya immediately. Therefore, the speed of cultivation in Tuṣita Heaven is considerably faster than in the Pure Land of Bliss. By presenting Chengci's question in detail, Hongzan consciously exhibits his own intention to establish the cult of Maitreya as a competitive belief with the Pure Land of Bliss. In this way, Hongzan aimed to address the decline of monasticism. If Chan was not a sensible choice for Buddhist practitioners of his time in general, and for monastic communities in particular, the revival of dhyāna meditation and Vinaya discipline was inevitable. Furthermore, because the all-encompassing Pure Land of Bliss tradition could not address the decline of Buddhist monasticism—insofar as the tradition deemphasized the importance of Vinaya disciplines—then belief in Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven must serve as a new unifying dogma to prevent monastic communities from losing their distinctive identity and religious lifestyle.

6. Conclusions

Ritzinger (Ritzinger 2017, pp. 145–46) points out that the Republican Chinese Buddhist master Taixu's 太虛 (1890–1947 CE) so-called "modernized" belief of Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven should not simply be regarded as a reconciliation between Buddhist faith and the modern world; instead, Taixu tried to call back the "traditional" monastic rituals and religiosity in Chinese Buddhism. It is arguable whether this "tradition" ever existed in Chinese history, but Taixu is certainly not the first to turn to the cult of Maitreya for help when facing "crises" of Buddhism in China. In this article, we have seen how the early Qing dynasty Caodong Chan master Zaisan Hongzan's Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven beliefs reflect his own Chan revisionist and monastic revival sentiment. Hongzan faced a time similar to Taixu, when numerous Chinese Buddhist elites lamented the fall of the most influential and predominant Buddhist school in China, the Chan School, and were concurrently deeply troubled by the alleged decline of monasticism. Certain monastic authorities introduced the double cultivation of Chan and Pure Land *nianfo* practice, but this "reinvented" means of meditation caused new problems and constantly sparked doubts and disagreements. Prominent late Ming dynasty figures within the Chan community also recognized the "declining" of this tradition, especially the literary Chan tradition from the

Song period, and endeavored to save Chan practices and communities. However, their actions only put Chan in a more precarious position by the time of the early Qing dynasty.

Some voices started to question the legitimacy and necessity of Chan both as a sectarian Buddhist faith and as a means of meditation. Caodong masters in the Ming period were the most radical internal Chan critics, criticizing the degeneration of literary Chan and trying to reinstate the ancient, “authentic” teaching of Chan. They were also interested in using Pure Land of Bliss practice as a supplementary instrument to reform Chan meditation. Zaisan Hongzan, the ordained Caodong monk from Guangdong, proposed the most severe criticism on Chan. He went beyond his contemporary Chan critics to question the fundamental validity of the edifice of Chan School. To Hongzan, Chan itself is not a specific form of teaching or dogma but a realm of non-duality, and Hongzan believed that the sectarian Chan tradition of his day could not lead to enlightenment only by playing with Chan words. In this way, Buddha’s teaching of Vinaya disciplines and gradual practice such as dhyāna meditation could lead to the attainment of Chan wisdom, rather than any concrete Chan words. Therefore, Hongzan believed that only by reviving monasticism and replacing the current dogmatic Chan teachings with Vinaya and gradual meditative practice could Chinese Buddhism be saved from annihilation. For this reason, Hongzan avoided any systematic teaching of Chan practices in his works and instead wrote primarily about Vinaya codes and tantric practices.

This sentiment also influenced his construction or “reinvention” of the Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven cult. Hongzan’s *Anthology of Exemplary Tales of Tuṣita Heaven Rebirth*, as the only Maitreya pure land rebirth biography in traditional China, served as a platform for Hongzan to exhibit his own religious preferences and beliefs via hagiographic narratives of idealized monastic figures. Sectarian Chan elements are removed from the stories included in this collection, and the term *chan* exclusively refers to dhyāna meditation in Hongzan’s vocabulary. Moreover, famous unorthodox Chan patriarchs like Fu Xi and Qici are no longer labeled Chan teachers in Hongzan’s biographies. By linking successful ascent to Tuṣita Heaven and Maitreya’s miraculous power to eminent monastic figures’ Vinaya practices, Hongzan deliberately depicted a religious landscape of Tuṣita Heaven faith as most suitable for strict monastic practitioners in contrast to the Pure Land of Bliss tradition. This should also be seen as a motivation Hongzan provided to his peers to encourage the return of Buddhist monasticism. In this way, Hongzan’s Maitreya belief is nothing but a cogent reaction to his own observation of Chinese Buddhism in crisis.

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Notes

¹ Hereafter referred to as *Anthology*.

² This is an established metaphor in Chan literature to describe the “correct” and ineffable transmission of true wisdom from a master to a disciple, as if the transmission of wisdom and the verification of a disciple’s accomplishment are validated by a carved insignia. See Foulk (2007, p. 450).

³ Māra is often depicted as an evil celestial being who disturbed Buddha’s meditation and vowed to destroy dharma. He is usually recognized as the archenemy of Buddhism. See Boyd (1971).

⁴ Arhat, in Sanskrit the “Worthy One”, refers to those Buddhist saints who have terminated the afflictions of reincarnation and possibility of future rebirth and the highest level of sagehood in Hīnayāna tradition (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 62). Saṃsāra refers to the chain of rebirth in different realms or forms of life (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 758).

- 5 One of the most compelling case is his categorization of Buddhist practices of Five Schools (*wuzong* 五宗). Zhixu proposed that there are four distinct methods of meditation whose traits resemble four seasons, and Chan echoes with winter as a formless, tranquil and iconoclastic practice. But all practices that can be categorized according to this four seasons theory are inferior to and inseparable to Pure Land nianfo practice, since Pure Land nianfo practice is the most superior king of all Mahāyāna teachings (J36, 369c).
- 6 These include two kinds of fully ordained monastic communities (monks [bhikṣu] and nuns [bhikṣuṇī], two kinds of novice monastic communities (male novice monk [sāmaṇera] and female ones [śrāmaṇerikā]), one kind of senior female novice nun (śikṣamāṇā), and male lay Buddhist (upāsaka) and female lay Buddhist (upāsikā).
- 7 This refers to Huineng’s full monastic ordination in the *Sixth Master’s Platform Sutra* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經) circulated in Ming and Qing. According to the text, Huineng could not preach Chan’s teaching before he was fully ordained with full Vinaya. See T48, 349c08–350a2.
- 8 Chengguan’s biography records that he made ten vows by himself immediately after he officially received Bodhisattva Precepts. See *Fajie zong wuzu lue ji* 法界宗五祖略記 (X77, 623a).
- 9 See T24, 997c. Elements of this canon are perhaps transformed from *Huayan jing* 華嚴經, and considered by Chinese authorities as a part of the special teachings Buddha made to high level Bodhisattvas immediately after his enlightenment before preaching to his human disciples. See Groner (1990, pp. 252–57).
- 10 “若佛子! 心背大乘, 常住經律言非佛說, 而受持二乘聲聞、外道惡見、一切禁戒邪見經律者, 犯輕垢罪。” (T24, 1005c)
- 11 “二乘…如來觀彼根劣, 未堪授與大法, 故暫示之小教。彼即厭苦斷集, 欣滅修道, 而證得人空偏理。獨出三界, 無利人心, 遂失本源地正體。非惡見如何, 若不知大乘常住之法, 捨此心地大戒, 而受持聲聞禁戒道法。亦不得圓滿具足…況復梵網八萬威儀, 七眾並資, 五道通被, 豈容破戒, 稱為佛乘? …如經所說, 為策彼堅修行者, 恐其棄大習小。復令一向習小法者, 趨向大乘, 非謂聲聞戒, 可輕可忽。有慚有愧者, 惟恐持之不逮。是以五天竺國, 凡出家者, 皆先學小, 然後習大…不達如來秘密之意, 纔聞此即捨彼, 取捨乖方, 妄符經旨, 悖佛言教。自取累於長劫, 若屑聲聞戒不受, 則不應剃髮染衣, 作沙門之相…苟欣其相, 而棄其戒, 冒入法門, 與僧同事, 羯磨布薩, 名為賊住。罪與五逆同科, 後永不得受具戒。” (X38, 724b)
- 12 In the section of *Answers to Questions in the Chamber* (*Shizhong dawen* 室中答問), there are sixteen Chan dialogues and only five of the questioners are monks (J 35, 482a–483b). Among these five monk questioners, only one of them is registered with a specific name while others are only recorded as “a monk” (*seng* 僧). In contrast, all of the eleven lay literati questioners’ names are recorded.
- 13 This story has been transmitted in Chan historiography since the Tang dynasty. See Adamek (2007, pp. 129–31) and Gregory (2019).
- 14 For this kind of traditional classification, see Zheng (2017).
- 15 See “頓漸修者, 頓修即末後一輪, 漸修即二十四輪也。唯除頓覺人者, 謂不立階級及文字法相, 如前所云居一切時不起妄念者, 則一斷永斷一證永證, 是上上根截法而過。或不藉此而修, 或信根不具不肯隨順者亦不依此修。其餘三賢十聖一切修菩薩行者皆當依此法輪隨順勤修也, 修而復加勤者勵之也。” (X10, 533c).
- 16 The “stage of three worthies and ten sages” (階三賢十聖) refers to the Arhat and Bodhisattva stages in the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism. See A. Charles Muller’s translation of *Outline of the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings* (*Tiantai si jiaoyi* 天台四教儀) (T46, 773c–78c), <http://www.acmuller.net/kor-bud/sagyoui.html>.
- 17 Fire between flints and crackles of lightening refers to the mirage in afflicted minds.
- 18 As Kaijue noted in his annotations, this refers to famous stories of four well-known Chan masters in the Song dynasty who, despite their Chan cultivation, still fell into reincarnation and were born as ordinary people.
- 19 Anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti (wusheng faren 無生法忍) is a kind of wisdom that the “nonretrogression” stage Bodhisattva started to learn in Mahāyāna, in which Bodhisattvas begin to understand the deep meaning of emptiness and truly realize the unrealness of self and others, reincarnation and even nirvana, that “all dharmas . . . are originally and eternally ‘unproduced’ or ‘tranquil’” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 55).
- 20 In Zhiyi’s biography, it is recorded that at his death he claimed that he would be reborn in the Pure Land of Bliss (T50, 196a). The Ming Pure Land master Wengu’s *nianfo* temple was named *Jingci an* 淨慈庵, an apparent reference to the Pure Land (淨土) (X61, 819b).
- 21 For example, see 斐然宋元戎初入法門求示修心法要 (J35, 478b), 警策縑素 (J35, 486b) and 與尹瀾柱銓部 (J35, 495c).
- 22 See the three articles mentioned above. This perhaps indicates Yunqi Zhuhong’s influence. See 掃雲樓大師塔文 (J35, 505c) for Hongzan’s intellectual and social liaison with Yunqi Zhuhong.
- 23 As there are more than half of the stories dedicated to lay practitioners in *Wangsheng ji* and more than a third dedicated to lay figures in *Jingtu shengxian lu*.
- 24 See 禪門達者雖不出世有名於時者在 *Jingde chuandeng lu* (T51, 429c).
- 25 This is not the Chan master Damo but a central Asian monk.
- 26 Hongzan perhaps missed a sentence from the original text. See T50, 399a.
- 27 The original story is seen in the Tang Buddhist encyclopedia *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T53, 945a).
- 28 Here I consulted Chapin’s translation of Qici’s biography. See Chapin (1933).

- ²⁹ In fact, Janet Gyatso has shown that the Vinaya codes are primarily concerned with bodily behaviors and acts prior to the status of the mind, and Hongzhan's narrative here seems to stress this somatic dimension of Vinaya. See Gyatso (2005, pp. 271–90).
- ³⁰ These kind of bone relics were usually understood as remains of Buddhist "saints" and a proof of their accomplishment. They were enshrined and venerated for their miraculous power, but very often this kind of veneration of bodily relics was limited to monastic figures. See Ritzinger and Bingenheimer (2006).
- ³¹ These two methods are established Maitreya devotional practices since medieval China aiming at ascent to Tuṣita Heaven, and they are very similar to Pure Land of Bliss practices. See Sponberg (1988, pp. 94–109).
- ³² Another name for Buddhist dhyāna meditation.
- ³³ See Utsuo Shoshin's (Utsuo 1950) discussion of Bai Juyi's pure land beliefs.

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Article

From “Sangha Forest” (叢林 Conglin) to “Buddhist Academy”: The Influence of Western Knowledge Paradigm on the Chinese Sangha Education in Modern Times

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Abstract: Drawing on Foucault’s theoretical framework of “space and power”, this paper examines the discursive construction of “knowledge” in the context of Chinese Buddhist education. It traces the historical transformation of Chinese Buddhist education from the traditional “Sangha Forest” (the monastic community; 叢林 Conglin) style education to the Buddhist Academy, and analyzes how modern Buddhism reshaped its social image and function from a faith-based to a knowledge-based culture. Furthermore, this paper explores the reasons why modern Buddhism requires “knowledge” as a bridge between its worldly and transcendental dimensions, and the roles of elite laymen and monasteries as “Buddhist Institutes” in the new discursive practice.

Keywords: modern Chinese Buddhism; Sangha Education; Buddhist Academies; Buddhist institutes; Buddhist monastic space

1. The Internal and External Constraints Imposed by the Discursive Power of “Knowledge” on Chinese Buddhist Education

1.1. External Constraints: Traditional Chinese Epistemology Reshaped by the Modern Western Education System

From 1850 to 1949, China experienced a critical period of modern education and scientific transformation. The reformists of the late Qing dynasty believed that to revitalize China, they had to start by reforming the people’s mentality and the education system. In 1862, the Qing government established the Tongwen Guan of Peking (京師同文館 Jingshi Tongwen Guan) as the earliest modern school in China, marking the beginning of modern education in China. In 1898, the Qing government founded the Imperial University of Peking (京師大學堂 Jingshi Daxuetang) as the first national comprehensive university in modern China. In 1905, the Qing government abolished the imperial examination system that had lasted for more than a thousand years and set up the Ministry of Education (學部 Xuebu) as the central agency for education. It also issued *the Imperially Approved Regulations for Schools* (欽定學堂章程 Qinding Xuetang Zhangcheng) as the first official school system promulgated by the government and implemented nationwide. After that, the Qing government established various types of new schools and specialized institutions, such as the Foochow Arsenal Academy (福建船政學堂 Fujian Chuanzheng Xuetang), the Higher Normal School (高等師範學堂 Gaodeng Shifan Xuetang), and the School of Practical Industries (實業學堂 Shiye Xuetang). It also sent students to study abroad in Japan and Europe. From the Tongzhi Restoration (同光新政 Tongguang Xinzheng), the Self-Strengthening Movement (洋務運動 Yangwu Yundong), the Hundred Days’ Reform (維新變法 Weixin Bianfa), the New Policies of the Late Qing (清末新政 Qingmo Xinzheng), the Constitutional Preparation Period (預備立憲 Yubei Lixian) to the Beiyang government (北洋政府 Beiyang Zhengfu) and the Nanjing government (南京政府 Nanjing Zhengfu) era, Chinese intellectuals learned technology and science from the West in various ways. The education model centered on Western learning not only changed the intellectual, intuitive,

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and individual modes of traditional Chinese education, but also introduced a knowledge system that was essentially different from Eastern civilization's "science". Science, as a new type of knowledge system, began to spread and popularize in China, especially after the May Fourth Movement. Science was no longer just about Western technology such as making guns, ships, and steel, but a rational tool that could explain the world, transform society, and improve individuals. The dissemination and popularization of scientific knowledge also brought a new form of power, that is, the power to shape people's bodies and minds through various mechanisms such as knowledge, discipline, surveillance, etc., thereby producing obedient and useful subjects. This view was profoundly discussed by French sociologist Michel Foucault in his book *The Birth of The Prison* (Michel Foucault 1977, pp. 135–69). He believed that there was a positive feedback loop between the formation of knowledge and the expansion of power. Some forms of knowledge can be dissolved by the intervention of power relations, while power itself can be amplified by the formation and accumulation of new types of knowledge (Michel Foucault 1977, pp. 27–31). Therefore, Western learning as a kind of knowledge also represents a new force that undermines the traditional Chinese education system.

This emerging force not only had a profound impact on China's secular education, but also brought unprecedented challenges to China's religious education. The great changes in modern Chinese education from concepts to systems also impacted Buddhist education. Modern Buddhist education not only had to face the competition and conflict of the new education model, but also had to accept the infiltration and transformation of the new knowledge system and value system. This new knowledge system and value system mainly came from Western modernist thought, which had a close connection with anti-clericalism. Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer talked about this in their book *The Religious Question in Modern China*, saying that after the Hundred Days' Reform (百日维新 Bairi Weixin) of 1898, Western modernist thought poured into China, and influenced by Western religious concepts, Chinese intellectuals began to re-examine Chinese religion in the framework of "superstition and religion" (Vincent and Palmer 2011, p. 91). The Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced the *Regulations for the Management of Buddhist Temples and Monasteries* (《管理寺廟條例》 Guanli Simiao Tiaoli), which stipulated in Article 5 that all temples and self-established schools must teach general education in addition to Buddhist scriptures. Article 15 of the *Regulations* also made specific provisions on the teaching objectives, methods, and content of the temple schools, which marked that introducing a modernized new education model into Buddhist education was not only the aspiration of the people, but also a systemic requirement. At the same time, there were also popular movements such as destroying superstition, transforming temple property into schools, etc., which reflected a tendency to challenge the authority and legitimacy of traditional religious institutions and practices and to advocate scientific and rational ways of understanding reality.

The pressure of social reality made the monks gradually see the precariousness of Buddhism's position. The Education Initiation with Temple Property Movement (廟產興學運動 Miaochan Xingxue Yundong) further prompted Buddhist practitioners to reflect on the many problems that had developed within the Buddhist community. This reflection then paved the way for the introduction of a new monastic education system. Given the twists and turns the community had experienced since the Hundred Days' Reform until the recent movement to expropriate monastic properties for making schools, it started to conduct critical self-reflection, during which community members identified the lack of well-trained, high-quality Buddhist practitioners as the key reason for the decline of Buddhism. Thus, they concluded that "the only way to save monastic properties from devastation is to quickly install a Buddhist education system 果欲维护寺产, 避免遭受摧残, 唯有火速兴办教育事业". In response to the crisis, Chinese Buddhism, in agony, attempted to preserve its own sacred space by developing a modern monastic education system. Buddhist institutes were soon established all over the country. Without the example set by Western missionary schools, the transition to modern Chinese education, and the recent expropria-

tion of monastic properties for building schools, the Buddhist community probably would not have recognized the urgency with which it needed to develop its own education system. It is precisely for this reason that Dongchu 東初 (1908–1977) proposes the year 1898, the 24th year of the Guangxu Era and the year of the Hundred Days' Reform, to mark the beginning of modern monastic education (Dongchu 1974, p. 203).

1.2. Internal Constraints: The Decline of Anti-Intellectual Monastic Education in Traditional "Sangha Forest" (叢林 Conglin) in Modern China

In Buddhism, the importance of knowledge is to be realized within the framework of "right faith" (正信 Zhengxin)-"superstition" (迷信 Mixin). The traditional Buddhist education has continued the context of "respecting intelligence" from the Era of the Dharma Commentator (論師時代 lun shi shi dai) in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, to the Era of the Dharma Masters (法師時代 Fashi Shidai) in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The "intelligence" here emphasizes the dialectics of Buddhist doctrines. During the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, a large number of Buddhist scriptures were introduced into China, and monks studied, explained, and debated them. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, monks translated and annotated the Buddhist scriptures and exchanged and compared them with Indian Buddhism, forming various sects. Buddhist monks improved their wisdom and insight in the atmosphere of doctrinal dialectics, and Buddhist education mainly unfolded through lecturing on scriptures and dharma and discussing principles and meanings. Learned monks made Buddhism respected and revered in society at that time. After the late Tang Dynasty, with the rise of Chan Buddhism, Buddhist education took another path of "anti-intellectualism". Chan practice is to attain enlightenment through intuitive ways of spiritual experience such as "observing heart" (觀心 Guanxin), "seeing heart" (看心 Kanxin), "sealing heart" (印心 Yinxin), etc., and considers knowledge and words to be limited, thus neglecting the training of cognitive awareness. Moreover, since the Song Dynasty, Chan's sense of dharma lineage was influenced by the cultural gene of Chinese society that centered on bloodline and clan system, emphasizing the teacher-disciple relationship and the transmission of orthodoxy. "It highlighted the authority of the patriarchs in the process of transmission and promoted the formation of patriarchal faith (Fang 2012, p. 805)." Therefore, after the Buddha-dharma, as the "truth" changed from being carried by texts to being carried by individuals (patriarchs), Buddhist education tended to deepen the clan concept, gradually eroding the purity of Buddha-dharma faith. However, this situation changed following the rise of Chan Buddhism during the later years of the Tang dynasty, when "anti-intellectualization" became the new norm dominating the developmental path of Chinese Buddhism. Since the Song dynasty, in integrating the key concepts of patriarchy, Chinese Buddhism has established lineages to assert and normalize the spiritual "bloodlines" passed down from teachers. Subject to the influence of notions such as bloodlines and patriarchal hierarchies that characterize Chinese culture and society, the concept of Dharma in Chan Buddhism "emphasizes the authority of the teachers during the process of Dharma transmission and thus facilitates the development of students' faith in their teachers (Fang 2012, p. 805)."

This anti-intellectual tradition in Chan Buddhism subsequently caused malpractices to occur, while the truth of the Dharma was gradually lost over time. As the ancient saying goes: "An object that attracts insects must have already gone rotten, a body that attracts diseases must have already been weak and unhealthy 物必自腐而後蟲生，身必自虛而後病入". Considering the quality of Buddhist education in modern China, not only was there a significant gap between Buddhist teachings and the social realities at the time, but the quality of the teachers was also lamentable. The lack of good teachers, the self-contained manner characterizing Buddhist education, the preference to employ only one's close relatives or friends, and pay inequality are among the factors that led to the decline of the traditional "Sangha Forest" (叢林 Conglin; hereafter referred to as the Conglin) education and the drastic reduction in teaching quality. This change was particularly the case with subjects that emphasized the practice of faith, such as Chan Zong (Chan Buddhism 禪宗), Jiaozong

(teaching the sutras 教宗), and Lüzhong (Rissū Buddhism 律宗). Consequently, as Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841) observes, “With its dropped standards, now it seems that anyone can practice Chan Buddhism, which, in turn, causes this Buddhist school to further lower its threshold and its doctrines to become even simpler. The literati are content with this easy access to the Chan school, as they can now justify nearly all their behavior in the name of Chan. Meanwhile, the illiterate monks are also practicing Chan in a shallow and frivolous manner. The number of available Chan booklets now even exceeds that of novels. Some insane people gathered opera singers, taught them Chan using simple phrases improvised on the spot, and asked them to sing these with good rhythms and tones during their performances. Then, three days later, there were Chan masters everywhere! 愈降愈濫，愈誕愈易。不但昧禪之行、冒禪之名儒流文士樂其簡便，不識字髡徒習其狂滑。語錄繁興，多於小說……狂者召伶市兒，用現成語句授之，勿失腔節。三日，禪師其遍市矣!” According to Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005), “the decline of Chinese Buddhism happened not only because of its vagueness and shallowness and the lack of critical thinking by its practitioners but also because the Buddhist community tended to focus on mystical theories at the expense of ignoring facts. Ever since the Song dynasty, one cannot easily find any satisfying biographies of senior monks. This situation lasted until then when the contempt of knowledge and dislike of critical theories finally led Chinese Buddhism into complete chaos.” As traditional monastic education lost its original quality, previously marginalized phenomena such as superstition and the vulgarization of Buddhism thus became severe problems.

In modern China, the key to revitalizing Chinese Buddhism was thus reviving its earlier tradition of “respecting intelligence”. As for the young generation of Buddhist practitioners who had grown up in the new era, “their behavior was subject to the regulation of self-discipline rather than traditional discipline, while their faith was developed based on a rational understanding of Buddhist doctrines rather than superstition (Deng 1994, p. 146).” Therefore, in the overall history of Buddhism, the promotion of modern Buddhist institutes can be seen as a restoration of the Dharma to Chinese Buddhism. Although traditionally, Buddhist practitioners in favor of Conglin Style education tended to be reluctant toward knowledge acquisition, it is undeniable that, since the commencement of the modern era, the discursive power of knowledge has still left its mark on Conglin practitioners.

2. The Rise of Knowledgeable Laymen

2.1. *Elite Laymen and Their Initiative in Buddhist Studies*

Since the 19th century, European religious studies have moved from a traditional theological background to an intellectual path. The so-called intellectualization means to analyze and explain religious phenomena with scientific methods and theories rather than relying on divine revelation or doctrinal authority. Intellectualized religious studies include not only the discussion of basic issues such as the nature, origin, form, function, and development law of religion, but also the investigation of various aspects of specific religious beliefs, organizations, rituals, culture, ethics, etc. As the founder of religious studies, Friedrich Max Müller abandoned the limitations of traditional European Christian theology and learned oriental languages, translated oriental religious classics, and used comparative religious methods to strive for an objective and fair study of rich and diverse religious phenomena. He edited and published a 51-volume *Collection of Oriental Sacred Books*, which included Buddhist scriptures and other religious documents from India, China, Japan, and other countries, providing important information for Westerners to understand oriental religions. Max Müller’s groundbreaking research method not only laid the foundation for religious studies as a discipline, but also paved the way for Buddhism to enter the European world in modern times, thus forming a scholarly direction of the literature and philosophy in European Buddhist studies.

This academic style of interpreting the original meaning of oriental Buddhism with an academically neutral attitude has had a profound impact on the development of Buddhist studies in modern China. Especially in the process of translating Sanskrit Buddhist

scriptures into English, Western Buddhologists paid attention to etymological research on noun concepts and showed their understanding of Buddhist cultural characteristics through horizontal comparative studies of Buddhism and other religions. This point just inspired the intention of a group of laymen with profound Buddhist backgrounds in modern China. These people are not simple believers in Buddhism. Instead, they focused on the need for rational thinking and emphasized the importance of studying Buddhist scriptures, as they advocated the principle of “follow[ing] the scriptures rather than the authority 依法不依人”, thus clearly distinguishing the true Dharma from its false counterpart. Such advocacy contrasts sharply with the anti-intellectual tradition formed in the Ming and Qing dynasties that tended to practice Chan in an unchecked, frivolous manner, refrain from studying theories, overlook the need to read texts, and “follow[ing] the authority rather than the scriptures 依人不依法 (Li 1995, p. 47)”. Under the new trend of Buddhist studies development, these elite laymen played a key role in the development of modern Buddhist education. In the middle of the Qing dynasty, laymen including Wang Jin 汪縉 (1725–1792), Peng Shaosheng 彭紹升 (1740–1796), and others created the Jian Yang Academy 建陽書院, the first academy where laymen could also deliver lectures on Buddhist doctrines, which, unexpectedly, set the precedent of allowing laymen to teach Dharma in public. Following the example of the Jian Yang Academy, many similar institutes were established, such as the Dharmalaksana Academy (法相學社 Faxiang Xueshe) established by Fan Gunong 範古農 (1881–1951) in Shanghai, the Yogacara Society (瑜伽學會 Yujia Xuehui) set up by Gu Jingyuan 顧淨緣 (1889–1937) in Shanghai, the Dharmalaksan Research Institute (法相研究會 Faxiang Yanjiuhui) and the Three Times Society (三時學會 Sanshi Xuehui) created by Han Qingjing 韓清淨 (1884–1949) and others in Beijing, the Learning and Practicing Vihara (解行精舍 Jiexing Jingshe) founded by Wang Hongyuan 王弘願 (1876–1937) in Guangzhou, the Lotus Vihara (蓮花精舍 Lianhua Jingshe) organized by Wang Jiaqi 王家其 in Kunming and the Vimalakirti Vihara (維摩精舍 Weimo Jingshe) started by Yuan Huanxian 袁煥仙 (1887–1966), Jia Titao 賈題韜 (1909–1995) and others in Chengdu (Wang and Wang 2013, p. 101).

The establishment of modern Buddhist institutes began with the work of Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), a lay devotee living during the years of the late Qing. As early as the 1870s and 1880s, Yang Wenhui realized that, without cultivating new talent in the Buddhist community, Chinese Buddhism would not only face competition from other foreign religions but would also suffer suppression by the domestic ruling powers. After more than 10 years of hard preparatory work, the Jetavana Hermitage (祇洹精舍 Zhiyuan Jingshe) was finally inaugurated in 1908, the 34th year of the Guangxu Era. Basing itself on the Jinling Sutra Printing House (金陵刻經處 Jinling Kejing Chu), the Jetavana Hermitage attracted many highly recognized scholars to come and organize talks and discussions and, in this manner, created a good academic atmosphere. The case of the Jetavana Hermitage clearly demonstrates the combination of modern Buddhist studies and new educational practices. Thanks to its excellent academic background, high-quality teachers, and many other advantages, the Jetavana Hermitage showed a high level of teaching effectiveness and produced a generation of Buddhist elites such as Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943), Mei Guangxi 梅光羲 (1880–1947), Gui Bohua 桂伯華 (1861–1915), Li Zhenggang 李政剛, as well as Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), Renshan 仁山 (1887–1951) and so on, turning the place into the most important Buddhist cultural center where Buddhist talents gathered (He 1998, p. 117). Comparing the Jetavana Hermitage with the self-organized Buddhist institutes and monastic education associations that were common at the time, one can see that, in terms of the concept of Buddhist education, the Jetavana Hermitage showed many signs of progressiveness. In contrast to the passive attitude adopted by many Buddhist practitioners, whose efforts to organize Buddhist institutes were driven merely by the wish to save monastic properties, Yang Wenhui made it clear that his work aimed at “the making of Buddhist teachers”. Although the Jetavana Hermitage existed for less than two years, it had far-reaching significance. As it established an education system centered on research and investigation, the Jetavana Hermitage managed to break

free from the constraints imposed by the traditional Conglin Style education and create an independent educational space, the organization and institutionalization of which highly resembled those of modern schools. Notably, “aside from its application of innovative pedagogic methods and its focus on the teaching of canonical Buddhist texts, it was also the first Buddhist institute to teach English and Sanskrit language courses, which set an example for other Buddhist institutes established after it (Yu 1995, p. 318).”

Following the example set by Yang Wenhui, Ouyang Jingwu then established the Chinese Metaphysical Institute in Nanjing in 1922, the 11th year of the Republican era. As its educational principles, the institute “mourns the death of the true Dharma and dedicates itself to learning from the West 哀正法滅，立西域學宗旨”，while at the same time, it “shows compassion for all those who suffer and works toward the common good of all people 悲眾生苦，立為人學宗旨” Meanwhile, the starting point of its education was to “open students’ minds and cultivate students’ interest in reading Buddhist texts through teaching 教授以誘進閱藏，開啟心思為鵠的 (*Inner Studies. No.3 Teaching Notes: The University Secto* 1926).” Based on this aspiration, the institute dedicated itself to training Buddhist specialists by combining the spirit of great compassion in Mahayana Buddhism with the spirit of patriotism born after the May Fourth Movement, as it insisted that “compassion be put before learning 悲而後有學” and “saving the nation be put before learning 救亡圖存而有學.” Moreover, the institute required students to “pursue studies to benefit others 為利他而學” and to switch their aim from “entering the spiritual world” to “making positive contributions to the secular world”. In this manner, the institute combined the tasks of revitalizing Buddhism and saving the Chinese nation closely with the civic awareness required of modern Chinese citizens following the establishment of the Republic of China. Thanks to its excellent academic atmosphere, the Chinese Metaphysical Institute produced a generation of outstanding Buddhist scholars such as Lü Cheng 呂澂 (1896–1989), Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 (1893–1964), and Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968). It also attracted more than 200 researchers to conduct research at the institute, along with thousands of students who attended to pursue their studies (Deng 1999, p. 18).

Through the intellectualization of faith, the laymen managed to shift people’s focus to the rational components within Buddhist doctrines. Specifically, they promoted Buddhism as a form of knowledge in harmony with the spirit of modern science and, in this manner, facilitated the gradual intellectualization and rationalization of the Buddhist faith, which was often criticized as being tantamount to superstition. The laymen’s efforts also had far-reaching implications for the later development of Buddhist studies and research (Yao 2013, p. 53). Additionally, those Buddhist research spaces created by knowledgeable laymen were in line with the contemporary pursuit of scientific rationality and speculation; they paved the way for the later transition of monastic education from its traditional Conglin Style to a rational, systematic modern model of Buddhist studies focusing on research and investigation. The remarkable contributions of laymen to Buddhist studies subsequently earned them a voice in the Buddhist community, and their influence on the development of Chinese Buddhism in the modern era was gained precisely from their foresight regarding knowledge. The laymen of modern China had played such a vital role in the promotion of Buddhist knowledge that, when recalling Buddhist research during the Late Qing, one can scarcely feel the participation of monastics. As Zhang Taiyan observes, “Since the Qing dynasty, Dharma has left those wearing Kasaya to be with the senior laymen 自清之季，佛法不在緇衣，而流入居士長者間。”

2.2. Laymen’s Efforts to Preserve the Space of Chinese Buddhist Education

In addition to the elite laymen in academia, those in other social sectors also played a key part in resisting the expropriation of monastic properties, funding the establishment of Buddhist institutes, and facilitating the publication of Buddhist journals and magazines. In the military sector, the lay devotee Lin Sen 林森 (1868–1943), president of the Nationalist government, was also a vegetarian and a devoted follower of Buddhism. Together with Taixu and others, Lin took the initiative to build a depository of Buddhist sutras in

front of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's Mausoleum in Nanjing. Lin also photocopied 15 volumes of the Dragon-King sutra and ordered related government agencies to protect Qixia Temple and its properties, which in this manner contributed to resisting the movement of expropriating monastic properties. Meanwhile, when serving as the local governor and the commander-in-chief of China-Eastern Railway, lay devotee Zhu Ziqiao 朱子橋 (1974–1941) helped Taixu set up Buddhist institutes and revitalize Buddhism in Northeast China. During the Anti-Japanese War, Zhu made large contributions to Buddhism's revitalization in Northwest China, where he committed himself to renovating pagodas and establishing Buddhist institutes. Zhu also created the Ci En Academy (慈恩學院) and photocopied various Buddhist scriptures, including the Golden Canon of Zhaocheng (趙城金藏 Zhaocheng Jinzang) (Fori 1998, p. 15). Then, in the business sector, Wang Senfu 王森甫, a very wealthy merchant from Wuhan, and Yu Huiguan 玉慧觀 (1891–1933), the owner of a pharmaceutical company based in Shanghai, had both become disciples of Taixu and subsequently provided tremendous financial support to facilitate the latter's activities to promote Buddhist education in Wuhan and Shanghai. Additionally, Wang Yiting 王一亭 (1867–1938), a lay devotee from Shanghai, who had acted as the director of the China Jisheng Society, the president of the World Buddhist Lay Association, and the chairman of the Shanghai Buddhist Bookstore (上海佛學書局 Shanghai Foxue Shuju), had made significant contributions to the development of Buddhist education throughout his life. Finally, the two brothers Jian Zhaonan 簡照南 (1870–1923) and Jian Yujie 簡玉階 (1875–1957), who were recognized entrepreneurs, donated their residence, the South Garden (南園 Nanyuan), to the Buddhist community in Shanghai, turning the place into a major site where the Shanghai Buddhist Pure Karma Society (上海佛教淨業社 Shanghai Fojiang Jingye She) and the Shanghai Buddhist Laymen Association (上海佛教居士林 Shanghai Fojiang Jushilin) could carry out their activities to promote Buddhism (Wang and Wang 2013, p. 102).

Due to their wealth, in their efforts to facilitate the development of Buddhist education, elite laymen were often capable of securing a strong economic base for circulating Buddhist doctrines. For this reason, in the modern era, many senior monastics were willing to closely collaborate with the lay community. Subsequently, the monastics walked out of the temples to dedicate themselves to the development of Buddhist education together with laymen. In fact, many Buddhist institutes were jointly organized by monastics and laymen. For example, the Hua Yan University (華嚴大學 Huayan Daxue), founded in 1914, the third year of the Republican era, within the Hardoon Garden (哈同花園 Hatong Huayuan) in Shanghai, was precisely an outcome of the collaboration between Zongyang 宗仰 (1865–1921), Yuexia 月霞 (1858–1917), and the owner of Hardoon Garden, also the largest property developer in Shanghai at the time, Silas Hardoon and his wife Luo Jialing 羅迦陵 (1864–1941). The Hua Yan University was a modern religious university that took Huayan Buddhism as its main teaching guide. It was also the first modern Buddhist institution of higher education that was ever known in Chinese history as a "university". Following Zongyang and Yuexia, monastics such as Dixian 諦閑 (1858–1932), Xingci 興慈 (1881–1950), Taixu, and Yuanying 圓瑛 (1878–1953) also maintained a close relationship with the lay community. In this manner, monastics and laymen worked together to advance the development of modern Chinese Buddhist education.

2.3. *The Improved Social Status of Laymen and the Changing Power Relations between Monastics and Householder Practitioners*

The changes that had occurred in relation to laymen's social status in modern China also illustrate the internal structural changes of modern Chinese Buddhism. The elevation of laymen's social status and the deterioration of that of monastics modified people's long-held belief in the superiority of the latter and the inferiority of the former. Since Buddhism was introduced to China over 2000 years ago, over time, it has created a set of systems aimed at securing the absolutely dominant position of the monastic community over the laymen. In Buddhist traditions formed in ancient China, monks/nuns were the true followers and advocates of Buddhism, whereas laymen, or household practitioners, could be its

only external defenders (Li 1993, p. 7). Such traditions that valued monastics over their lay counterparts were then preserved and passed down through the Chinese Buddhist education system and the practices of Dharma transmission. Specifically, given the dominant position of monastics, laymen were required to show them due respect and not criticize or judge their decisions or behavior. Consequently, a householder practitioner should be “as careful to serve a monastic as a servant was to serve his/her master 瞻應奉事唯謹，一如奴僕之事主人 (Lan 1997)”. Laymen were not only prohibited from setting up altars to teach Dharma but also from creating Buddhist associations outside the temple or accepting disciples privately, which largely indicates the monastics’ near monopoly of Buddhist education. In this regard, one can say that, in ancient China, Buddhist education was dominated by one group only: the monastics.

However, these seemingly solid power relations were to change in the context of modern China. The social stratification in modern Chinese cities, people’s increased economic mobility, the development of new communication technology, the accelerated pace of life, and other societal changes had all modified how monastics and laypeople interacted with each other. On the one hand, the differences between their identities and the division of their related rights and responsibilities became increasingly institutionalized. On the other hand, the separation between Buddhist followers and nonfollowers was further institutionalized, thus making the lay community an integral part of the Chinese Buddhist Community on an institutional level (Ji 2014, p. 86). In the modern era, one can find the presence of elite laymen in many emerging fields such as academic research, business and commerce, new technology, media, and communications. Additionally, there were many politicians in the lay community. Due to the wealth of resources at their disposal, these elite laymen were able to facilitate the development of Chinese Buddhism in many ways. In modern China, the lay community took the initiative to respond to the needs of the revolution by seeking inspiration from Buddhist doctrines. At the same time, laymen participated in Buddhist studies and played a leading role in the development of monastic education and the organization of modern Buddhist institutes. In this regard, after the monastics, they formed another major body for Buddhist education and became a leading force in the revitalization of Chinese Buddhism. The awareness of their importance in political, economic, and social life also prompted laymen to adopt new strategies to challenge the traditional power relations between the lay community and the monastics. Just as the structure of knowledge production and power discourse in modern education systems are aligned, the Buddhist knowledge in the Buddhist system represents the intellectual virtue, the orthodoxy of Buddhist lineage, and the symbolic power that enable this mode of lay teachers teaching monks to break through the taboo of monastic education that monks should not rely on “white clothes 白衣” to learn the Dharma. For instance, cultural elites such as Ouyang Jingwu attempted to loosen the restriction imposed by the norm that “only monastics are allowed to become masters, only renunciants are allowed to become monks/nuns 非僧不許為師，非出家不許為僧” through the discourse of Buddhist studies. Although this attempt was unsuccessful, such efforts themselves signaled the lay community’s ability to challenge the status of monastics as the embodiment of Dharma, along with their moral privileges, and to organize itself into an independent social group in the modern era.

3. The Establishment of “Intellectualized” Buddhist Institutes via the Collaboration of the Monastic and Lay Communities

3.1. The Traditional Conglin System and Its Hindrance to Establishing a Modern Buddhist Epistemology

Due to the influence of patriarchy, the traditional Conglin system developed a strong belief in family bonds and ownership. This belief made it extremely difficult to break or change the traditional Dharma transmission systems, which were formed either based on the Buddhist schools followed or the tonsure ceremony performed, and the system of privatizing monastic properties, to start to promote modern educational models in Buddhist temples. The reason for this difficulty is that the tensions between rational, scientific views

and the traditional educational philosophy would inevitably undermine the authority of the Conglin educational model and, in this manner, harm the elders' interests, who were the resolute upholders of traditional values. Hence, at the beginning of establishing the Buddhist institutes, members of the Buddhist community who were supporters of the modern education system suffered considerably, as their work offended the interests of the established system. For instance, in 1904, the 30th year of the Guangxu Era, the Buddhist institute jointly created by Jing'an 敬安 (1851–1912) and Songfeng 松風 was loathed by local conservative monastics in the Hangzhou area, which eventually led to the tragic death of Song Feng. Later, Jing An wrote a poem commemorating this event. The poem reads: "In the end of the world we together with the desire to reverse the situation. Did you ever expect that you would end up sacrificing your life for the sake of Dharma? It is wailful that blood must be shed to make changes! You will certainly be remembered as the Buddhist who started the new era! 末劫同塵轉願運，那知為法竟亡身？可憐流血開風氣！師是僧中第一人！". Another tragedy took place in 1906, the 32nd year of the Guangxu Era. Shortly after Wenxi 文希 set up a Buddhist middle school in Tianning Temple, Yangzhou, he was groundlessly accused of maintaining secret connections with Japanese revolutionaries who were seeking refuge in China. He was then arrested and sentenced to lifetime imprisonment, and the middle school he established was also forced to close. These examples are clear evidence of the difficulties encountered by Buddhist practitioners in the early days as they tried to establish Buddhist institutes.

Taixu also experienced many ups and downs during the process as he tried to introduce reforms to Buddhist education, which demonstrates the extent to which the conservative sector of Chinese Buddhism resisted new educational concepts and practices. From another angle, Taixu's experience shows the determination of the new generation of Buddhist practitioners to advance Chinese Buddhist education. In 1912, the first year of the Republican era, Taixu and Renshan "made a big fuss" in Jinshan 金山 in their efforts to create a Buddhist university. Their attempts were ultimately unsuccessful due to opposition from the conservative sector of the Buddhist community, which made them realize the difficulties they would face should they wish to introduce new educational models within the existing Conglin system. Despite this unsuccessful attempt, Taixu did not abandon his hopes for promoting modern Buddhist institutes under the constraints imposed by the Conglin system. Thus, in 1917, the sixth year of the Republican era, when carrying out reforms at Jingci Temple 淨慈寺, once again, Taixu tried to "create the Yong Ming Vihara for the purpose of promoting Buddhist studies and cultivating Buddhist practitioners 籌設永明精舍，以作研究佛學，栽培弘法人材的地方." Nevertheless, the reforms were again met with objections from conservative elders in the Buddhist community of Hangzhou. "Due to their bad habits, the retired elders and senior monks in the temple, who were unwilling to follow new rules, established secret connections with the local gentry and military, as well as monks from other temples 寺中囿於惡習不甘拘束的退居與老班首等，勾結諸山寺僧及豪紳軍人." Together, they launched groundless and severe criticisms against Taixu and ultimately forced him to leave Jingci Temple. As with Taixu's unsuccessful attempt to establish a Buddhist university in Jinshan 10 years prior, the failure of Taixu's reforms at Jingci Temple is evidence of the difficulty of changing the conservative views held among certain sectors of the Buddhist community at the time and promoting modern Buddhist education under the constraints of the traditional Conglin system, a goal whose achievement seemed extremely unlikely.

Given the obstacles encountered by members within the Buddhist community as they tried to install a modern Buddhist education system, people in the education sector, who were better informed of the international situation, started to realize that the successful introduction of modern Buddhist education to China could be achieved only by avoiding all the restrictions and constraints imposed by the traditional Conglin system. In other words, ways must be found to organize modern Buddhist institutes outside the Conglin system. The new era thus also introduced new requirements for the proponents of Buddhist education. They were not only expected to demonstrate a good understanding of

Buddhist doctrines and the Buddhist faith but also needed to be capable of grasping the trends in the modern world and showing an in-depth understanding or firsthand experience of the status and values of new ideas. Only by fulfilling such requirements would they be able to observe Chinese society and adapt to this society from the standpoint of Buddhism (Deng 1999, p. 14).

3.2. *The Integration of New Buddhist Institutes into Modern Education*

The secular society emphasized the importance of disciplinary knowledge. Such knowledge, in turn, was evidence of the discursive power of “science”. Thus, should it wish to modify its superstitious and backward image, Buddhism needed to “base itself on science to establish the highest faith from a scientific perspective (Huang 1995, p. 53)” and integrate rational, modern values into Buddhist education. The transition from Conglin Style education to institute-based Buddhist education is a key turning point in the history of Chinese Buddhism (Dongchu 1974, p. 204). The new education was aimed not only at training religious preachers, but also (and especially) at cultivating loyalty to the government and respect for the political ideologies of the Republic (Travagnin 2017, p. 230). With the subsequent development of modern Buddhist education, the term “Buddhist institute” proposed by Taixu became the most commonly used term to refer to Buddhist educational institutions (Zhang 2014, p. 216).

In 1918, the seventh year of the Republican era, with the support of Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936), Chen Yuanba i 陳元白, Wang Yiting 王一亭, Jiang Zuobin 蔣作賓, and others, Taixu founded the Awakening Society (覺社 Jue She) in Shanghai, which inspired Taixu to develop other educational ideas such as the introduction of a university sector within Buddhist institutes, the creation of scripture perusal chambers, lecture halls, and publishers specializing in the publication of Buddhist works. Then, on 1 September 1922, in the 11th year of the Republican era, Taixu founded the Wuchang Buddhist Academy (武昌佛學院 Wuchang Foxueyuan) on Qianjia Street (千家街 Qianjiajie) within Wang Shan Men 望山門 of Wuchang City. This event had far-reaching significance in the history of modern Buddhist education, as it was through this academy that Taixu’s hypothesis of the revitalization of Chinese Buddhism and the cultivation of new Buddhist experts was tested. Taixu’s educational philosophy can be synthesized from his advocacy for revolution in the domains of Buddhist doctrines, Buddhist systems, and Buddhist property, which clearly shows the extent to which Taixu’s educational thought was informed by his thorough reflection on the modern transition of Chinese Buddhism. Following the Wuchang Buddhist Academy, Taixu founded several other new Buddhist Academies whose influence is also noteworthy. These included the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Academy (漢藏教理院 Hanzang Jiaoliyuan), the Minnan Buddhist Academy (閩南佛學院 Minnan Foxueyuan), the Bailin Buddhist Academy (柏林教理院 Bailin Jiaoliyuan), and others, which trained a great number of modern Buddhist experts and significantly improved the quality of Chinese Buddhist practitioners in the modern era. In this regard, these modern Buddhist Academies had a profound impact on the modernization of Chinese Buddhism. Thanks to the efforts of progressive-minded educators in the Buddhist community, modern Buddhist educational institutions were set up all over the country. New Buddhist institutes were established even in the remote northeastern and northwestern regions of China (Deng 1999, p. 16). According to incomplete statistics, during the Republican years, there were approximately 157 Buddhist institutes in China, which spanned all 21 of the country’s provinces at that time. Among these, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province had the largest number of Buddhist institutes: 24 institutes were established in Jiangsu Province, and 14 were created in Zhejiang Province (Li 2009, p. 257). Between the 1920s and 1940s, Taixu and his disciples either established or taught regularly at 40 or 50 institutes at a minimum (Deng 1999, p. 9). In this manner, the appearance of the new Buddhist educational institutions broke the constraints imposed by the traditional Conglin system, facilitated the transition of the Buddhist educational model, and thus played a leading role in modernizing Chinese Buddhist education.

Compared to the traditional Conglin Style, the new Buddhist institutes had achieved many breakthroughs and introduced many innovations. In terms of their educational philosophy, the new institutes acquired the characteristics of social education. Moreover, instead of only teaching Buddhism, they taught subjects covering Western learning, Eastern learning, and even Christian theology. Meanwhile, the pedagogic methods employed were largely inspired by modern academic research, which clearly reflects the modernization and scientification of Chinese Buddhist education in the modern era. For example, it adopts scientific methods and theories to analyze and explain Buddhist phenomena; it introduces comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives to broaden the scope of Buddhist studies; it emphasizes the historical and social contexts of Buddhist texts and traditions; and it explores the practical implications and applications of Buddhist teachings for contemporary issues. In terms of teaching Buddhist doctrines, the new institutes favored the simultaneous study of multiple schools of Buddhism and their doctrines. Since the establishment of the Republic of China, some elders in the Conglin system have created Buddhist institutes to promote the doctrines of their own Buddhist schools. Examples include the Dharma Realm Academy 法界學院 (Fajie Xueyuan) of Changshu, the Hua Yan University of Shanghai, the Guanzong Academy 觀宗學社 (Guanzong Xueshe) of Ningbo, various institutes in Gaoyou, including the Tiantai Academy 天台學院 (Tiantai Xueyuan), and the many academies founded by Tanxu in northern China that belonged to the Tiantai Dharma Lineage. These Buddhist institutes tended to focus on promoting the doctrines of particular Buddhist schools and training monastics who were meant to become experts in those schools. While specialized Buddhist education may facilitate the in-depth study of the canonical texts of specific Buddhist schools and, in this manner, further the development of those schools, this kind of Buddhist education can also nurture bias and factionalism among the different schools of Buddhism. In contrast, the new Buddhist institutes focused on Chinese Buddhism as a whole and encouraged the study of multiple Buddhist schools and their doctrines at the same time. For example, in the curriculum that Yang Wenhui designed for Jetavana Hermitage, “the Inner Class Curriculum of Buddhism (釋氏學堂內班課程 Shishi Xuetang Neiban Kecheng)”, which was a fairly comprehensive curriculum, Yang included original Buddhist scriptures and various canonical texts from Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism. Yang’s curriculum also stressed that “starting from the fourth year, students can decide, as they wish, to dedicate the next two, three or five years (or any length of time) of their life to study Buddhist scriptures. They may choose to study the scriptures of several Buddhist schools at the same time or to focus on those in a particular school, as they see fit 自第四年起，或兩年，或三、五年，不拘期限，各宗典籍，或專學一門，或兼學數門，均隨學人志願。” Then, in terms of the scope of the studies of Buddhist scriptures, the Chinese Metaphysical Institute, aiming at the revitalization of Indian Buddhism, especially the Nalanda model of Buddhist education, tried to include texts used in various Buddhist schools in its curriculum, including Mahayana Buddhism, Hinayana Buddhism, Madhyamaka Buddhism, Yogacara Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism, and Exoteric Buddhism. In doing so, the Chinese Metaphysical Institute “hoped to project an image of Buddhism as a unity.” Similarly, the Wuchang Buddhist Academy introduced pedagogic methods unlimited by the prioritization of single Buddhist schools. The course outline shows that, at the Wuchang Buddhist Academy, “scriptures from all Buddhist schools were taught”. In 1925, the 14th year of the Republican era, Taixu further proposed that “new Buddhist universities should not emphasize the division of Buddhist schools.” “Of the two approaches of organizing Buddhist institutes, one tends to encourage the institutions’ specialization in particular Buddhist schools, whereas the other approach takes as its objective the revitalization of all Buddhist sects, the first approach often prioritizes the teachings of one specific Buddhist school without allowing students the opportunity to gain a balanced and comprehensive understanding of other Buddhist schools. The second approach, instead, enables students to study both Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism and thus to achieve a comprehensive view of Buddhist studies. Based on this view, students can

decide, according to their interests, in which Buddhist school they wish to specialize. In this manner, the second approach improves educational efficiency without undermining the distinctive characteristics of each Buddhist sect. At the same time, it paves the way for collaboration between temples of different schools when these are built in the future 一則以專宏一家宗風為事業，一則以普遍整興各宗教為鵠的也。且分宗則偏注一家，不能對各宗普遍了達，平均發展。不分宗則大小乘既得全體研究，於佛學有全整之認識，再以性質所近，深造一宗，既屬事半功倍，且不失嚴分宗派，則將來建各宗寺，更有互相協調之利。Taixu's theory of the simultaneous promotion of all eight Buddhist sects in Buddhist education was based on his advocacy of the equal development of Buddhist schools and the elimination of biases and sectarianism in Chinese Buddhism. In "What Do I Think of the Existence of Different Schools of Buddhism?", Taixu writes: "The eight schools under the Great Vehicle are all equal in their status. They are also equal in their final goal, which is the attainment of Buddhahood. Their only difference is the methods that they each employ to achieve that goal 這大乘八宗，其境是平等的，其果都是以成佛為究竟，也是平等的，不過在行上，諸宗各有差別的施設。". Taixu's advocacy for the equal development of the eight Buddhist schools is thus unmistakable. According to Fu Yinglan, "In his theory, Master Taixu conceptualized the eight Buddhist sects as a unity in which each sect could maintain its distinctive features, but at the same time, its existence would also depend on the existence of other sects. Specifically, each sect could judge and criticize other Buddhist sects according to its own principles and doctrines. It could also posit itself above all other schools, turning these into a part of it. In this sense, beyond each particular school, there would be no Dharma. However, at the same time, the existence and development of each sect also relied on the existence of other sects: without other schools, the individual sect would also perish. This conceptualization clearly demonstrates the equal status of the eight Buddhist schools under the Great Vehicle, without discarding the distinctive features of each school (Fu 2010, p. 204)."

In addition to the educational model that encouraged the simultaneous study of multiple schools of Buddhism, when designing the curriculum, the progressive-minded Buddhist educators also actively learned from the experiences and lessons gained in national and international religious and nonreligious education to accelerate the scientification and rationalization of modern Buddhist education. The "objective" and "scientific" approach to studying Buddhist doctrines, a product of the modern era, was key to adapting Buddhism to modern society and revitalizing Buddhist education. Therefore, the new Buddhist institutes introduced tiered learning, an advanced pedagogic method, and other critical research methodologies. For instance, the curriculum of Jetavana Hermitage, established by Yang Wenhui, learned from the successful practices of Japanese Buddhist education and European Christian education, including Catholic education. It incorporated modern subjects such as foreign languages, Western studies, and reformist studies. It invited Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884–1918) to teach English and Li Xiaotun 李曉暉 to teach Chinese in order to expand the students' perspectives and knowledge.

This curriculum reflects Yang's attempt to combine Buddhist education with academic publishing and research. Then, Taixu's Wuchang Buddhist Academy, aiming at "the creation of a new form of Buddhism in line with modern thought by critically studying the current and past academic achievements of the East and the West," offered both intensive and sessional courses, thus adapting its curriculum to the requirements of modern teaching and education systems. The intensive courses were reserved for dedicated learning programs that usually lasted for three years, whereas the duration of sessional courses was only six months. In 1924, the 13th year of the Republican era, the intensive-course sector of the Academy was turned into a university sector that focused on academic research as much as teaching. The university sector of Wuchang Buddhist Academy had acquired clear features of modern Buddhism, as it combined the thoughts of different Buddhist schools and both metaphysical and physical studies. Meanwhile, apart from the teaching of the doctrines and origins of all Buddhist schools, courses taught at the university sector included Buddhist logico-epistemology, the history of Chinese Buddhism,

the history of Indian Buddhism, Chinese and Western philosophy, Western ethics, psychology, religious studies, sociology, biology, Sanskrit, the Tibetan language, English, and Japanese, among others. In terms of the teaching staff, apart from Buddhist scholars, the Academy also recruited university academics outside the Buddhist community, forming a staff team comprising both followers and nonfollowers. Additionally, the Academy created the Akarawathi Saddha Publishing House (正信印書館 Zhengxin Yinshuguan) and the magazine *The Sound of Sea Tide* (海潮音 Haichao Yin), which not only contributed to promoting the Academy but also offered staff and students chances to publish their research. Last, Ouyang Jingwu's Chinese Metaphysical Institute must also be mentioned. The Chinese Metaphysical Institute was divided into four sectors: the high school sector, the undergraduate sector, the postgraduate sector, and the travel-based learning sector. Courses taught in the undergraduate sector were also separated into four categories that included cram courses, preparatory courses, special courses, and undergraduate courses. In the high school sector, approximately one-third of the classes were dedicated to self-cultivation and Buddhist studies, while the remainder were reserved for subjects such as Chinese, English, history, geography, and the natural sciences. The undergraduate and postgraduate sectors focused instead on Yogācāra School while also teaching subjects that included the doctrines of Buddhist schools, Buddhist logic, Buddhist monastic discipline, Buddhist psychology, Buddhist art, Buddhist history, Chinese and Western philosophy, old Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, English, Japanese, and so on. Notably, the Institute's undergraduate and postgraduate sectors embraced international academic standards by encouraging the use of presentations, discussions, and critical research as the primary methods for delivering course content, which was a radical break from the traditional educational model based on force-feeding knowledge (Deng 1999, p. 17) as well as the Conglin Style that tended to value morality over wisdom.

Compared to conservative monastics, progressive Buddhist educators were often more open-minded. During his creation of the Jetavana Hermitage and the Buddhist Studies Association, Yang Wenhui took care to place Buddhist studies in an international context and subsequently included Japanese, English, and Sanskrit studies in the curriculum of the Jetavana Hermitage. Yang's international vision of Buddhist education had a significant impact on Taixu and Ouyang Jingwu and their later organization of modern Buddhist institutes. In 1929, the 18th year of the Republican era, Taixu, who had just returned from his world trip, began to put forward a plan for creating the World Buddhist Academy and founded its "head institute" in Nanjing. Shortly afterward, Taixu established the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Academy in Sichuan Province, making it the Sino-Tibetan sector of the World Buddhist Academy. He also created the "Library of the World Buddhist Academy", based in Wuchang Buddhist Academy, and turned the Minnan Buddhist Academy and the Bailin Institute of Beijing into the Sino-Japanese and the Sino-English sectors of the World Buddhist Academy, before establishing a Balinese sector of the Academy in Xi'an Province (He 2018, p. 160). Later in 1939, the 28th year of the Republican era, Taixu led a mission to Burma, India, Nepal, British Ceylon, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam to promote Buddhism and China's cause against the Japanese invasion. During his trip, he met with world-renowned leaders such as Nehru, Gandhi, and Tagore. Taixu also sent young Buddhists to study in Japan and South Asian countries, among whom one may recognize the names of Dayong 大勇, Chisong 持松, Xianyin 顯蔭, Manshu, Mochan 墨禪, Tanxuan 談玄, Tianhui 天慧, and Renxing 仁性, who went to study in Japan, and those of Tican 體參, Fafang 法舫, Baihui 白慧, and Xiulu 岫廬, who went to India. Others, such as Weihuan 惟幻, Fazhou 法周, Huisong 慧松, Weishi 唯實 and Liaocan 了參, went to study in British Ceylon. There were still other young Buddhists who went to study in Thailand and Burma, such as Dengci 等慈, Beiguan 悲觀, Shangui 善歸, Xingjiao 性教, Jueyuan 覺圓, Daju 達居, Jingshan 淨善, Changhai 昌海, and Chengru 誠如. All these Buddhists, who had studied overseas, would later become leading forces in promoting modern Buddhism both within and outside China.

Based on the Buddhist educational theories and practices of Yang Wenhui, Ouyang Jingwu, Taixu, and others, Buddhist education and the establishment of new Buddhist institutes at that time aimed at not only attaining wisdom to gain personal freedom but also contributing a “source of ideas” to facilitate social development. The new era thus brought new approaches to knowledge production. Meanwhile, in modern China, the reliance on written texts to transmit knowledge, the importance attributed to the establishment of new epistemologies, the evaluation of personal competencies, and even the design of the teaching space all started to build their own unique logic. By introducing the epistemologies, teaching systems, values, and beliefs celebrated in modern education into Buddhism, the Buddhist educators managed to redefine the content, forms, and subjects of the Buddhist legacy and changed how knowledge, power, and the sanctity of Chinese Buddhism were aligned (Ji 2009, p. 41).

3.3. *The Learned “Student-Monks (学僧 Xueseng)” and the New Dharma Lineages*

At the same time as Buddhist institutes were where all Buddhism-related knowledge was taught, they also formed a site for power struggles. In addition to the building of Buddhist networks based on Dharma transmission to defend the orthodoxy of each Buddhist lineage, the modern era saw the emergence of another method of asserting Buddhist orthodoxies, which was closely linked to the work of the “student-monks” in Buddhist institutes (Rongdao 2017, pp. 55–70). Notably, the functions of Buddhist institutes were by no means limited to those of teaching Buddhist knowledge. Instead, such institutes were also responsible for helping the monastic community keep pace with formal national education. The establishment of modern Buddhist educational institutions was aimed precisely at cultivating Buddhist experts with multidisciplinary skills who could adapt to the new era and contribute to the new society. The many “student-monks” who had graduated from these modern institutions subsequently modified the relationship between the Buddhist community and the Chinese nation, which was undergoing drastic social changes. As they learned secular knowledge and built a strong knowledge base, the student-monks were capable of exchanging Buddhist ideas with intellectuals and elites in the fields of religion, philosophy, science, etc. In this process, they were in fact defending the field of Buddhism. As Jichen 寄塵 suggests, “to introduce new reforms into Chinese Buddhism, one should not only examine the current social trends but also study the modern society thoroughly to understand how it is organized and what convenient methods can be applied in order to cultivate the new generation of Buddhist followers in the future!” He further points out that the combination of Buddhist education with social education can at least enable the monastics to “first, understand the way in which the modern society is organized, and second, to acknowledge the role played by Buddhism in the modern society”. Keenly aware of their social and religious responsibilities, the student-monks who trained in modern Buddhist institutes were seen as active contributors to redefining Chinese Buddhism in the modern era and were optimistic about the part they would play in reshaping the Buddhist religion in the nation’s future. As the social values of the student monks were continuously recognized by the Buddhist community in modern China, in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions, even abbots in the Conglin system would accept student monks as their disciples. It was precisely the tensions and conflicts between the traditional and the modern models of Dharma transmission that subsequently prompted the modernization of Chinese Buddhism. The new student monks should be regarded as an important force shaping modern Chinese Buddhism.

By now, it is clear that the transfer from civil society to the government as the main body for organizing Buddhist education has relied largely on the work of Buddhist experts cultivated by the modern Buddhist institutes, with Taixu being the most prominent figure in this regard (Chen 2020, p. 7). While his modern view of Buddhist education was still nascent during the Republican era, by 1956 to 1966, after establishing the People’s Republic of China, the influence of his view had been fully felt. Of the teaching staff at the Buddhist Academy of China, aside from laymen and university lecturers, monas-

tic staff members such as Fazun 法尊, Guankong 觀空, Zhengguo 正果, Chenkong 塵空, Yejun 葉均, and Yuyu 虞愚 had all been either students or teachers at the Wuchang Buddhist Academy and the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Academy founded by Taixu. Meanwhile, Zhao Puchu 趙樸初, Juzan 巨贊, and Mingzhen 明真 were all followers of Taixu's modern philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教 Renjian Fojiao), thanks to whose efforts the privileged position of Humanistic Buddhism in Buddhist studies today is widely recognized.

4. Conclusions

This paper focuses on “knowledge” as a discursive construction in modern Chinese Buddhism, and draws on the analytical framework of “discourse and power” by the French sociologist Foucault. By describing the evolution of Chinese Buddhist education from Conglin to Buddhist Academies, it shows the transformation of the social image and function of modern Buddhism from faith to knowledge culture, discusses why modern Buddhism needs to base itself on “knowledge” to connect the sacredness of Buddhism with the world, and what role the Buddhist monastic space as a “Buddhist Academy” plays in the new discursive practice.

In understanding the term “Buddhist education”, this paper uses an outside-in approach, i.e., defining Buddhist education in light of the new social attitudes toward the concept, methods, and content of education at the time. Therefore, the concept of “Buddhist education” in the paper is not fixed, but changes with the changes in the external environment. It does not specifically refer to the forms of ancient Conglin such as master-disciple teaching, sitting incense in the meditation hall, preaching in the Dharma hall, and traveling around to visit eminent monks. After the introduction of Western learning in modern times, it broke the internal, enlightenment-oriented, and inspirational education of the monks, which focused on spiritual and mental quality. It reshaped people's thinking concepts with the modern knowledge system, which emphasizes science, rationality, empiricism, and discipline classification. Therefore, it changed the traditional Conglin training mode of education and also caused the Buddhist education venues to change from monastic communities to academies (including research organizations). When discussing the Conglin system, this paper also focuses on explaining the impact of “knowledge” as a discourse power on the traditional Conglin power structure. After the definition of education changed from introspective spiritual enlightenment to argumentative knowledge accumulation, “knowledge” as a new influence weakened the stability of the Dharma-clan relationship in the Conglin system. The stability of the Dharma-clan relationship in the traditional Conglin was also based on the Chinese social clan structure and produced at the same frequency. This paper argues that the development of Buddhism has always been “in tune with the social environment” in order to be viable.

The changes in the concept of Buddhist education in modern China have offered an important angle for observing and reliving the interactions and conflicts between Western and Chinese cultures in the modern era. Cultural differences between Westerners and Easterners have led to their different ways of thinking. The Chinese traditional private schooling system, which valued personal wisdom, intuition, and individuality, was completely different from the Western education system, which tended to be more practical, emphasizing the rational, tiered learning of academic subjects. Therefore, during the eastward transmission of Western learning in the modern era, a period when China was undergoing deep social changes, the absorption of Western knowledge, the need to cultivate “new citizens”, and changes in the national views of education all led to the transformation of the Conglin education system of Chinese Buddhism, which was deeply affected by Confucianism. This transformation, in turn, involved many complex issues, including the traditional Conglin patriarchy system, the Conglin education system, the methods of Dharma transmission, and the relationship between monastics and householder practitioners, among others.

Revisiting the practices of modern Chinese Buddhist education reveals several prominent features in the development of Chinese Buddhist education in the modern era. Such

features include the shift of Buddhism's passive and conservative view on education to a more active and open view; the gradual abandonment of the traditional Conglin educational model and the embrace of the modern, institutionalized model; and the end of the monastics' monopoly of Buddhist education and the beginning of the joint organization of Buddhist education between monastics and laymen. In this process of the overall rationalization of Chinese education, Buddhist education, as an important part of traditional Chinese education, was unavoidably affected. The rationalization of Chinese Buddhist education subsequently became a major topic in modern Buddhist reforms. Buddhist masters such as Yuexia, Dixian, Yang Wenhui, Tanxu, Changxing, Yuanying, and Taixu had all dedicated themselves actively to promoting modern Buddhist educational practices. With their awakened awareness of modernity and globalization, progressive-minded members of the Buddhist community attempted to integrate the Buddhist religion into world civilization through the development of Buddhist education. Subsequently, they tried to shift their focus from "a China-centered Buddhism to the creation of a new Buddhism more adaptable to the needs of our time 從中國漢族的佛教本位，而適合時代需要的新佛教。" In this regard, Taixu's work is particularly noteworthy, as he promoted the notion of Humanistic Buddhism and traveled around Europe and America to engage in conversations with Western religious leaders from different schools. He also contributed actively to the creation of the World Buddhist Academy and the World Buddhist Library and, in this manner, facilitated the globalization of Buddhism. Such efforts not only enabled the religious culture of modern China to break free from the constraints imposed by ancient traditions and cultural borders but also directly impacted the promotion of Chinese religious culture, including its national characteristics and diverse development pathways, in the international world. Since then, Buddhism has widely participated in various cultural dialogues through various forms, actively participated in international exchanges and cooperation, broken the imprisonment of various regions and nationalities, and actively responded to various social and cultural trends of thought, thus moving towards the development path of traditional and modern, national and world-wide opportunities.

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Article

Techniques of the Supramundane: Physician-Monks' Medical Skills during the Early Medieval China (220–589) in China

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Abstract: Hagiographical tales tell us that some Buddhist monks who lived during the Early Medieval China (220–589) possessed considerable medical skills. Some were proficient in foreign medicine, while others had mastery over traditional Chinese medicine. The outstanding medical practitioners among these monks included Yu Fakai 于法開, Zhi Facun 支法存, Sengshen 僧深, and Shi Daohong 釋道洪. In addition to having a background in traditional Chinese medicine, these individuals are said to have had access to foreign medical knowledge due to their status as monks. However, the literature on these physician-monks' medical skills is limited, which is why the present paper aims to explore this matter further, especially by introducing and elaborating upon some modern Chinese research which has generally gone unnoticed in international scholarship. To this end, this paper critically analyzes various historical records detailing these monks' lives. It shows that, in addition to having extraordinary medical skills, some of these physician-monks mastered methods to cure specific diseases (such as beriberi [*jiaoqi bing* 腳氣病] (This is the name of the disease in traditional Chinese Medicine. It refers to a disease characterized by numbness, soreness, weakness, contracture, swelling, or muscle withering in the legs and feet.)). It also shows that they were usually more accurate in syndrome differentiation, while the treatments they prescribed were unique. However, given the lack of information, further research is required to clarify how these physician-monks learned methods as well as the impact of their foreign medicine knowledge on their methods.

Keywords: Early Medieval China (220–589); physician-monks; medical skill

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1. Introduction

In his famous essay, “Hufang kao” 胡方考 [An Examination of Foreign Prescriptions], Fan Xingzhun 范行准 (1906–1998), a prestigious expert of medical history in modern China, states the following:

Culture is inherently fluid. Anything that is not fluid will never advance. Concerning Chinese medicine, if not for the flow and contact between the ancient Chinese and Western cultures, I am afraid that *Shennong's Herbal Classic* (*Shennong bencao jing* 神農本草經), which documented 365 kinds of medicaments, and the *Treatise on Cold Pathogenic Diseases* (*Shanghan lun* 傷寒論) which has 113 recipes would not have been published around the period of the Han dynasty. 文化本屬富有移動性之物，凡事無移動即無進步，中國醫學，若非古代中西文化之移動解除，吾恐三百六十五種本草之《神農本草經》，一百一十三方之《傷寒論》，在漢季尚難出世也。(Fan 1936, p. 1235)

Fan posited that the development and dissemination of Chinese medicine were influenced by its contact with foreign cultures. In the latter part of his essay, he mentioned that “the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties, during China's Three period, were the peak of the spread of Brahmanical [Indic] medicine into the country, as it was during this time that Brahmin monks and Buddhists were most active in China.” 當我國兩晉南北朝三方鼎峙，正印度婆羅門醫術傳入極盛時代，因其時婆羅門僧與佛教徒在中國最為活躍也 (Ibid., p. 1242). The “*Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings*” (“*Jingji zhi*” 經籍志) of the *Book of Sui* (*Suishu* 隋書) (hereafter *Suishu's Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings*)

documented 12 medical books introduced from India and the Western Regions. There are as follows:

- (1) *Mohe chu huguo fang* 摩訶出胡國方 [Foreign Prescriptions by Mahā] in 10 *juan*.
- (2) *Xiyu zhuxian suoshuo yaofang* 西域諸仙所說藥方 [Prescriptions Taught by the Sages of the Western Regions] in 23 *juan*.
- (3) *Xiyu boluoxianren fang* 西域波羅仙人方 [Prescriptions of the *Para Sages of the Western Regions] in 3 *juan*.
- (4) *Xiyu mingyi suoji yaofang* 西域名醫所集要方 [Important Prescriptions Collected by Famous Physicians in the Western Regions] in 4 *juan*.
- (5) *Longshu pusa yaofang* 龍樹菩薩要方 [Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva's Important Prescriptions] in 4 *juan*.
- (6) *Longshu pusa hexiang fa* 龍樹菩薩和香法 [Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva's Incense Blend Recipes] in 2 *juan*.
- (7) *Longshu pusa yangxing fang* 龍樹菩薩養性方 [Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva's Spiritual Cultivation Methods] in 1 *juan*.
- (8) *Qipo suoshu xianren minglun fang* 耆婆所述仙人命論方 [Sagely Knowledge of Life Conveyed by Jīvaka] in 2 *juan*.
- (9) *Qiantuoli zhigui fang* 乾陀利治鬼方 [Methods of Exorcism in Kantoli] in 10 *juan*.
- (10) *Xinlu Qiantuoli zhigui fang* 新錄乾陀利治鬼方 [Newly Documented Methods of Exorcism in Kantoli] in 4 *juan*.
- (11) *Poluomen zhuxian yaofang* 婆羅門諸仙藥方 [Prescriptions of Brahmin Sages] in 20 *juan*.
- (12) *Poluomen yaofang* 婆羅門藥方 [Brahmin Prescriptions] in 5 *juan*.

These foreign medical documents included in the *Suishu* had probably already existed since the period of division (220–589). Among the monks who travelled between the south and north were also physicians who practiced what was originally foreign medicine. On the one hand, they spread Buddhism by practicing the medicine which they had mastered, while on the other hand, they introduced foreign medical knowledge into China. Simultaneously, many of the physician-monks at that time were Han Chinese who possessed consummate skills in traditional Chinese medicine. In addition to having extraordinary medical skills, some of them also mastered various methods to cure specific diseases such as beriberi. These *sui generis* physician-monks add vivid color to the history of monks and medicine in early imperial China.

Some developments in Chinese scholarship have been made in research on the group of Buddhist monastic physicians (*sheyi sengren* 涉醫僧人)¹. In Li Hong's 李紅 *Review of Ancient Buddhist Doctors in China* (中國古代僧醫綜述) (Li 2008), the activities carried out by ancient physician-monks in China were discussed, and the perspectives were extended to fields such as the medical education of Tibetan Buddhism. The research perspective of this paper is history and there is no discussion about traditional Chinese medicine. In Fu Shuang's 付爽 "Overview of the Researches on Buddhist Doctors in the Wei, Jin, Northern, Southern, Sui, and Tang Dynasties" (魏晉南北朝隋唐時期佛教醫僧研究概述) (Fu 2015), the research results of physician-doctors across several dynasties were summarized. The scholarship of this study is relatively solid and it has value for reference. In "Distribution of Places of Birth and Preaching Places of Buddhist Doctors Coming from the Surrounding Areas to China in the Tang Dynasty" (唐代周邊區域來華醫僧的籍生地與駐錫地分佈) (Gou and Fu 2013), by Gou Lijun 勾利軍 and Fu Shuang, from the perspective of historical geography they discuss the source and distribution of physician-monks from other places. In Li Xican's 李熙燦 "History of Buddhism: Buddhist Doctors in the Poetry of the Tang Dynasty" (佛教史話: 唐詩中的醫僧) (Li 2015), Li starts from the poems in the Tang Dynasty and discusses the treatment methods and social intercourse of doctors in the Tang Dynasty. This research is quite meaningful and provides new material for us to study the medical skills of monks. Among works about physician-monks, *Biographies of Figures of Buddhist Doctors* (佛醫人物小傳) (Fu and Ni 1996), edited by Fu Fang 傅芳 and Ni Qing 倪青, is an early work in which medical figures in Buddhism are discussed, which provides a foundation for future research. In addition, in *Biography of Buddhist Doctors* (佛醫人物傳略)

(Tao and Liao 2014), edited by Tao Xiaohua 陶曉華 and Liao Guo 廖果, a large number of stories of ancient Buddhist Monk doctors in China are discussed. It has made contributions to data collection, but there are a few other studies. Liu Shufen's 劉淑芬 "The Relationship between Monks, the State, and Healthcare in the Tang and Song Dynasties: From the Prescription Hole to the People Benefiting Bureau" (唐宋時期僧人、國家和醫療的關係——從藥方洞到惠民局) is included in *Chinese History from Healthcare* (從醫療看中國史) (Liu 2012), edited by Li Jianmin 李建民. She provides a detailed discussion on official healthcare and monastic healthcare in the Tang and Song Dynasties. It is a valuable reference. In Cao Shibang's 曹仕邦 *Research on External Studies of Buddhist Monks in China: from the Late Han Dynasty to the Five Dynasties* (中國沙門外學的研究：漢末至五代), the medical knowledge and achievements of Buddhist monks are summarized. He believed that the troubled times in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties were the direct driving force for monks acquiring medical knowledge and writing medical treatises. When the state was more unified, it was not necessary for the monks to participate in such activities (Cao 1994, p. 404). In Shang Yongqi's 尚永琪 *Study of Social Groups in the North under the Background of the Spread of Buddhism from the 3rd to 6th Century* (3~6世紀佛教傳播背景下的北方社會群體研究) (Shang 2008), one chapter discusses the groups of monastic-physicians in the society of the north, and folk healthcare in the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The study of Shang Yongqi proposes some unique ideas and is a solid work.

Hong Pimo's 洪丕謨 "Medical Career Record of Buddhist Monks in History" (歷史上醫僧行醫生涯散錄) (Hong 1993) was adapted into a popular text from historical data. It has a certain instructive significance. In "Discussion About the Influence of Buddhism on the Development of Medicine in the Sui and Tang Dynasties" (試論隋唐時期佛學對醫藥發展的影響) by Liang Lingjun 梁玲君 and Li Liangsong 李良松 (Liang and Li 2016), they discuss in some contexts the Buddhist monks in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, and the works of physician-monks from that time. In "Discussion about the Influence of Sinicized Buddhism on the Academic Study of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Part 2)" (試論漢化佛教對中醫藥學術的影響(下)) by Hu Shilin 胡世林, Tang Xiaojun 唐曉軍, and Wang Qianzhi 王謙之 (Hu et al. 1996), they summarize the ancient physician-monks of China. It is argued that more than one hundred Buddhist monks can be found in the literature. In Zheng Junyi's 鄭俊一 "Buddhist Doctors of Han Nationality in Medical Exchanges between Tang and Tubo" (唐與吐蕃醫學交流中的漢族僧醫) (Zheng 2017), the influence of physician-monks of Han ethnicity on Tibetan medicine is discussed from the perspective of exchanges between the Han Chinese and Tibetans. In Han Guozheng's 韓國正 *Study of "Sengshen's Prescriptions" in Chinese and Japanese Medical Literature* (中日醫學文獻中的《僧深方》研究) (Han 2012), literatures on Sengshen's prescriptions in the mediaeval times were summarized and studied alongside a comparison of Chinese and Japanese literatures. The article focuses on Sengshen's understanding and treatment of diseases. It is written from the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine. In Xue Keqiao's 薛克翹 "Indian Buddhism and Ancient Chinese Medicine in the Han Region" (印度佛教與中國古代漢地醫藥學) (Xue 1997), the relationship between Indian Buddhism and traditional Chinese medicine is systematically summarized. Two parts separately discuss physician-monks from the Western Regions and China. At the same time, the author systematically summarizes medical books and skills introduced into China from other regions, as well as the contributions of important medical figures. In Dang Xinling's 黨新玲 "Zhai Farong, the Medicine King of Dunhuang in the Tang Dynasty" (唐代敦煌醫王翟法榮) (Dang 1993), there is a special study on Zhai Farong, a physician-monk of Dunhuang. In this article, it is argued that he could serve as Chief Monk in Dunhuang mainly due to his excellent medical skills. In Zhou Hua's 周華 *Study of the Development History of Medicine in Shaolin* (少林醫藥發展史研究) (Zhou 2016), the physician-monks in Shaolin in different periods are described, but its depth of research is limited. In "Medical Achievements of Buddhist Doctors in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties" (魏晉南北朝僧醫的醫學成就) by Li Qing 李清, et al. (Li et al. 2009), the practice of Buddhist Monk doctors from this period are investigated from the perspective of their medical practices. In Ding Jiashuo's 丁嘉燦 "Medical Activities of Monks in the

Tang Dynasty- Monks in Chang'an in the Period of Emperor Taizong in the Tang Dynasty as an Example" (唐代僧人的醫療活動——以唐太宗時期長安僧人為例) (Ding 2017), the social activities of monks are discussed based on their medical practices. Gao Xiang's 高祥 *Study of Healthcare of Monks in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties* (魏晉南北朝僧人醫療保健研究) (Gao 2019) clearly summarizes the medical practices and healthcare of monks in the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Relevant scholarship in English includes Paul U. Unschuld's *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*, in which the impact of Indian medicine on Chinese medicine is discussed. Buddhism became the media for medical exchanges, and monks became the core group spreading and receiving medicine from foreign countries (Unschuld 1985, pp. 132–53). C. Pierce Salguero's *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* discusses the exchange of medical culture between China and India in the mediaeval period. This monograph offers a good historical discussion on the relationship between Buddhism and healthcare during the period in question. Chapter Five looks at Buddhist physicians (Salguero 2014, pp. 237–70). His other important paper is "A Flock of Ghosts Bursting Forth and Scattering": *Healing Narratives in a Sixth Century Chinese Buddhist Hagiography* (Salguero 2010). This paper is an important contribution to the research of medical monks. Compared with this article, my research pays more attention to how these monks use specific traditional Chinese medicine techniques and prescriptions. The focus of my article is not on the interpretation of literature. Smith, Hilary A.'s *Forgotten Disease: Illnesses Transformed in Chinese Medicine* (Smith 2017), the author talks about a distortion of Asian traditional disease concept after the introduction of western vitamin concept and discussed the complex situation of *jiaoqi* 腳氣 in Medieval China, which is not just beriberi. Liu Yan's *Healing with Poison: Potent Medicines in Medieval China* (Liu 2021), also talked about the use of the poisonous drug *hanshi san* 寒食散 by Buddhist monks.

Having outlined the past research on the topic at hand, we should further clarify what we are addressing in this study. In my opinion, "Buddhist medicine" is a concept involving formal medical techniques and technologies. We should not simply believe that all the medical practices of Buddhism or its mystical methods for disease treatment, such as those relying on meditation, ought to be regarded as "medicine" because Buddhism applies labels such as "Great Lord of Healing" (*Dayi wang* 大醫王) and "Healing the Mind" (*yi xin* 醫心). Medicine should treat very specific diseases of the human body and some monks in Buddhism really did master some practical medical techniques. This would be a real example of "Buddhist medicine" in practice. My research approach in this paper, therefore, will focus on the "theory, method, prescription, and medicine"² (*lifa fangyao* 理法方藥) used by these monks of antiquity in the process of practicing medicine. Buddhist physician-monks in the real world, I argue, should have had specific practices and medical records or prescriptions which we can analyze. This is one of the core indicators with which to judge whether a monk was a real physician. Therefore, in this paper, I want to pay special attention to the prescriptions given by some monks in detail.³ This requires reference to a point of view rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is in this way that we can objectively and critically discuss the physician-monks under investigation.

2. Physician-Monks Recorded in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks]

According to the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks], the first documented monk in the text who is credited with possessing medical skills was An Shigao 安世高, an eminent monk who translated Buddhist scriptures:

An Qing, known by the courtesy name "Shigao" 世高, was the crown prince born to the king and queen of Parthia. He was known for his filial piety since he was a child. He was diligent in his work, intelligent, and studious. He had extensive knowledge of the foreign classics, the seven shining stars and the five elements [i.e., astronomy and related sciences], medical treatments, special techniques, and even the sounds of birds and other animals. 安清, 字世高, 安息國王正後之太子

也。幼以孝行見稱，加又志業聰敏，克意好學。外國典籍及七曜五行醫方異術，乃至鳥獸之聲，無不綜達。(Hui 1992, vol. 1, p. 4)

However, the text does not specify which kind of medical skills An Shigao used to treat people. Assuming this account is historically true, what he had learned was likely similar to the knowledge possessed by Indian Brahmins. According to the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, Yu Daosui 于道邃, another monk of the Northern and Southern dynasties, “became a monk at the age of 16, and served Mr. Lan 蘭公 as a disciple. He was academically brilliant, and read extensively both domestic and foreign literature. He was proficient in medicine and writing, had a deep understanding of different customs, and was eloquent.”⁴ The Mr. Lan mentioned here was the eminent monk Yu Falan 于法蘭 of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420).

Yu Fakai, another disciple of Falan, became known for curing people while spreading the Buddhist Dharma alongside his medical skills. He was the first monk whose practice of medicine was documented in detail in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*. Yu Fakai, whose life details remain relatively unknown, had deep thoughts but seldom expressed himself, while his views were considered unique. He was familiar with the scriptures of the *Fangguang bore jing* 放光般若經 and *Zhengfa hua jing* 正法華經, followed the path of Jīvaka 耆婆, and had considerable medical skills. One time he begged for food and stayed temporarily at a host’s house. Later, when one of the women in the household went into labor, complications put her life at risk. Many physicians tried to treat her without success, and her whole family was in distress. Upon seeing this, Yu Fakai said, “This is easy to cure.” As the host began slaughtering a sheep to perform an illicit ritual, Yu Fakai ordered people to take some of the mutton to cook soup instead. After the woman in labor drank the soup, he applied acupuncture based on her *qi* 氣 (i.e., the vital energy within her body). Shortly after, the baby was born with the amnion covering its body.

On another occasion, in the fifth year of Shengping 昇平 era (361), Xiaozong 孝宗 (Emperor Mu of Jin) had fallen ill. “The emperor suffers from a small illness and [Empress Kangxian 康獻] asked Mr. Yu to take his pulse. He came to the door but refused to enter, giving many excuses. He should be thrown in jail.” Shortly after, the emperor passed away and Kai was pardoned. Subsequently, he returned to Shicheng temple 石城寺 on Mount Shan 剡山. Someone asked him: “Master, you are highly intelligent, unbending and simple. Why do you let the medical arts cross your heart?” He answered: “When we understand the six *pāramitās* 六度, we can eliminate the illnesses caused by the four devils. When we adjust the nine pulse-taking conditions⁵ (*jiuhou* 九候), we can cure cold-wind illnesses. This benefits not only oneself but others, and nothing is more delightful than this.” Yu Fakai died at a hill temple at the age of sixty *sui*. Sun Chuo 孫綽 described him as “an intelligent man and an eloquent speaker who “made use of the mantic arts to spread the teaching (i.e., Buddhism); this is the person Mr. Kai was.”⁶

Yu Fakai’s native place is unknown. It is also possible that he adopted his last name to honor his master, Yu Falang. As the records mention that Yu Fakai “followed the path of Jīvaka,” it can be assumed that people would have imagined that his medical knowledge came from Indian sources and perhaps he knew Indian medicine in reality.⁷ Some scholars believe that Yu Fakai treated labor dystocia. In the system of Indian medical practice that had spread to Khotan, knowledge of obstetrics, gynecology, and pediatrics was included in the “Prescriptions for Children” branch, which was one the “eight branches of medicine” (*yifang bazhi* 醫方八支). Jīvaka was also considered the king of doctors for children, and was surely familiar with obstetrics. Thus, it has been suggested that the skills used by Yu Fakai to treat dystocia were related to the knowledge passed on by Jīvaka to his followers (Chen 2008, pp. 21–22).

Helping women in labor by using acupuncture was a common practice among Chinese physicians in premodern times. Almost all of the acupuncture classics from all dynasties discussed similar topics. Some examples include: “When a woman encounters difficulties in giving birth and if the fetus does not come out, Kunlun 昆侖 is the major acupuncture point for treatment (女子子難，若胞不出，昆侖主之).” (Zhang and Xu 1996). Further,

“When a woman gives birth to a fetus with its feet coming out first, penetrate the Foot-Taiyin 足太陰 with one-third of the needle under the skin, and take out the needle when the feet retract inside. The acupuncture point is located at the concave part between bones under the white skin behind the medial malleolus.”⁸ Additionally, “If the fetus’s hand comes out first, penetrate the Taichong 太沖 point with one-third of the needle under the skin, and urgently stimulate the Baixi point, which is located one *cun* 寸 [a unit of length] away from the hallux. If the placenta is not expelled, penetrate the Foot-Taiyang four *cuns* under the skin, with the acupuncture point at the concave point one *cun* under and behind the lateral malleolus [...] Additionally, penetrate the Sanyinjiao 三陰交 point for dystocia, non-stop menstruation, malposition, and excessive fetal movement.”⁹ In the author’s opinion, it is almost certain that foreign medicine comprised a part of Yu Fakai’s medical skills. However, as acupuncture is also used in traditional Chinese medicine to deal with dystocia, whether Yu Fakai used foreign medicine to treat the woman with labor dystocia is an issue that remains to be discussed. However, based on the fact that someone asked him (“Master, you are highly intelligent, with a strong and assertive personality. Why are you also highly skilled in medicine?”), it can be inferred that many people were aware of Yu Fakai’s medical skills, and it is likely that he was a famous doctor during his time.

Both Yu Daosui and Yu Fakai were disciples of Yu Falan, and both of them had medical backgrounds. However, Chen Ming 陳明 pointed out that no records show that Yu Falan practiced medicine; therefore, it is conceivable that the two disciples had learned their medical skills from someone other than their master. Moreover, Chen Ming speculated that Yu Daosui learned his medical skills from Yu Fakai and that the skills were passed on from one fellow disciple to another (Chen 2008, p. 21). As records are limited, these are merely reasonable inferences. Regardless of where the two learned their medical skills, it is noteworthy that two of the three individuals hitherto mentioned (i.e., the master and his two disciples) practiced medicine.

The *Biographies of Eminent Monks* also recorded the deeds of Zhu Fotiao 竺佛調. Although the records do not explicitly mention that he possessed advanced medical skills, they reveal additional information:

Zhu Fotiao, from an unknown clan, was said by some people to be from Tianzhu 天竺 [India]. With Fotucheng as his master, he lived at Changshan Temple 常山寺 for many years. He lived a pure and simple life and did not make displays of ornate language, for which many people of that time praised him. Two brothers who were devoted believers in Changshan lived a hundred *li* [unit of length] from the temple. The wife of the elder brother had fallen seriously ill and was moved near the temple so that she could be treated. The elder brother had Tiao as his teacher. During the daytime, he was always in the temple to be taught Dharma. One day, Tiao suddenly visited his home. The younger brother asked about his sister-in-law’s illness and his brother’s situation, to which Tiao answered: “The sick person is fine, and your brother is as usual.” After Tiao had gone, the younger brother rode a horse and headed to the temple. When he talked about how Tiao had visited in the morning, his elder brother was stunned, and said, “The monk has not left the temple all morning. How could you see him?” The elder brother asked Tiao about this, and Tiao smiled in silence. Many people heard of this and were also astounded. 竺佛調者，未詳氏族，或云天竺人。事佛圖澄為師，住常山寺積年。業尚純樸，不表飾言，時咸以此高之。常山有奉法者，兄弟二人，居去寺百里。兄婦疾篤，載至寺側，以近醫藥。兄既奉調為師，朝晝常在寺中諮詢行道。異日調忽往其家，弟具問嫂所苦，並審兄安否。調曰：“病者粗可，卿兄如常。”調去後，弟亦策馬繼往。言及調旦來，兄驚曰：“和上旦初不出寺，汝何容見？”兄弟爭以問調，調笑而不答，咸共異焉。(Hui 1992, vol. 9, p. 363)

What is particularly noteworthy in this passage is that the elder brother’s wife had been moved near the temple so she could be treated. This shows that the temple in which Zhu Fotiao stayed had adequate medical resources to treat sick people. In ancient times, having adequate medical resources meant that good physicians lived in a given place.

This implies that Zhu Fotiao's medical skills were highly regarded among the Buddhist households in the vicinity. Moreover, judging from the apparent miracle he performed, his behavior resembled that of his master Fotucheng 佛圖澄, who was also a foreign eminent monk whose medical skills were also documented in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*. As mentioned in his biography: "Fotucheng treated sick people that no one else had been able to cure and the illness would subside gradually. He subtly treated people and countless people benefited from his skills."¹⁰ We can assume that the methods Fotucheng used did not originate from local Chinese medicine.

Another event recorded in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* can further illustrate the special characteristics of Fotucheng's medical skills: "At that time, two sons of the crown prince Shi Sui 石邃 stayed in Xianggou 襄國. Fotucheng said to Shi Sui: 'Your younger son is sick; you should go and bring him back.' Thus, Shi Sui instructed his trusted aide to ride a horse and visit his younger son, who was indeed ill. The imperial physician Yin Teng 殷騰 and some foreign monks claimed that they could cure him. Fotucheng said to his disciple Faya: 'Even if the saint were here, he would not be able to cure this kind of illness, let alone these people.' Three days later, the sick man died, as Fotucheng had expected."¹¹ We can look at this passage from two perspectives. First, Fotucheng conformed to the precepts of Buddhism and refused to tell lies; therefore, he did not support the other doctors' opinions that the man could be cured. Second, based on the medical skills that he had learned, Fotucheng judged that there was no way to cure the patient. This diagnosis was a conclusion that he had reached on his own, as a direct result from the foreign medical knowledge that he had mastered. Moreover, this reminds us that the foreign medical knowledge that these monks had mastered might have been unique in China in terms of its methods of identifying symptoms and diseases.

3. Zhi Facun 支法存, the Monk Yang (仰道人) and Sengshen, and Beriberi

The following three monks became widely known in the Wen and Jin dynasties for curing beriberi and became the archetype of physician-monks at the time.

3.1. Zhi Facun

Zhi Facun was a reputable physician-monk who lived during the Wei and Jin dynasties period. He was a member of the Hu 胡 people. He grew up in Guangzhou 廣州 and became proficient at practicing medicine. According to the literature, he was proficient at curing beriberi, a disease that struck many people during the Eastern Jin dynasty period. Zhi Facun amassed considerable wealth through his medical skills. It was said that he owned two treasures: an eight-*chi* (unit of length) blanket with bright and shining colors that could change into a hundred different images, as well as an eight-*chi* bed made from agarwood, so that a pleasant smell always filled his house.

Wang Yan 王琰 (some sources cite his first name as Tan 談) from Tayuan 太原 was the regional inspector of Guangzhou at that time. His eldest son, Shaozhi 邵之, asked for the aforementioned two treasures owned by Facun, but the latter refused multiple times. Subsequently, Wang Yan reported Facun for being an unruly man of wealth; later, he had him executed and his assets confiscated. Following Facun's death, a spirit that looked like him appeared in the regional court. The spirit frequently beat a drum outside the building, seemingly to protest the injustice that had befallen Facun. Sometime later, Wang Yan fell ill and began to see Facun by his side. Shortly after, Wang Yan died. Shaozhi died shortly after he had arrived at Yangdu 揚都.¹²

According to the *Suishu* Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings, Zhi Facun penned the *Shensu Prescriptions* (*Shensu fang* 申蘇方 in 5 *juan*) (Feng 1993). Further, people from the Song dynasty provided additional information on his life:

Zhi Facun was a monk in the Lingnan 嶺南 area. He longed for the life of a monk since he was a child and hoped to pursue ultimate wisdom. He was an honest and sincere man, never tired of searching for new treatments, and was highly respected during his time. Following the wave of migration to the south

during the Yongjia 永嘉 era (i.e., when upper-class individuals of the Jin dynasty fled from the Central Plains to southern China after the Disaster of Yongjia), the scholar-officials had been unable to adapt to their new environment, and many of them suffered from weakness in the legs. Only Facun could save them. 支法存者，嶺表僧人也，幼慕空門，心希至道，而性敦方藥。尋覓無厭，當代知其盛名。自永嘉南渡，晉朝士夫不習水土，所患皆腳弱，惟法存能拯濟之。¹³

When the Song writers recorded Zhi Facun's story, he had long since passed; therefore, said information can only serve as a tentative reference. The two treasures of Zhi Facun, the eight-*chi* blanket and the eight-*chi* bed are believed to be rare objects from distant regions of the Wei and Jin dynasties period. The former is believed to be a high-quality woven blanket of exquisite craftsmanship with gorgeous patterns and colors. It is likely that Zhi Facun obtained both treasures because he was a member of the Hu people and because of the wealth he had amassed by practicing medicine. The illness that he was an expert at treating was a so-called "weakness in the legs," also known as beriberi, which is considered to be a thiamine (Vitamin B1) deficiency by modern medicine.

Beriberi is a nutritional deficiency disease characterized by impaired glucose metabolism, caused by a long-term lack of vitamin B1 in the individual's diet; people with beriberi usually lack other types of vitamin B as well. Its early symptoms include fatigue, a feeling of heaviness in the lower extremities, scaling skin, numbness in the calves or feet, muscle soreness (especially in calves), headaches, insomnia, and loss of appetite. Following this initial stage, the following typical symptoms appear: (1) Nervous system: Peripheral polyneuritis. (2) Circulatory system: Palpitations and shortness of breath, especially during movements. In severe cases, cyanosis, dyspnea, and hepatomegaly, which are symptoms of heart failure, may appear. (3) Sufferers may develop different levels of edema, initially in the ankles. (4) Digestive system: Flatulency, loss of appetite, and constipation may appear, although less commonly than the other three types of symptoms. The illness can be divided into five types, including the dry type, with peripheral polyneuritis as the main symptom; the wet type, with anasarca as the main symptom; the fulminant type, with acute heart failure as the main symptom; the cerebral type, with central nervous system disorder as the main symptom; and the mixed types, with various symptoms (Zhang 1989).

Chinese medical historians were well aware of this disease. Liao Wenren 廖温仁 summarized traditional Chinese medicine's historical understanding of the pathogenesis of the disease as follows: "Those who believed it to be an exopathy split into several groups, who attributed the cause of the disease to wind toxicity, miasma, dampness, or a contagion. Those who believed it to be an endopathy also split into several groups, attributing the cause of the disease to kidney deficiency, epilepsy, internal dampness (a kind of water intoxication), malnutrition, inherited pathogenic toxins (pathogenic toxins passed from mother to fetus), a down-flow of dampness, or stagnation of the spleen's *qi*. Apart from these causes, other exopathic factors include the land (local conditions), climate (season), age, gender, status, and occupation." (Liao 1929). However, many medical historians have accepted the view that this illness is the same as what the modern medicine practitioners identify as a thiamine deficiency. For example, Chen Bangxian 陳邦賢 posited, "It was only recently discovered that [beriberi] is caused by the lack of vitamin B in rice." (Chen 2011, p. 332). However, this theory has been refuted by certain historians of medicine. For example, Liao Yuqun 廖育群 writes, "The prevalence of the disease only happened during certain periods, living environments, and among specific groups of people. In certain environments where white rice is the staple food, the prevalence of the disease has not been observed." (Liao 2000). Concerning the prevalence of the disease in the eastern Jin dynasty, Liao Yuqun pointed out that the historical curve of drug poisoning due to the intake of mineral substances (e.g., mercury, lead, and arsenic) and that of the incidence of beriberi are identical; this idea is further reinforced by the fact that, during this time, the use of "medicinal pellets" was popular.

Judging from physicians' historical understanding of beriberi, it seems that the scope of diseases considered by traditional Chinese medicine doctors to be beriberi is not limited

to thiamine deficiency. This is directly related to the difference between traditional Chinese and Modern physicians' methodology, namely, "syndrome differentiation" (*bian zheng* 辯證) vs. "disease differentiation" (*bian bing* 辯病). For physicians of traditional Chinese medicine, who follow the principle of "treatment based on syndrome differentiation," understanding diseases' syndromes is of direct and critical significance to curing the disease.¹⁴ Therefore, any disease that involves weakness in the legs is considered to be related to beriberi. According to the *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold* (*Qianjin fang* 千金方), physicians including Zhi Facun, Monk Yang, and Sengshen of the Wei and Jin dynasties were experts in treating diseases related to leg weakness. Sun Simiao (孫思邈; 541–682) writes the following:

Combing through the classical prescriptions, several theories for leg weakness can be found, but the symptom appears rare during the period under investigation. However, following the Yongjia migration to the south, many officials' relatives suffered from the disease. In Jiangdong, Lingnan, people like Zhi Facun and Monk Yang studied the classical prescriptions and became exceptionally good at curing leg weakness. Almost all of the officials and people from prominent families were cured thanks to treatments offered by the aforementioned physicians. Afterward, during the Liu Song (420–479) and Qi (479–502) dynasties, the monk Shenshi had collected the old prescriptions from physicians such as Zhi Facun and compiled the records into 30 volumes of medical books. In these books, there are nearly 100 pieces of prescriptions for leg weakness. . . . The disease begins with symptoms in the legs, such as swelling in the calves; therefore, the disease was called "qi in the legs" (i.e., *jiaoqi* 脚气, or beriberi in modern medicine) by people at that time, which is the same as the leg weakness mentioned by Shenshi. Shenshi compiled more than 80 pieces of prescriptions used by Zhi Facun, including Fu Shilian (lived Yongping mountain), Fan Zuyao, and Huang Su, which were all distinguished. 論曰：考諸經方，往往有腳弱之論，而古人少有此疾。自永嘉南渡，衣纓士人多有遭者。嶺表江東有支法存、仰道人等，並留意經方，偏善斯術，晉朝仕望，多獲全濟，莫不由此二公。又宋齊之間，有釋門深師道人述法存等諸家舊方為三十卷，其腳弱一方近百餘首。 . . . 然此病發，初得先從腳起，因即脛腫，時人號為腳氣，深師雲腳弱者即其義也。深師述支法存所用永平山敷施連、範祖耀、黃素等諸腳弱方，凡八十餘條，皆是精要。(Sun 1998, vol. 7, pp. 162–63)

The records mention that Zhi Facun and Monk Yang paid attention to classical prescriptions. If this description is true, it shows that the treatment methods used were mainly from traditional Chinese medicine, probably without many foreign elements or techniques. In *Prescriptions Worth A Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Sun Simiao documented a type of *fangfeng* (i.e., radix ledebouriella, a root) decoction (*fangfeng tang* 防風湯). According to the records, it was a prescription used by Zhi Facun. Sun Simiao spoke highly of the prescription:

A *fangfeng* decoction is a treatment for weakness and mild wind-type convulsions in the limbs, uncontrollable movements of the joints, disorientation, and nonsense speech. The symptoms come and go at any time, and the sufferers are usually unable to tell the passage of time. The treatments used by Zhi Facun of the south are usually effective, with a mild nature, and do not hurt the body. Those treatments are better than other medicines such as *xuming* decoctions, decoction for relieving edema, and *fengyin* decoctions. A group of people in Guangzhou and some scholars in the south usually prescribe this treatment, which is also effective for leg weakness: Two taels [mass unit] each of radix ledebouriellae, ephedra, large leaf gentian, double-teeth pubescent angelica root, fresh ginger and pinellia tuber; one tael each of Chinese angelica, thinleaf milkwort root, licorice, four stamen stephania root, ginseng, baikal skullcap root, large trifoliolious bugbane rhizome, and white peony root; half tael of gypsum; and six *zhu* [mass unit] of musk. One of the prescriptions calls for one additional tael of largehead atractylodes rhizome. Next, it requires the physician to finely chop the 16 ingredients and boil them in

13 *sheng*s [mass unit] of water down to a decoction of four *sheng*s. The prescription requires the sufferer to take one *sheng* of the decoction at a time. For the first time the sufferer drinks the decoction, the treatment calls for them to be covered with a heavy blanket until they break out in a light sweat. Afterward, two or three doses of the decoction should be taken again, over intervals equivalent to the time it takes a person to walk 10 *li*. 防風湯，治肢體虛風微痙，發熱，肢節不隨，恍惚狂言，來去無時，不自覺悟。南方支法存所用多得力，溫和不損人，為勝於續命、越婢、風引等湯。羅廣州一門南州士人常用，亦治腳弱甚良方。防風、麻黃、秦艽、獨活、生薑、半夏各二兩；當歸、遠志、甘草、防己、人參、黃芩、升麻、芍藥各一兩；石膏半兩；麝香六銖，一方用白術一兩。右十六味咬咀，以水一鬥三升煮取四升，一服一升，初服厚覆取微汗，亦當兩三行下，其間相去如人行十裏久，更服。(Ibid., vol. 7, p. 173)

The Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet (Jinkui yaolüe 金匱要略) also details a decoction for relieving edema, which includes the following ingredients: gypsum, ephedra, fresh ginger, jujube (*da zao* 大棗), and licorice. Decoctions for relieving edema were commonly prescribed for wind edema syndrome (*fengshui zhi zheng* 風水之證). Accordingly, Zhang Zhongjing¹⁵ 張仲景 stated: “For wind edema, aversion to wind, full-body edema, floating pulse, absence of thirst, and non-stop sweating without reason and without severe fever, use a decoction for relieving edema as the main treatment” (風水惡風，一身悉腫，脈浮不渴，續自汗出，無大熱，越婢湯主之) (Zhang 2013, p. 129). Further, the Xuming decoction proposed by Zhang Zhongjing is also included in the prescription.¹⁶ *The Records of Ancient and Modern Effective Recipes (Gujin luyan 古今錄驗)* mentioned the following:

A *xuming* decoction can cure stroke sufferers who cannot control their bodies, cannot speak, are in pain (typically with unclear sore spots), experience spasms, and are unable to turn their body [...] Three taels each of ephedra, cassia twig, Chinese angelica, ginseng, gypsum, dried ginger, licorice, and zechwan lovage; almonds (40 pieces). 《古今錄驗》〔續命湯〕治中風痲，身體不能自收，口不能言，昧不知痛處或拘急不得轉側。……麻黃、桂枝、當歸、人參、石膏、幹薑、甘草各三兩；芎藭(川芎)；杏仁(四十枚)。 (Zhang 1963, p. 17)

In fact, the *xuming* decoction recipe also details a decoction for relieving edema, among other supplements. Both decoctions are treatments designed by Zhang Zhongjing. Therefore, if the ledebouriellae decoction is really a treatment passed on by Zhi Facun, we can essentially confirm that classical treatments were a part of his medical repertoire. By examining Zhi Facun’s recipe for the ledebouriellae decoction, we can find that its main purpose is to dispel pathogenic winds and remove dampness, clear heat toxins, tranquilize, strengthen the sufferer’s vital *qi*, and relieve pain. The purpose of including the ingredients of the edema-relief decoction in the ledebouriellae decoction is to mitigate edema and fever in the sufferer, while the *xuming* decoction is used to cure symptoms similar to those of a stroke, including spasms and impaired movement in the limbs and aphasia. The purpose of combining these two prescriptions is to eliminate dampness and clear heat toxins, as well as to relieve the sufferer’s limb spasms. For mental symptoms such as disorientation and aphasia, the treatment’s aim is to tranquilize the sufferer with thinleaf milkwort root and remove phlegm with pinellia tuber. It is believed that musk is used to prevent severe pain and fainting, that is, to keep the sufferer conscious. Thus, the treatment fully takes into account the sufferer’s possible ailments; it is a well-articulated treatment combining various high-quality ingredients.

In addition, according to the *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Zhi Facun also used acupuncture to treat beriberi:

It is also performed using the old methods of Zhi Facun: A total of 18 acupuncture points, including *liangqiu*, *dubi*, *sanli*, *shanglian*, *xialian*, *jiexi*, *taichong*, *yanglingquan*, *juegu*, *kunlun*, *yinlingquan*, *sanyinjiao*, *zutaiyin*, *fuliu*, *rangu*, *yongquan*, *chengshan* and *shugu*. 亦依支法存舊法：梁丘、犢鼻、三里、上廉、下廉、解谿、太沖、陽

陵泉、絕骨、崑崙、陰陵泉、三陰交、足太陰、伏溜、然穀、湧泉、承山、束骨等凡一十八穴。(Sun 1998, vol. 7, p. 167)

Hence, we can see that Zhi Facun used external methods when treating leg weakness. However, due to a lack of information, we are unable to see the full picture regarding his external methods of treatment.

3.2. Monk Yang and Sengshen

There are relatively few records about Monk Yang and Sengshen in the literature, and we can only understand them from the scattered records related to the physician-monks:

Yang was a monk in Lingnan 嶺南. Although he began studying Buddhism because he was intelligent, he also practiced medicine. After the migration of the Jin dynasty to the south, many people from the families of officials could not adapt to the new environment, and suffered from leg weakness. No sufferers could survive, before the monk became one of the rare ones who could cure the disease. He became famous as a result of this. Sengshen (also known as Shenshi 深師), who was a Buddhist monk who lived in the Liu Song and Qi dynasties, was good at curing leg weakness. He compiled prescriptions (which were mostly effective) from many physicians, including Zhi Facun, into a 30-volume book. The book was named the *Shenshi Prescriptions* (*Shenshi fang* 深師方 [publication date unknown]). 又曰仰道人，嶺表僧也，雖以聰慧入道，長以醫術開懷。因晉朝南移，衣纓士族不襲水土，皆患軟腳之疾，染者無不斃路，而此僧獨能療之，天下知名焉；又曰僧深，齊宋間道人，善療腳弱氣之疾，撰錄法存等諸家醫方三十餘卷經，用多效，時人號曰《深師方》焉。¹⁷

This is one of the few extant records of Monk Yang in the literature. The only thing we know about him is that he was a well-known physician-monk who could cure beriberi.

Compared with the monk Yang, there is more information on Sengshen. Various other sources mention Sengshen in the literature. *The Yin-Yang Properties of Stalactite, 17 Recipes of Herbs and their Preparation* 乳石陰陽體性並草藥觸動形候等論並法一十七首, Volume 37 of the *Secret Essentials of An Official* [Waitaimiyao 外臺秘要方]¹⁸) states the following:

Shennong and Tongjun had a deep understanding of medicine; thus, they recorded the mutual interactions and contraindications of medicines in classic herbal recipes. However, Shenshi was a student of Daohong. What was the basis of the knowledge taught by Daohong? 舊論曰：神農、桐君，深達藥性，所以相反畏惡，備於本草，但深師祖學道洪，道洪所傳何所依據云？(Wang 2011, p. 749)

This text reveals that Sengshen's teacher was Shi Daohong. There is a volume named *Treatment of Cold Food Powder* (*Hanshi sandui liao* 寒食散對療) written by Shi Daohong, and a volume on Shi Daohong in the *Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings, Book of Sui*, which show that Shi Daohong's medical skills were widely recognized during his time. Sengshen's prescriptions were compiled into various medical books, such as the *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*, the *Secret Essentials of An Official* and the *Ishinpō*; therefore, we can still get a glimpse of Sengshen's medical achievements. The "Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings" in the *Book of Sui* and its counterpart in the *Old Book of Tang* (*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書), and the "Record of Arts and Literature" 藝文志 in the *New Book of Tang* (*Xin Tang shu* 新唐書) all mention that Sengshen penned a medical book with 30 *juan*, entitled *Prescriptions of Monk Shen* (*Seng Shen yaofang* 僧深藥方) or the *Collection of the Prescriptions of Sengshen* (*Sengshen jifang* 僧深集方). Later generations (including modern researchers) named the work *Shenshi Prescriptions*.

According to some scholars, "There are 344 recipes in the *Shenshi Prescriptions* [...] to categorize the method of preparation, there are 164 decoctions, 64 pills, and 43 types of powder. There is a large variety of syndrome names in the *Shenshi Prescriptions*, altogether being 1151 in total." (Wang 2004). Although Sengshen was well-known for curing beriberi, few of the treatments he left behind have been clearly described as potential cures for beriberi. Among Sengshen's treatments, only the "adjusted decoction for kidney dripping" (*Zengsun shen li tang* 增損腎瀝湯) was explicitly recorded to be a cure for leg weakness:

Sengshen's adjusted decoction for kidney dripping was used to treat the following symptoms: toxicity brought by wind-type weakness and strain; pain, numbness, weakness, or difficulty when moving the legs; asthenia cold at the lower burner; mild heat invasion in the chest; heart deficiency and palpitation due to fright; insomnia; loss of appetite and loss of smell or taste; persistent anxiety; inability to lie down; urinary hesitancy; and irregular excretion. The prince of Xiangdong 湘東王 visited Jiangzhou 江州 and exhibited such symptoms, later falling into critical condition. I made this decoction and asked him to take it, and he quickly recovered. All individuals with these symptoms recover [with this treatment]. The appropriately adjusted recipe is as follows:

One tael each of milkvetch root, licorice, white peony root, dwarf lilyturf, ginseng, desert living cistanche, dried rehmannia root, red halloysite, Indian bread, Chinese wolfberry root-bark, Chinese angelica, thinleaf milkwort root, magnetite, trifoliate orange, radix ledebouriellae and fossil bone; two taels each of cinnamomi centralis cortex and Szechwan lovage rhizome; four taels of fresh ginger; three ge [mass unit] of Chinese magnoliavine fruit; one sheng of pinellia tuber; 30 pieces of jujube; and a white sheep kidney. Next, "Finely chop the 23 ingredients, use 20 shengs of water to cook the sheep kidney. Take 12 shengs of the soup to boil all other ingredients. Boil the decoction down to four shengs, and divide into five doses." 道人深師增損腎瀝湯，治風虛勞損挾毒，腳弱疼痛或不隨，下焦虛冷，胸中微有客熱，心虛驚悸，不得眠，食少失氣味，日夜數過心煩，迫不得臥，小便不利，又時複下。湘東王至江州，王在嶺南病悉如此，極困篤，餘作此湯令服，即得力。病似此者服無不瘥，隨宜增損之方：黃芪、甘草、芍藥、麥門冬、人參、肉蓯蓉、幹地黃、赤石脂、茯神、地骨白皮、當歸、遠志、磁石、枳實、防風、龍骨各一兩；桂心、芎藭各二兩；生薑四兩；五味子三合；半夏一升；大棗三十枚；白羊腎一具。右二十三味咬咀，以水二鬥煮羊腎，取汁一鬥二升，內諸藥煮取四升，分為五服。(Sun 1998, vol. 7, p. 172)

Five men in history were invested with the title of Prince of Xiangdong, namely, Liu Yu 劉彧 (439–472) of the Liu Song, Xiao Zijian 蕭子建 (486–498) and Xiao Baozhi 蕭寶暉 (?–502) of the Southern Qi, Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–555) of the Southern Liang (502–557), and Chen Shuping 陳叔平 (572–?) of the Chen (557–589). All princes of Xiangdong were from the southern dynasties. This indicates that the record is probably the content of *Shenshi Prescriptions* as directly quoted by Sun Simiao; in other words, it is an entry of Sengshen's personal medical diary. If this assumption is true, it indicates that Sengshen was very confident in his ability to cure beriberi and was also proficient at it. The symptoms recorded in the text show that the sufferer was weak and exhausted, had been struck by wind toxicity, felt numbness and pain in the legs, and suffered from urinary hesitancy. Additionally, the text mentions the presence of asthenia cold in the lower burner (下焦虛冷), a categorization of human organs in traditional Chinese medicine, which meant that the sufferer had insufficient kidney *yang* 腎陽 and may have had symptoms of water excess due to *yang* deficiency. Further, the term "heat invasion" 客熱 refers to the exogenous heat, meaning that there was exogenous evil or heat stagnation in the upper burner of the sufferer, which usually leads to irritability and restlessness. Additionally, a deficiency of healthy *qi* (*zheng qi* 正氣) and exogenous led to palpitations due to fright and insomnia. Moreover, in the middle burner, there was a deficiency in the spleen and stomach, as well as loss of appetite.

In terms of the combination of different ingredients, the main purposes of the prescription include strengthening vital *qi*, warming *yang*, invigorating the kidneys, and alleviating the sufferer. The prescribed treatment includes a cinnamon twig decoction (*guizhi tang* 桂枝湯), consisting of cassia twig, licorice, fresh ginger, jujube and white peony root; a minor pinellia decoction (*xiaoban xia tang* 小半夏湯), consisting of fresh ginger and pinellia tuber; a pulse-engendering powder (*sheng mai san* 生脈散), consisting of ginseng, dwarf lilyturf tuber and Chinese magnoliavine fruit; a peach blossom decoction (*taohua tang* 桃花湯), consisting of red halloysite, dried ginger and Japonica rice—in this treatment, fresh

ginger is used instead of dried ginger, while Japonica rice is omitted; and a four-agent decoction (*si wu tang* 四物湯), consisting of rehmannia root, Chinese angelica, Szechwan lovage rhizome, and white peony root. As for commonly-used medicines, the prescription includes the well-known combination of milkvetch root, licorice, and ginseng, which is used for benefiting the sufferer's *qi* and strengthening their vital *qi*; additionally, milkvetch root and *radix ledebouriellae* are combined to cure diseases related to apoplexy.

This prescription takes fully into account the two major characteristics of the disease, that is, a "deficiency cold" (*xu han* 虛寒) and "wind pathogens" (*feng xie* 風邪). For example, the cinnamon twig decoction has the effects of dispelling pathogenic wind from the muscles, harmonizing *rong[qi]* 榮[氣] (circulation of blood) and *wei[qi]* 衛[氣] (circulation of *qi*), and coordinating *yin* and *yang* as well as the spleen and stomach. It is widely used in clinical practice. The minor pinellia decoction, a common prescription for thoracic fluid retention, originates from the *Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet*. When fluid is retained in the chest, the sufferer will suffer a cough, be short of breath, pant, have difficulty lying down, and also have edema. However, there was no record of a "pulse-engendering powder" until the Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties;¹⁹ however, it is believed that the powder was used earlier, during the Wei and Jin dynasties. For example, the adjusted decoction for "kidney dripping" includes a pulse-engendering powder, which can benefit *qi* for promoting the production of fluid, strengthening the heart, and as an emergency treatment for fainting. Sengshen used a peach blossom decoction in his prescription, probably because he identified the symptoms of urinary hesitancy and irregular excretion. According to the *Treatise on Cold Pathogenic Diseases* (*Shanghan lun* 傷寒論), the peach blossom decoction was used to cure deficiency-cold dysentery. It explicitly documented that the symptoms included "urinary hesitancy and non-stop urination 小便不利, 下利不止," while "urinary hesitancy and irregular excretion," as mentioned by Sengshen, are believed to be symptoms similar to diarrhea. The peach blossom decoction used by Sengshen included fresh ginger instead of dried ginger. On the one hand, a large amount of fresh ginger can balance the toxicity of pinellia tuber, while on the other hand, a large amount of fresh ginger has similar effects to dried ginger, therefore, it serves two purposes simultaneously.

The prescription also includes a four-agent decoction, which can be found in the *Prescriptions of the Bureau of Taiping People's Welfare Pharmacy* (*Taiping huimin heji ju fang* 太平惠民和劑局方). This is an adjusted decoction based on the content of angelica root, donkey-hide gelatin, and an argy wormwood leaf decoction (*qionggui jiao'ai tang* 芎歸膠艾湯), which consists of Szechwan lovage rhizome, donkey-hide gelatin (*ajiao* 阿膠), licorice, argy wormwood leaf (*ai ye* 艾葉), Chinese angelica, white peony root, and dried rehmannia root), and is a basic prescription for nourishing the individual's blood. The adjusted decoction for kidney dripping used here includes desert-living cistanche and dried rehmannia root to warmly invigorate kidney *qi*; Chinese wolfberry root-bark to remove the exogenous heat of the upper burner; thinleaf milkwort root, Indian bread, magnetite, and fossil bones to calm the sufferer and restore the normal coordination between the upper and lower burners; and trifoliolate orange to relieve chest congestion and reduce mass, activating the *qi* to induce diuresis.

Another point to be noted is that a sheep kidney is used in the recipe; it is cooked, and its soup is combined with other ingredients. This is a special method used when the sufferer exhibits deficiency-cold of the kidney's *qi*. According to Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593), "for kidney deficiency and strain, as well as diabetes and beriberi, a kidney-dripping decoction is a common remedy used in the recipes found in the *Prescriptions Worth A Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and the *Secret Essentials of An Official* and the *Shenshi Prescriptions*. All recipes involve using a kidney soup to boil the ingredients. The prescription is used as a guiding drug and each of the recipes has its own usage."²⁰

Therefore, if this prescription was the one used by Sengshen, this indicates that he was a physician-monk who was distinctly familiar with Zhang Zhongjing's classical prescriptions. He also had a deep understanding of the sufferers' symptoms and pathogenesis.

Therefore, he could combine different treatments and ingredients with synergistic effects. Thus, his treatments were rigorous and harmonious, giving him the confidence to assert that “every sufferer with these symptoms will recover.” Judging from the relationship between Zhi Facun and the Monk Yang and Sengshen, they shared a common lineage. However, it is estimated that this common lineage only involved the latter learning medical skills from the former. Moreover, it is particularly likely that the latter learned through books, rather than a master-disciple relationship. The fact that these three monks were influential in the medical field demonstrates that their medical skills were widely recognized during their time. Moreover, the scattered medical records left by Zhi Facun and Sengshen show that they were excellent practitioners of Chinese medicine who could accurately differentiate syndromes, and were familiar with classical prescriptions.

4. Shi Huiyi’s 釋慧義 Discussion on the Intake of Cold-Food Powder (*hanshi san* 寒食散)

The *Suishu* Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings mentioned that the seventh volume of the *Discussions on Cold-Food Powder* (*Hanshi jie zalun* 寒食解雜論), written by Shi Huiyi, had been lost (Wei 1973, vol. 34, p. 1041). However, the *Ishinpō* had documented a few pieces of Shi Huiyi’s discussions on prescriptions, and most of them are about cold-food powder. Regarding the background of Shi Huiyi, the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* introduced a man with the same name: “Shi Huiyi, whose original last name was Liang, grew up in the north and became a monk at a young age. He was handsome and gentle, a man of integrity who was diligent in his work. In his youth, he traveled between the city of Peng 彭城 and Liu Song and learned along the way, and knew the elements of the Buddhist scriptures by heart.”²¹ However, the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* did not document Shi Huiyi practicing medicine. Therefore, more information is required before we can determine whether the two were the same person. According to Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗 (1842–1906), “. . . the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* did not mention that there was such a book; therefore, it is not clear if this is the same Shi Huiyi. However, although the biography of Huijiao listed out the books about foreign knowledge written by monks, many books were omitted. Therefore, the record of Shi Huiyi might have been omitted as well.”²² Shi Huiyi’s commentary on the prescriptions documented by the *Ishinpō* 醫心方 can be found in the following passages, quoting the so-called “Shi Huiyi lun” 釋慧義論 [Discussions of Shi Huiyi]:

Cold-food powder is a high-quality medicine. [It] can extend the lifespan as well as harmonize the temper and qualities of a person, so [its] effect is not limited to curing disease. It nourishes health and cures disease if used correctly, and causes harm if used incorrectly, so we must be careful. Thus, the user is responsible for the effect, not the medicine itself. Further, the abovementioned prescriptions may come in different versions. Huangfu [Mi] [謚] (215–282; scholars, medical scientists and historians in the Three Kingdoms 三國 and Jin Dynasties 晉朝) advocated for it to be taken cold, while Duke Linqiu²³ advocated for it to be taken warm. In most cases, it is acceptable for it to be cold. Therefore, Shi’an’s (士安 Huangfu Mi’s style name) theory remains popular everywhere. 《釋慧義論》云：五石散者，上藥之流也。良可以延期養命，調和性理，豈直治病而已哉。將得其和，則養命瘳疾；禦失其道，則天性。可不慎哉？此是服者之過，非藥石之發也。且前出諸方，或有不同。皇甫唯欲將冷，廩丘欲得將石藥性熱，多以將冷為宜。故士安所撰，遍行於世。²⁴

The Bathing and Compress Methods of Shi Huiyi and Vice Minister Xue 薛侍郎 mentioned the following:

Bathing can relieve the side effects of cold-food powder. Regarding the methods for bathing: For sufferers who feel chilly at an early stage, use cold water first and use a raw-boiled decoction (i.e., a bai boiling decoction mixed with freshwater) next. For sufferers who had fever at an early stage, use warm water first and use cold water next. When bathing, be careful not to wash the hair first. To wash

the hair, use two to three shengs of water. The symptoms of urinary hesitancy, constipation, dribbling urination, hematuria, or vaginal pain are caused by heat and can be cured by using compresses. Regarding the methods for making compresses: First, apply cold materials as a compress on the lower abdomen. After that, apply warm materials as a compress. Apply the cold compress again after the warm compress. For frequent urination, also use cold compresses and warm compresses alternatively, and the sickness will be cured. 《釋慧義、薛侍郎浴熨救解法》云：凡藥石發宜浴，浴便得解。浴法：若初寒，先用冷水，後用生熟湯。若初熱，先用暖湯，後用冷水。浴時慎不可先洗頭，欲沐可用二三升灌矣。若大小便秘塞不通，或淋瀝尿血，陰中疼，此是熱氣所致，熨之即愈。熨法：前以冷物熨少腹，冷熨已又以熱物熨前；熱熨之以後復冷熨。又小便數，此亦是取冷過，為將暖自愈。(Ibid., vol. 19, pp. 404–5)

Additionally, Tamba provides us with a wider picture of Shi Huiyi's treatments, as detailed in the following excerpts:

The side effects of taking stalactite include headaches. Drinking hot wine can relieve this. 釋慧義云：鐘乳發令人頭痛，飲熱酒即解。(Ibid., vol. 19, p. 411)

The recipe for the Ophiopogon (dwarf lilyturf tuber) decoction is as follows: dwarf lilyturf tuber (one sheng), fermented soybean (two shengs), common gardenia fruit (14 pieces), and fistular onion stalk (half a kati [unit of mass]). Use six shengs of water to boil the four ingredients. Boil down the decoction to two shengs and divide it into several doses. 釋慧義云：解散麥門冬湯方：麥門冬 (一升)、豉 (二升)、梔子 (十四枚)、蔥白 (半斤)。凡四物，以水六升，煮取二升，分再服。(Ibid., vol. 20, pp. 415–16)

Shi Huiyi said: The relieving recipe for eye pain and headache: szechwan lovage rhizome (three taels), kudzu root (two taels), Manchurian wildginger root (two taels), Radix ledebouriellae (three taels), Chinese magnoliavine fruit (three taels), largehead atractylodes rhizome (four taels), Wolfiporia extensa (four taels), baikal skullcap root (two taels), and ginseng (two taels). Use 13 shengs of water to boil the nine ingredients. Boil down the decoction to three shengs and divide it into three doses. 釋慧義云：解散治目疼頭痛方：芎藭 (三兩)、葛根 (二兩)、細辛 (二兩)、防風 (三兩)、五味子 (三兩)、術 (四兩)、茯苓 (四兩)、黃芩 (二兩)、人參 (二兩)。凡九物，以水一鬥三升，煮取三升，分三服。(Ibid., vol. 20, p. 417)

When side effects occur, the heat rushes to the eyes, and the vision is impaired. In this case, prepare the following: golden thread (hair removed), dried ginger, Manchurian wildginger root, and prinsepia uniflora. Take the four ingredients in equal amounts, finely chop them and wrap them in cotton. Place the ingredients into five shengs of pure wine and boil in a copper vessel. Boil the decoction down to two shengs and a half and slowly pour through the eyes to rinse them. Repeat it the next day. 釋慧義云：散發，熱氣沖目，漠漠無所見方：黃連 (去毛)、幹薑、細辛、蕤核。凡四物，等分，咬咀，綿裹，淳酒五升，以藥納中，於銅器中煮，取二升半，綿注洗目，使入中，日再。(Ibid.)

This is a treatment for the following symptoms: shivering, being seemingly attacked by pestilent factors, cold clammy extremities, opisthotonus, stroke-like symptoms, or experiencing chills following a fever. If the sufferer feels chills first, wash the feet with two to three shengs of cold water. If the sufferer has fever first, wash the feet with four to five shengs of a raw-boiled decoction. If the central part of the body is stiff, then the effects of the medicine have begun to dissipate. Take the following decoction immediately: snakegourd fruit (three taels), common gardenia fruit (21 pieces, smashed), ginseng (one tael), licorice (one tael, roasted), fermented soybean (one sheng), gypsum (three taels, in powder), and green onion leaf (3 taels). Finely chop the seven ingredients. Use eight shengs of water to boil the ingredients; boil the decoction down to two shengs, and divide into

three doses. 釋慧義云：治寒噤似中惡，手腳逆冷，角弓反張，其狀如風，或先熱後寒，不可名字。若先寒者，用冷水二三升洗腳，使人將之。先熱者，以生熟湯四五升許洗之，若體中覺直者，是散，急服此湯方：栝蒌根（三兩）、梔子（二十一枚，擘）、人參（一兩）、甘草（一兩，炙）、香豉（一升）、石膏（三兩，末）、蔥葉（三兩）。凡七物，細切之，以水八升，煮取二升半，分三服。（Ibid., vol. 20, p. 422）

Shi Huiyi's discussions on medicinal prescriptions show that he was influenced by the trend which promoted the intake of cold-food powder. His interest in medicine focused on treating the side effects from taking cold-food powder. In fact, Volumes 19 and 20 of the *Ishinpō* detail various prescriptions for treating cold-food powder's side effects. This indicates that Shi Huiyi had some experience in treating the effects of cold-food powder. *Pang's Theory*²⁵ (*Pangshi lun* 龐氏論), documented in the *Ishinpō*, describes the symptoms relating to cold-food powder's effects as follows:

When the effects of the medicine are about to occur, the sufferer will first want to yawn and stretch, or may feel a headache and pain in the eyes, and may begin to convulse. Alternatively, they may develop palpitations due to fright, with a stiffness over the whole body. Or they may feel air filling their ears, hearing various sounds, or may feel an intense heat all over their body. Or they may feel pins and needles, shivers due to aversion to cold, and may become anxious or fall unconscious, not knowing which part of the body is unwell. Or they may feel heat in the abdomen, like carrying a white-hot iron in their arms. When the situation gets worse, the abdomen of the sufferer will feel hard like stone. The skin surrounding the mouth will become blue and black, blood will appear in the urine and stool, while the pulse will weaken. Such effects can be cured via large pouring, and the sufferer will be cured after a while. 凡藥欲發之候，先欲頻伸或苦頭目疼，身體癱瘓；或驚恐悸動，周身而強；或耳中氣滿，如絳車之聲，或體熱劇於火燒；或如針刺，噤燥惡寒，昧昧憤憤，不知病處；或腹中燠熱，如燒煨鈇懷之也。其發甚者，腹滿堅於材石，繞口青黑，大小便血，而多無脈也。如此之病，歸於大澆，以瘥為期也。（Ibid., vol. 20, p. 414）

Here, a "large pouring" (*da jiao* 大澆) means to wash the body with a large amount of cold water, so as to lower the body's surface temperature. It shows that taking cold-food powder will cause the body to develop symptoms of fire-toxicity and stasis. Therefore, the major purpose of the prescription for the effects of cold-food powder is to mitigate such fire-toxicity. In terms of the composition of the prescriptions, both the "ophiopogon decoction for resolving the effects of cold-food powder" and the last decoction prescription contain a gardenia fruit and fermented soybean decoction (*zhizi shi tang* 梔子豉湯), which originates from the *Treatise on Cold Pathogenic Diseases*. This decoction can clear heat and relieve restlessness, and is designed to treat the heat stagnation and irritancy caused by taking cold-food powder. Furthermore, in both prescriptions, green onion is used, which also helps mitigate heat stagnation. Moreover, in the last prescription, snakegourd fruit is used to promote fluid production, a large amount of gypsum is used to clear heat, ginseng and licorice are used to benefit *qi* (it is believed that when such symptoms appear, the syndrome of "strong fire reduces *qi*"²⁶ [*zhuanghuo shi qi* 壯火食氣] has also occurred). Apart from this, the "prescription for resolving pain in the eyes and headaches caused by cold-food powder" also resembles Zhang Zhongjing's *xuming* decoction. From a holistic point of view, Shi Huiyi's formulas were developed following the principles of Chinese medicine, and their curative effect was probably influential at that time, otherwise they would not have been included in the *Suishu's* Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings.

5. Reflections on the Books Discussing the Prescriptions to Treat the Effects of Cold-Food Powder, Penned by Monks in Medieval China

Besides Shi Huiyi, there were other experts in treating the effects of cold-food powder. Two books discussing such prescriptions, which were authored by monks, were included in *Suishu's* Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings, namely, one volume of the *Treatments*

for Cold-Food Powder, written by Shi Daohong, and two volumes of *Resolving the Effects of Cold-Food Powder* (*Jie hanshi san fang* 解寒食散方), written by Shi Zhibin 釋智斌 (Wei 1973, vol. 34, p. 1041). However, we are currently unable to verify the backgrounds of these monks due to a lack of information. Some content from Daohong's *Methods of Resolving the Effects of Cold-Food Powder* (*Daohong jiesan fa* 道弘解散法) appears in the *Ishinpō*, and it is believed to have been copied from *Shi Daohong's Treatments for Cold-Food Powder*, by the author of the *Ishinpō*. *Daohong's Methods for Resolving the Effects of Cold-Food Powder* states the following:

For problems caused by eating dirty rice, carrion, leftover soup, and vegetables, take the gardenia fruit decoction. For problems caused by eating undercooked rice and unsterilized wine, take roasted barley powder with five *he* [a volumetric measure] as one dose. If the sufferer is not cured after taking three doses, take one *sheng* of rice-grain sprout. For problems caused by eating too much meat, use the prescription as described above. If the sufferer is not cured after taking fired barley powder, take ground rice-grain sprouts. If the intake of ground rice-grain sprout does not work, take the gardenia fruit and fermented soybean decoction. For problems caused by eating raw vegetables, take the licorice decoction. For problems caused by eating coarse rice, take the licorice decoction [coarse rice refers to rice that is not properly chewed]. For problems caused by being too full, take the licorice decoction as mentioned above. For problems caused by hunger, take the fistular onion stalk and fermented soybean decoction. For problems caused by drinking, take the fistular onion stalk and fermented soybean decoction. If not cured, take the *lizhong* decoction. For problems caused by angry emotions, take the ginseng decoction. For problems caused by cold, the sufferer will usually have fever. Wash the body with seven to eight *sheng* of cold water and feed the sufferer five to six *shi* (volume unit) of a raw-boiled decoction. After feeding, let the sufferer eat some warm food and drink some hot wine, walk, and move their body, so that they will be cured. If not cured, take the gardenia fruit decoction. For problems caused by heat, the sufferer will usually feel pressure in the chest; in that case, take the baikal skullcap decoction. 《道弘解散法》云：食穢飯、臭肉、陳羹、宿菜發，服梔子湯。飯未熟生酒發，服大麥麩，一服五合，至三服不解，服糜米一升。食肉多發，如上法服。服麩不解，又服糜末，糜末不解，又服梔子豉湯。食生菜發，服甘草湯。食粗米發，服甘草湯。(粗米謂咀嚼不精也。)大飽食發，如上服甘草湯。失食饑發，服蔥白豉湯。醉發，服蔥白豉湯；若不解，服理中湯。瞋怒太過發，服人參湯。將冷太過發，則多壯熱，先以冷水七八升洗浴，然後用生熟湯五六石灌之。灌已，食少暖食、飲少熱酒、行步自勞，則解。若不解，複服梔子湯。將熱太過發，則多心悶，服黃芩湯。(Ibid., vol. 19, p. 405)

The records focus on remedies for the effects of cold-food powder under different circumstances. It is worth noting that the gardenia fruit, gardenia fruit and fermented soybean, licorice, and ginseng decoctions are relatively simple recipes with few ingredients. This is characteristic of Chinese medicine during the Early Medieval China. Accordingly, Shi Daohong is believed to have been a practitioner of Chinese medicine. The *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold* show similar prescriptions, which are believed to have been copied from Daohong's prescriptions:

For problems caused by eating dirty rice or leftover carrion, soup, and vegetables, take the gardenia fruit decoction: 21 pieces of common gardenia fruits, three *sheng* of fermented soybeans and three taels of licorice. Finely chop the three ingredients and boil with eight *sheng* of water. Boil the decoction down to three *sheng* and divide it into three doses. Ginseng and fistular onion stalks can also be added. For problems caused by hunger, take the fistular onion stalk and fermented soybean decoction. For problems caused by excessive drinking, also take the fistular onion stalk and fermented soybean decoction: one kati of fistular onion stalk, two *sheng* of fermented soybeans, five taels of dried ginger, and two

taels of licorice. Finely chop the four ingredients and boil with seven *sheng* of water. Boil down the decoction to three *sheng*, and divide it into three doses. If the sufferer is not cured after taking this soup, use the *lizhong* decoction: three taels each of ginseng, licorice, and largehead atractylodes rhizome; two taels of dried ginger. Finely chop the four ingredients and boil with six *sheng* of water. Boil down the decoction to two and a half *sheng* and divide it into three doses. For problems caused by angry emotions, take the ginseng decoction: nine candareen each of ginseng, trifoliate orange, and licorice; six candareen each of snakegourd fruit, dried ginger, and largehead atractylodes rhizome. Finely chop the six ingredients and boil with nine shengs of water. Boil down the decoction to three shengs, and divide it into three doses. For sufferers of shortness of breath, drink it slowly. 治食宿飯、陳臭肉及羹、宿菜發者，宜服梔子豉湯方：梔子三七枚、香豉三升、甘草三兩。右三味，咬咀，以水八升，煮取三升，分三服。亦可加入參、蔥白。失食發，宜服蔥白豉湯；飲酒過醉發，亦宜服蔥白豉湯方：蔥白一斤、豉二升、幹薑五兩、甘草二兩，右四味，咬咀，以水七升，煮取三升，分三服。服湯不解，宜服理中湯方：人參、甘草、白術各三兩；幹薑二兩，右四味，咬咀，以水六升，煮取二升半，分三服。嗔怒太過發，宜服人參湯方：人參、枳實、甘草各九分；栝蒌根、幹薑、白術各六分，右六味，咬咀，以水九升，煮取三升，分三服。若氣短者，稍稍數飲。(Sun 1998, vol. 24, p. 747)

This indicates that the prescriptions used by Shi Daohong were relatively simple and followed the methods described by Zhang Zhongjing. The *Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings, Book of Sui* mentioned the three monks' prescriptions to treat the effects of cold-food powder. Thus, it is natural for us to ask why the monk paid so much attention to the side effects of cold-food powder. We know that the intake of cold-food powder was popular among scholars in the Wei and Jin. Further, cold-food powder is in its own separate category in the medical field: "The taking of the powder, the requirements of its use and new information regarding its dosage and the methods used to treat its side effects had been combined to form a relatively independent category. [Addressing its effects] was an important issue in the history of medicine which originated in the Wei and Jin dynasties and continued until the Sui and Tang dynasties." (Liao et al. 2016, p. 204) Against this social background, the monks conformed to the status quo. According to the materials passed on by monks during that period, some monks also consumed cold-food powder. For example, the eminent monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) died after taking cold-food powder:

Since Huiyuan moved into Mount Lu, he lived in seclusion for more than 30 years, never leaving the mountain and never appearing in the secular world. Every time he took visitors on a trip, he stopped when he reached the Tiger River. In the 8th month of the 12th year of Yixi era (416), Jin dynasty, he began to feel ill after taking the powder. Six days later, he had fallen gravely ill. Elderly men of virtue bowed on the floor and urged him to drink some fermented soybean wine, but he refused. Again, people urged him to drink some rice wine, but he refused again. They later asked him to drink a mixture of honey and water. Experts in the Buddhist precepts were ordered to go through a book and confirm whether he could drink this. However, before the experts finished reading half the book, Huiyuan died at the age of 83. 自遠卜居廬阜三十餘年，影不出山，跡不入俗。每送客遊履，常以虎溪為界焉。以晉義熙十二年八月初動散，至六日困篤，大德耆年，皆稽顙請飲豉酒，不許，又請飲米汁，不許，又請以蜜和水為漿。乃命律師，令披卷尋文，得飲與不，卷未半而終，春秋八十三矣。(Hui 1992, vol. 6, p. 221)

The text mentioned that Huiyuan suffered from the side effects of cold-food powder. Considering that Huiyuan had talked about his illness to Emperor An of Jin 晉安帝 (382–419) before this, the reason for him to take cold-food powder might have been his old age and serious illness. However, it seemed that cold-food powder did not cure his illness; on the contrary, he died as a result of its side effects. The *Biographies of Eminent Monks* mentioned that "elderly men of virtue bowed on the floor and urged him to drink

fermented soybean wine” (大德耆年，皆稽顙請飲豉酒) (Ibid.). These elderly men of virtue are believed to be people who strictly follow the Buddhist precepts, but they asked Huiyuan to drink some fermented soybean wine. It shows that his ailment had to be treated using fermented soybean wine. Similar prescriptions were mentioned in the *Ishinpō*; for instance, the Liu Song (劉宋 420–479) physician Qin Chengzu 秦承祖 (d.u.) stated:

Fermented soybean wine to treat the effects of taking cold-food powder; it is a cure for the effects that do not fade away such as shivering, heartache, and red and purple lips. Fermented soybean of good quality (two shengs, with no salt added) is used in the prescription. Boil the ingredient until it is fragrant. Take three *sheng* of pure wine and pour it in until boiled. Filter the decoction and take three *sheng* of the warm wine. The sufferer will feel warm and begin to sweat. For sufferers who have a fever and are unable to sweat, they can still drink the wine, but sweating is not necessary. 秦承祖云：療散豉酒方：散發不解或噤寒，或心痛心噤，皆宜服之方。方用：美豉（二升，勿令有鹽）。凡一物，熬令香，以三升清酒，投之一沸，濾取，溫服一升，小自溫暖，令有汗意。若患熱不可取汗者，但服之，不必期令汗也。（Tamba 2011, vol. 19, pp. 418–19）

As early as the period in which the Treatise on Cold Pathogenic Diseases was written, fermented soybean (*dan douchi* 淡豆豉) has been used as a medicine. Accordingly, in a commentary to the *Prescriptions Worth A Thousand Pieces of Gold* it was described as follows:

Bitter, cold, and non-toxic. A cure for cold pathogenic diseases, headache, chills or fever, miasma, irritability, sensation of fullness in the abdomen, asthenic diseases and shortness of breath, as well as pain and coldness in the feet. It can also clear various toxins naturally borne by the six domestic animals. 味苦，寒，無毒。主傷寒，頭痛寒熱，瘴氣惡毒，煩躁滿悶，虛勞喘吸，兩腳疼冷。又殺六畜胎子諸毒。（Sun 2016, vol. 4, p. 96）

This description shows that the effect of the fermented soybean is to clear toxins and relieve restlessness. The wine is used to warm up the body to facilitate the diffusion of toxins. As such, fermented soybean wine was probably a common treatment used to treat the effects of cold-food powder, which is likely why the monks possessed this knowledge. Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 is believed to have been the first to research what happened in the latter stages of Huiyuan’s life. Yu pointed out the following:

Although he was an eminent monk who lived in seclusion, he could not avoid the fear of death or escape from the limitations of flesh and blood, which is why took such a poisonous treatment and died. This shows that cold-food powder was so popular that most people at the time regarded it as a common treatment, to the point that even the respected men of virtue and morality could not see its dangers. 遠以出世高僧，豈尚不能了生死，外形骸，乃競服此至毒之藥以喪其身，足見寒食散之盛行，舉世以為常餌，雖古德高賢有所不悟者矣。（Yu 1997, p. 177）

Even if Huiyuan was one of the most prominent monks of his generation, he fell into the trap of this dangerous substance, not to mention other monks. Similarly, volume eight of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* explicitly mentions that Shi Fadu took cold-food powder:

Shi Fadu was from Huanglong. He became a monk at a young age. He traveled in the north and learned during these travels. He had a comprehensive understanding of Buddhist scriptures and relied on his perseverance to achieve his aspirations. At the end of the Southern Song dynasty, he traveled to the capital. The hermit Ming Sengshao of Qi county, who lived in seclusion in a mountain in the Langya Commandery. Ming Sengshao respected the pure mind and integrity of Du, and treated him like a teacher and a friend. Ming Sengshao renovated his house and built the Qixia Temple for Du to reside in. The same place was once inhabited by some Daoists who hoped to build a Daoist temple there. However, anyone who lived in the place died. Even if the place was renovated into a Buddhist temple, paranormal events continued to happen. Since Du moved into the temple, all demons ceased to make trouble. After living there for more than one

year, Du suddenly heard the sounds of people, horses, drums, and horns. After a short while, a person named Jin Shang sent a card to introduce himself to Du [...] One time, Du took cold-food powder and laid on the floor. He saw Shang coming in from the outside, rubbed his head and feet with his hands, and left afterward. Later, he took a glass to Du, and let him drink the water in the glass. The water was sweet and cold, and the pain of Du disappeared immediately. 釋法度，黃龍人。少出家，遊學北土，備綜衆經，而專以苦節成務。宋末遊於京師，高士齊郡明僧紹，抗跡人外，隱居琅之山。挹度清徽，待以師友之敬。及亡，舍所居山為棲霞精舍，請度居之。先有道士欲以寺地為館，住者輒死，及後為寺，猶多恐動。自度居之，群妖皆息。住經歲許，忽聞人馬鼓角之聲，俄見一人持名紙通度曰：「尚。」度嘗動散寢於地，見尚從外而來，以手摩頭足而去。頃之復來，持一琉璃甌，甌中如水以奉度，味甘而冷，度所苦即聞，其征感若此。(Hui 1992, vol. 8, p. 331)

Shi Fadu felt hot when the effects of the cold-food powder began to appear, and had to mitigate these symptoms by laying on the floor. After Jin Shang helped him, the pain disappeared temporarily, and the “water” he drank was “sweet and cold.” This description is consistent with treatments for the effects of cold-food powder, and also serves to highlight Shi Fadu’s religious sanctity. Shi Fadu’s behavior indicates that he was a monk who took cold-food powder. There were similar cases, including Shi Fahu 釋法護, a monk of the Tang dynasty (618–907):

Shi Fahu, whose original last name was Zhao, was a native of Zhao County [...]. Hu had a deep understanding of books other than Buddhist scriptures and was fond of Daoist sorcery. He was thrifty and abstemious, and had a habit of removing his own clothes and donating them to the poor. He wore simple clothes throughout the whole year, and paid little attention to his appearance. He was respected by noble and powerful people, and knew many excellent treatments. He took cold-food powder and felt uncomfortable and anxious for a few days. His followers were worried and lied to feed him breadcrumbs, telling him that they were only giving him more medicine. Afterward, Hu learned about the truth, and spoke solemnly: “I was deceived, and it was my own fault, but you tricked me into doing something that is against the Dharma. What is your reason for doing this?” He refused to talk to them afterward. This is an example of how headstrong he was. Furthermore, he never ceased to be generous. He only had a bed and a stool in his room. 釋法護，姓趙，本趙郡人。……護善外書，好道術，約已薄食，解衣贍寒，結帶終歲，不飾容貌，而貴勝所重，通方鹹萃。先服石散大發，數日悶亂。門人惶惶，夜投餅渣，詭言他藥。後聞，正色曰：“吾之見欺，當自責耳。然陷師於非道，是何理耶？”遂不與言。其確固例如此也。然好施忘倦，房無圭勺之儲，但一床一蹬而已。(Dao 2014, vol. 13, p. 467)

After taking cold-food powder, Hu was uncomfortable and anxious due to the cold-food powder’s effects. He had become bewildered and irritated, while also feeling hot. Judging from the behavior of these monks, several monks in medieval China took cold-food powder. However, records about this matter are scarce. If this inference is true, it is easier to understand why monks such as Shi Huiyi, Shi Daohong, and Shi Zhibin discussed various ways to treat the effects of cold-food powder. It was very likely that they had witnessed some monks suffering due to the effects of cold-food powder. Therefore, they researched various treatments for such effects. It is also possible that these monks took cold-food powder themselves and had to deal with its effects, which is why they focused on exploring the matter further. Various sources support this inference. For instance, Huangfu Mi, a prominent doctor in the Wei and Jin dynasties, also suffered from the effects of cold-food powder:

He had been seriously ill for a long time. Half of his body was numb, his right foot was smaller than normal, and he had been in this state for nineteen years. Over the past seven years, he has been taking cold-food powder, but in incorrect doses, so he was poisoned and had suffered considerably. In the depths of winter,

he strips naked and eats ice. In the summer, he coughs, feels irritated, and uncomfortable. The symptoms seem identical to warm malaria or some other old pathogenic disease. Additionally, he has developed edema and feels soreness and heaviness in the limbs. 久嬰篤疾，軀半不仁，右腳偏小，十有九載。又服寒食藥，違錯節度，辛苦荼毒，於今七年。隆冬裸袒食冰，當暑煩悶，加以咳逆，或若溫瘧，或類傷寒，浮氣流腫，四肢酸重。(Fang 1974, vol. 51, p. 1415)

Suffering from these symptoms was an important motivation for Huangfu Mi to develop considerable medical skills. It can also be inferred that the abovementioned monks themselves suffered from the side effects of cold-food powder, and this why they were keen on treating the condition.

6. Conclusions

This research revealed that there were many physician-monks in the Early Medieval China, some of whom were especially prominent. However, due to the lack of information, the medical experience of most of these physician-monks is unclear to us. Our knowledge of how these monks practiced medicine comes from scattered records. This paper's analysis shows that Zhi Facun and Sengshen were known to possess a profound understanding of Chinese medicine, as evidenced by their medical skills, at least in the recorded histories. The author speculates that they might have been considerably more proficient than other physicians in syndrome differentiation, otherwise their skills in curing beriberi would not have been so widely recognized during their time. If this inference is true, where did they learn such methods? Was such knowledge related to their status as monks? Were their skills owed to their understanding of foreign medicine? These questions seem to be difficult to investigate now, but reviewing their findings provides us with valuable insights. Throughout the history of Imperial China, when foreign culture flooded the region, monks might have been in close contact with foreign cultures and probably integrated foreign medical skills into their own knowledge of Chinese medicine; in this way, they may have become more precise in syndrome differentiation, which allowed them to develop more effective treatments. In addition, some well-known physician-monks (such as Sengshen and Monk Yang) recorded in medical literature are generally introduced with minimal details. This shows that for the medical documentaries in antiquity and the early medieval period, they were more concerned about the medical practices of physicians, but less interested in their own experience or identity. Therefore, I would surmise that physician-monks could only have been recognized by the wider medical community based on their proficiencies in the medical arts.

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Notes

- ¹ *sheyi sengren* refer to those monks who have mastered medical technology. In the Early Medieval China, they may be the Indian or Western Regions monks, or Chinese monks. The *sheyi sengren* referred to in this paper are those who have exact medical behaviors, or left medical prescriptions and specific medical practices.
- ² This is a conceptual approach in which theories, diagnosis methods, and treatment methods in traditional Chinese medicine are used to connect to the clinical practice, including four basic contents in the whole process of diagnosis and treatment. Theory specifically refers to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, while method refers to diagnosis and treatment methods.
- ³ Even in the Early Medieval China, there were many monks who were very familiar with traditional Chinese medicine. They left behind many effective prescriptions for later generations. From some medical literature, we can see their specific medical practice.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 169: 至年十六出家，事蘭公為弟子。學業高明，內外該覽。善方藥，美書筭，洞諳殊俗，尤巧談論。
- ⁵ *Jiuhou* is the method of pulse diagnosis in traditional Chinese medicine. The head, upper limbs and lower limbs are divided into three parts, namely, Tian 天, Di 地 and Ren 人, which are combined into nine periods; the cunkou pulse method is divided into Cun 寸, Guan 關 and Chi 尺.

- 6 Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 167–68: 于法開，不知何許人。事蘭公為弟子，深思孤發，獨見言表。善《放光》及《法華》，又祖述耆婆，妙通醫法。嘗乞食投主人家，值婦人在草危急，衆治不驗，舉家遑擾。開曰：“此易治耳。”主人正宰羊，欲為淫祀，開令先取少肉為羹，進竟，因氣針之，須臾羊膜裏兒而出。升平五年孝宗有疾，開視脈，知不起，不肯復入，康獻後令曰：“帝小不佳，昨呼於公視脈，互到門不前，種種辭憚，宜收付廷尉。”俄而帝崩，獲免。遷刻石城。……或問：“法師高明剛簡，何以醫術經懷？”答曰：“明六度以除四魔之病，調九候以療風寒之疾，自利利人，不亦可乎。”年六十卒於山寺。孫綽為之目曰：“才辯縱橫，以數術弘教，其在開公乎。”
- 7 Jivaka was a famous doctor considered to be divine in ancient India. Plenty of studies have been conducted to study his character, including (Chen 2005); *idem*, (Chen 2013; Wang 2016; Huang 2003).
- 8 (Sun 1998, vol. 26, p. 410): 女子逆產足出，針足太陰入三分，足入乃出針，穴在內踝後白肉際陷骨宛宛中。
- 9 Ibid.: 橫產手出，針太沖入三分，急補百息，去足大指奇一寸。胞衣不出，針足太陽入四寸，在外踝後一寸宛宛中。……產難、月水不禁、橫生胎動，皆針三陰交。
- 10 Ibid., vol. 9, p. 364: 時有痼疾世莫能治者，澄為醫療，應時瘳損。陰施默益者，不可勝記。
- 11 Ibid., vol. 9, p. 349: 時太子石邃有二子在襄國，澄語邃曰：“小阿彌比當得疾，可往迎之。”邃即馳信往視，果已得病。大醫殷騰及外國道士自言能治，澄告弟子法雅曰：“正使聖人復出，不愈此病，況此等乎？”後三日果死。
- 12 Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔, *Yiyuan* 異苑 [Garden of Extraordinary Things], *juan 6* (edition of Wenyuange Shiku quanshu 文淵閣《四庫全書》) [Complete Library of the Four Treasuries of the Belvedere of Literary Profundity; hereafter SKQS] (Liu): 沙門有支法存者，本自胡人，生長廣州，妙善醫術，遂成巨富。有八尺髡，光彩耀目，作百種形象；又有沈香八尺板林，居常香馥。太原王琰（一作談）為廣州刺史，大兒邵之屢求二物，法存不與，王因狀法存豪縱，乃殺而籍沒家財焉。法存死後，形見於府內，輒打闔下鼓，似若稱冤，如此經日，王尋得病，恒見法存守之，少時遂亡。邵之比至揚都，亦喪。 *Yiyuan* was written in Liu Song Dynasty of the Southern Dynasty. It is a collection of fantastic stories.
- 13 Zhang Gao 張皋, *Yishuo* 醫說 [About Medicine], *juan 1* (SKQS edition) (Zhang 1224). It is noted that this was from the preface 序 to the *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold* (*Qianjin fang* 千金方).
- 14 syndrome differentiation (*bian zheng* 辯證) is a comprehensive analysis of the symptoms and signs of patients through the basic theory of traditional Chinese medicine, such as four diagnostic methods, eight principles, viscera, etiology and pathogenesis, to identify what kind of disease and syndrome.
- 15 Zhang Zhongjing (about 150~154~about 215~219), a famous medical scientist, was born in Nanyang 南陽 (Henan 河南 Province) at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was honored as “Medical Saints” (*yisheng* 醫聖) by later generations. Zhang Zhongjing extensively collected medical prescriptions and wrote the masterpiece *Treatise on Febrile Diseases and Miscellaneous Diseases* (*shanghanzabinglun* 傷寒雜病論) handed down from ancient times. The principle of “treatment based on syndrome differentiation” (*bianzhenglunzhi* 辨證論治) established by it is the basic clinical principle of Traditional Chinese Medicine.
- 16 Zhong Jingzhi’s Xuming decoction is recorded in the *Jinkui yaolie fang lun* 金匱要略方論 [Commentary on the Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet] edited by Lin Yi 林億 of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). The decoction is documented in the book as a supplemental prescription. Based on the investigation in modern times, this is confirmed to be a decoction designed by Zhang Zhongjing. For the relevant investigation, refer to (Mi 2004, p. 3).
- 17 Li, Fangl 李昉, *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 [Readings of the Taiping Era], *juan 724* (SKQS edition) (Li).
- 18 Forty volumes of *Waitaimiyao* were written by Wang Tao 王焘 (670–755), a famous medical scientist in the Tang Dynasty. The recorded materials, from the Pre-Qin Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, collected a wide range of medical prescriptions that could be seen at that time. In particular, other documents are quoted to note the source in detail, and many lost documents are preserved. It not only has clinical practical value comparable to *Qianjin Fang* 千金方, but also has high philological value, which is a famous clinical reference book in the history of traditional Chinese medicine.
- 19 Modern scholars of Traditional Chinese Medicine formulae generally believe that this prescription originates from *Neiwai shang bianhuo lun* 內外傷辨惑論 [Clarifying Doubts about Damage from Internal and External Causes] penned by Li Dongyuan 李東垣 (1180–1251) of the Jin dynasty. See (Chen 2013, p. 614). According to Li Dongyuan, this prescription “uses the sweetness of ginseng to benefit *qi*; uses the bitterness and cold of Ophiopogon japonicus to purge heat and boost the source of water; uses the sourness of Chinese magnoliavine fruit to eliminate dry metal” (Li Dongyuan, *Neiwai shang bianhuo lun*, *juan 2*, SKQS edition, (Li 1247)).
- 20 (Li 2011, vol. 50, p. 1797): [時珍曰] 千金、外臺、深師諸方，治腎虛勞損，消渴腳氣，有腎瀝湯方甚多，皆用羊腎煮湯煎藥。蓋用為引導，各從其類也。
- 21 (Hui 1992, vol. 7, p. 266): 釋慧義，姓梁，北地人，少出家。風格秀舉，志業強正。初遊學於彭、宋之間，備通經義。
- 22 (Yao 1937, vol. 37, p. 603): 《高僧傳》不言有是書，不知是否即此慧義。然慧皎傳，例於諸僧所撰外學之書，多從其略，或為其略而不載焉。
- 23 Cao Xi 曹翕 was a medical scientist in the Cao Wei and Western Jin Dynasty. Unknown date of birth and death. A native of Qiaoxian 譙縣 (now Bozhou 亳州, Anhui 安徽 Province), he was the son of Cao Hui 曹徽, the Dongpingwang 東平王, Cao Wei. In the third year of Zhengshi 正始 (242), Cao Hui died and succeeded his heirs. Enter the Western Jin Dynasty, seal Lin Qiu Gong 廩丘公. He once wrote “*Jie Hanshisang Fang* 解寒食散方” and “*Huangdi Mingtang Yan'cerentu* 黃帝明堂偃側人圖”, all of which were lost.
- 24 (Tamba 2011, vol. 19, p. 395). *Ishinpō*, Medical Heart Prescription, a comprehensive medical literature. Thirty volumes. Japan. Tamba Yasuyori (912–995) wrote it in 982. This book is compiled and sorted out a variety of medical books before Tang Dynasty

in China. The contents include medical theory and clinical practice of various departments. The source of each document in the book is recorded so that readers can verify it, so the value of the document is very high. There are many ancient books that have disappeared before Tang Dynasty, but they can be compiled from *Ishinpō*. The whole book is rich in cited materials, and it is an important work to study Chinese medical literature before Tang Dynasty.

- 25 There are five quotations from *Pangshi lun* in *Ishinpō*, which can be found in the special volume of “*Fu Shi* 服石” in Volume 19 and Volume 20. Pangshi 龐氏’s name is unknown, and we do not know which documents are published in these five lost essays. However, from the content analysis of the lost essays, it comes from Pangshi’s monograph “*Fu Shi*”. 《醫心方》引用《龐氏論》有五處，見於卷十九、卷二十“服石”專卷中。按龐氏其名無考，此五處佚文亦不知所出何書，但從佚文內容分析，當出自龐氏的“服石”專著中。(Ibid., appendix, p. 718).
- 26 According to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, it is considered that the *yangqi* 陽氣 of nourishing viscera inside and filling skin outside is physiological fire (*huo* 火), which is called “less fire (*shaohuo* 少火)”; If *yangqi* is too hyperactive and fiery is endogenous, it will become a pathological “fire”, which is called “strong fire (*zhuanghuo* 壯火)”. This kind of excessive fire can increase the consumption of substances, so that it hurts *yin* 陰 and consumes *qi*, which is called “strong fire reduces *qi*”.

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Article

Seeing the Light Again: A Study of Buddhist Ophthalmology in the Tang Dynasty

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Abstract: Buddhist culture places a high priority on the eyes. The restoration of light through the treatment of eye conditions represents the dispelling of the illusion of the transmigratory worlds and the attainment of enlightenment. The treatment of eye disorders was a difficult medical issue that involved numerous prescriptions, procedures, and mantras in the Tang Dynasty medicine. It was not simply a metaphor for wisdom. The narrative of Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772–846) fighting against eye diseases highlights the value of the golden scalpel technique (*jinbi shu* 金篦術) and medical texts attributed to Ngārjuna Bodhisattva (Longshu 龍樹), which profoundly affected Chinese medicine on treating the eyes throughout the Tang Dynasty. Furthermore, the tale of Li Shangyin's 李商隱 (813–858) eyes being treated by Zhixuan 知玄 can only be fully explored within the context of the Esoteric Buddhism, where mandalas, prescriptions, rituals, and *dhāraṇīs* are frequently used in conjunction with eye care. The case of Qin Minghe 秦鳴鶴, however, suggests that ophthalmology practiced by Buddhists may become more popular as a result of religious competition.

Keywords: Buddhist ophthalmology; golden scalpel technique; Esoteric Buddhism

1. Introduction

Buddhist culture places a lot of emphasis on the eyes. The theory of five eyes (*wuyan* 五眼, *pañca-cakṣuṃṣi*) puts eyes in five categories, which are the physical eye (*rouyan* 肉眼, *māṃṣa-cakṣus*), the heavenly eye (*tianyan* 天眼, *divya-cakṣus*), the (holy) wisdom eye (*huiyan* 慧眼, *prajñā-cakṣus*), the Dharma eye (*fayan* 法眼, *dharmā-cakṣus*) and the Buddha eye (*foyan* 佛眼, *buddha-cakṣus*) (T30. 1579. 598a13–14, for all sutras cited from Tripitaka (T) in this article, see (Takakusu and Watanbe [1924] 1932)). This is not to suggest that the physical eye is not significant, but rather in order to see further and enter larger and deeper worlds, one must overcome the constraints of the physical eye. The cornerstone of everything, however, is actually the eye's capacity for observation.

Therefore, giving up one's eyes becomes a brave deed, a representation of the Bodhisattva's compassionate sacrifice of his body, because eyes are so valuable and unique. One of the most famous stories can be found in the 33rd tale from *Zhuanji baiyuan jing* 撰集百緣經 (*Avadānaśataka*) attributed to Zhiqian 支謙, in which the benevolent King Śivi (*shipi wang* 尸毗王) cuts his eyes out to a hungry vulture transformed from Indra (Śakra) (T. 200.4.218c16–219b17). Additionally, in *juan* 6 of *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (*The Sutra of the Wise and Foolish*), it tells the story of the Quick-eyed King (Sudhīra, *kuaimu wang* 快目王) taking his eyes to give as alms (T04. 202. 390b16–392c24). These tales highlight one of the six Buddhist precepts while simultaneously conveying the notion that the actual eye can be removed. Additionally, giving up one's eyes is one of the most famous actions in the gift-of-the-body *jātakas* and *avadāna* stories in Buddhist literature (Ohnuma 2006, pp. 40–48).

To acquire a higher degree of visual acuity, somehow the physical eye can be removed. Another famous story is the blind turtle encountering a hole in a wood (*mang gui fumu* 盲龟浮木). The blind turtle could not see anything, and every one hundred years, he comes to the surface of the sea. Meanwhile, there is wood with a hole drifting away with the waves in the endless ocean. Yet, somehow, one time when the turtle comes out, his head

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fits the hole in the wood (T02. 99, p. 108c6-20). On its face, the tale is about the rarity of human life and encountering Buddhism. However, at a deeper level of the story, the blind turtle naturally symbolizes those who have not heard of Buddhism. In Buddhist teachings, blindness is often used to refer to sentient beings who have not yet attained enlightenment. Additionally, the blind (*mang* 盲), the darkness (*ming* 冥), and eye disease (*yi* 翳) are often used to describe the cover of the wisdom of the ignorant sentient beings in Buddhist texts. As stated in the *Chuyaojing* 出曜經, one can be deeply shadowed by the great darkness (*shenbi youming* 深蔽幽冥) and it is like someone walks in the dark night and could not see any color or a blind person could not distinguish the sky and earth. Additionally, the great darkness refers to the ignorance that covers human being's physical form without any space left. Therefore, one should seek the light of wisdom (T04. 212. 612a11-18). That is to say, even if sentient beings have eyes and ears, if they do not know the Dharma and cannot distinguish between good and evil, they will still be considered blind and ignorant.

Furthermore, the Buddha and Bodhisattvas are considered as great healing kings who can cure physical ailments and open up wisdom for liberation. In Esoteric Buddhism (*mi-jiao* 密教 or Tantrims), *dhāranīs*, precepts and rituals are attributed to certain deities to cure eye related diseases. Not only are the physical eyes important, people should pursue the wisdom eye. With the wisdom eye, one can see beyond the realm of ordinary senses and gain an understanding of the true nature of reality. The role of the Bodhisattva is to help all beings achieve this state of wisdom, including those who are blind and ignorant.

With this cultural background, it is not difficult to see that Buddhist emphases on the eyes, along with their medical skills for the eye, come from Indian medical culture which was passed on to China. Medicine (*yingfang ming* 醫方明, *cikitsā-vidyā*) is one of the five sciences (*wuming* 五明, *pañca-vidyāin*) in India, under which Buddhist medicine was highly developed. The *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) contains many stories of monks with medical skills curing people of illness (see Li 2022, pp. 296–325). Yu Fakai 于法開, Zhi Facun 支法存, Sengshen 僧深, and Shi Daohong 釋道洪 possessed many medical skills and some are specialized in certain disease such as beriberi (*jiaoqi bing* 腳氣病) (Wang 2022, pp. 8–11). Additionally, Shan Daokai 單道開 (d.u.) of Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420) is good at curing eye-related disease (*Yanji* 眼疾). Shitao 石鞮 (?–348, the fifth son of Shihu 石虎 [295–349, the third Emperor of Later Zhao 後趙 (319–351)]) came to him to cure his eyes (T50. 2059. 387b2-c14). Throughout the Tang Dynasty, various Buddhist medicinal procedures were refined, and numerous prescriptions found their way into the medical literature represented by Sun Simiao's 孫思邈 (541–682) *Qianjin Fang* 千金方 (*Thousand Golden Prescriptions*) and Wang Tang's *Waitai miyao* 外臺秘要 (*Secret Essentials of an Official*). Among the various Buddhist medical techniques, the treatment of ophthalmic diseases was one of the most prominent ones in the Tang Dynasty.

Treating the eye is one of the most important signature aspects of Buddhist medical history, especially in the Tang Dynasty, which has been discussed by many researchers. Fang Dingya 房定亞 and others have discussed the influence of Indian medical practice on Chinese history, based on *Waitai miyao*, from four aspects: basic medical theory, ancient prescription formulas, ophthalmology, and herbal medicine. They consistently adhere to the principle of herbal medicine in the field of prescription formulation, using it as a means to promote Buddhism (Fang et al. 1984, pp. 68–73). Gou Lijun 苟利軍 conducted a comprehensive study of the Tang Dynasty medicine from three angles: etiology, treatment methods, and prescription formulas, as reviewed in his book *Tangdai fojiao yixue yanjiu* 唐代佛教醫學研究 (*Research on Tang Dynasty Buddhist Medicine*). In Ch. 3, Section 4, he specifically discusses ophthalmology and conducts analysis and research on various eye diseases treated with Buddhist medicine during the Tang Dynasty, such as cataracts, pterygium, glaucoma, and conjunctivitis (see Gou 2019, pp. 95–104). Mou Honglin 牟洪林 gives a brief explanation of the surgical treatment of cataracts in his essay, "A Brief History of Acupuncture Treatment for Eye Disorders" (see Mou 1992, pp. 34–38). Zhu Jianping 朱建平 and others argue that *Qian jin fang* made an immortal contribution to the compilation and preservation of ancient medical texts and the integration of Chinese medicinal

experience. This composition can be regarded as the epitome of medical formulas and books in the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, this work also introduces a large amount of foreign medical knowledge, especially from India (see Zhu 1999, pp. 220–22). Liang Lingjun 梁玲君 and Li Liangsong 李良松, respectively, discuss how Buddhism's understanding of the Four Elements and their combination with the Five Elements of traditional Chinese medicine contribute to the diversity of treatment methods, clarifying the achievements of Buddhist medicine in treating eye diseases and its driving role in medical development (see Liang and Li 2017, pp. 36–38). Ji Xianlin 季羨林 contends that Indian ophthalmology, which was highly developed and was widely used in China in the Tang Dynasty to treat eye disorders, had a significant influence on ancient Chinese medicine. Then, he discusses Qin Minghe's 秦鳴鶴 identity and medical abilities (Ji 1994, pp. 555–60). More information about the precise substance of Persian and Chinese ophthalmic techniques has been uncovered by Chen Ming 陳明. He highlights the importance of Buddhist ophthalmology and provides a more detailed analysis of materials of ophthalmic in Esoteric Buddhism (Chen 2017, pp. 67–89). C. Pierce Salguero did an excellent job on demonstrate on how Indian Buddhist medical terminology, doctrines, and metaphors were carried to China as part and parcel of the transmission of the philosophies and practices of the religion, and he exam the technique of golden lancet/scalpel (Salguero 2014, p. 130).

However, there is still room for further discussion in this study. To start with, these researchers do not actually really go into specifics of cases, so they fail to look at the significance of ophthalmic treatment stories on a narrative level. Secondly, a deeper investigation of Buddhist ophthalmology in Esoteric tradition and substance is warranted. It has been discovered that the propagation of Esoteric Buddhist classics, together with mantras, rituals, and other intricate religious activities, expanded ophthalmic therapy methods. Thirdly, and most significantly, it is crucial to take into account how Buddhism treated ophthalmology in Tang-era China in the context of interfaith conflict and at all social strata. For instance, the conflicting opinions of modern scholars on the identity of Qin Minghe himself suggest that ophthalmology became a key tool for religious competition in the Tang Dynasty and that Buddhism undoubtedly triumphed, gaining greater social influence and spreading over a wide area.

This thesis examines the most significant aspects of ophthalmology in the Tang dynasty, both in terms of technical and medicinal writings, starting with an analysis of the example of Bai Juyi. It continues by using Li Shangyin from the Tang dynasty and the recent changes in the Song dynasty to explain the cultural phenomenon of chanting mantras, in which the various components of Tantra pertaining to the eye are methodically explored. Finally, the historical context of eye doctors of different religions is discussed to situate Buddhist ophthalmology, and the cultural elements that shape the narratives of ophthalmologists with various identities are addressed.

2. The Case of Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846)

2.1. Bai Juyi's Eye Disease

Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, struggled with eye diseases throughout his life. He was known for his remarkable achievements in literature and his dedication to studying, even from a young age. As he writes in his poem *Yan'an* 眼暗 (*My Eyes Grow Dim*) in 814, he traced his eye disease back to the early days of studying, as his excessive reading caused him to develop dizziness and eye diseases as he grew older. He states that his eyes are similar to unpolished mirrors and all the medicine fails (Bai 2006, p. 1117).

Throughout his years, Bai Juyi's works described his blurred vision and the pain he experienced. In the seventh month of the tenth year of the Yuanhe Period 元和十年 (815), 44 years old Bai Juyi wrote a letter/poem to his friend, Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831). It was entitled *Zhouzhou du yuanjiu shi* 舟中讀元九詩 '*Reading Yuan Zhen's poem on a Boat*'. He said that after reading Yuan's poems and his eyes hurt, and he put off the light, feeling like he was sitting in the dark. The last sentence conveys the feeling of drifting in the wind and

rain with nothing to rely on. It describes the headwind and the waves against his boat. (Bai 2006, p. 1224) His eye condition probably made it even more uncomfortable with the sense of a hopeless future as he states that the wind blows and waves beat against his boat, which perfectly captures his emotional condition at the moment.

Out of the 2803 preserved poems Bai Juyi wrote, approximately 100 are closely related to medications. In some of these poems, he claimed that writing helped him cope with his illness, and some of these poems are about self-encouragement after his medical treatment failed (see Ma 2020, p. 1008). Of his many poems on his eye disease, two of them are most cited in the one entitled *Yanbing Ershou* 眼病二首 (Two Poems on Eye Disease) which goes as follows:

A thousand flakes of snow are scattered in the air, and a veil is cast over everything. Even when it's clear on a sunny day, it's like looking through a fog; it's not spring, yet I see flowers as well. 散亂空中千片雪，蒙籠物上一重紗。縱逢晴景如看霧，不是春天亦見花。

All (my) doctors advise me to stop drinking first, and most of my monastic friends ask me to quit my official positions. On my desk randomly lies *Nāgārjuna's Treatise*, while in my boxes, the pills of cassia seed are made but not used. 醫師盡勸先停酒，道侶多教早罷官。案上謾鋪龍樹論，盒中虛撚決明丸。(Bai 2006, p. 1923)

These two poems on Eye Diseases depict the snowflakes in the air similar to veils, causing visions to remain hazy. In the first poem, it uses pans to connect the snow, fog, and flowers to the visual blurring. This self-deprecating way of adapting the beautiful scenes and images in early Spring to his eye disease is almost humorous, trying to demote the painful fact that his vision is getting worse. In the second poem, he knows clearly that it is alcohol and hard work that prevent him from getting better, yet he does not do anything about it. Even though all the doctors, masters, and monastic friends suggest him to quit drinking and his official job, he still ignores them. Doctors and his monastic friends are the same people whom *yishi* (doctors) and *daolü* (monastic friends) are referred to in this context. The first two phrases do not say whether the doctors are Taoist monks or Buddhist monks, but *Longshu lun* (*Nāgārjuna's Treatise*) implies that they are Buddhist monks or at least Bai Juyi received medical care from people with a Buddhist background. This might be the book *Michuan yanke longmu lun* 秘傳眼科龍木眼論 (*Longmu* (*Nāgārjuna*) *Secret Treatise on the Eyes*) or medicine attributed to Longshu (*Nāgārjuna*, aka Longmu).

However, the phrase *manpu* 謾鋪 highlights that the medical books are lying on the desk randomly, which means he must read them a lot of times, yet they have not helped him (or he did not read them enough as he had already given up), so he tosses them around. *Jueming wan* is a common pill for eye disease, *nian* is to twist and put the cassia seed together into a pill with one's fingers, yet *xunian* means all of his efforts are in vain because he is unable to stop drinking or leave his employment.

Despite knowing that drinking alcohol would exacerbate his eye issues, Bai Juyi remains an alcoholic, explaining that wine brings him happiness, regardless of the physical consequences. At the same time, doctors warn him that abstaining from alcohol is critical in protecting his liver, which affects his eye health significantly. Bai Juyi's daily life revolves around consuming wine and celebrating the moment without caring about the long-term effects.

His eye conditions becomes worse as he wrote in *Bngzhong kan jing zeng zhu daolü* 病中看經贈諸道侶 (*Reading the Sutra in Sickness, A Poem for all My Monastic Companions*). Within this poem, Bai Juyi not only depicts the unpleasant physical conditions including dim sight and rheumatism (or gout, *zufeng* 足風), but he also alludes to his employment of specific treatments that have ultimately proven futile. Notably, the golden scalpel technique (*jimbi* 金篦)—a critical Buddhist therapeutic approach for cataracts and related eye maladies—holds particular significance within the text. It may be posited that Bai Juyi's underlying rationale for taking up residence in the temple was to pursue remedies for his ocular concerns (as well as rheumatism or gout). Nevertheless, his efforts prove to be

fruitless: even with medicinal and lithic interventions proving insufficient. He persists in seeking solace from Buddhism, complete with recitation of Buddhist sutras and conversion to the faith. Importantly, the poem also furnishes readers with insight into Bai Juyi's more burdensome life experiences. The stanza wherein he refers to having no heir (*wuzi* 無子) to accompany him aside from his wife speaks to the premature passing of his son, and this undoubtedly colors Bai Juyi's sentiments concerning the various ailments that plague his transient existence (Bai 2006, p. 2773). He referred the monastery as cao'an 草庵 (a thatched hut or place of retreat [Skt. *kuṭi*, *kuṭikā*] which echoes the story in Chapter Four of *Fahuajing* 法華經 (*The Lotus Sutra*) where a child takes his father to a thatched hut (T09. 262. 16b8-19a11).

In most of his poems related to eye disease, he does not specify the names of the monks, yet it is not difficult to conclude that he receives treatment from various monks in different temples. This indicates that treating eye disease in a monastery is common at this time. It is worth highlighting that Bai Juyi's visual impairments were intimately linked to his proximity to Buddhism, and that the golden scalpel and Nāgārjuna's medical books and technique referenced in the work represent two of the most pivotal threads comprising Tang dynasty Buddhist medical interventions for ocular diseases.

2.2. *Jipi* (Bi) *Shu* 金鉈 (篋) 術 (*Adamantine Scalpel Technique*) or *Jinzhen* *Bozhang* *Shu* 金針撥障術 (*The Technique of Golden Needle Moves Away the Eye-Shield*)

2.2.1. The Metaphor in Nirvāṇa Sutra

Jinpi 金鉈 or *Jinbi* 金篋 refers to a *jingangpi* 金剛鉈 (Adamantine scalpel) which is also the title of the book by Zhanran 湛然 (711–782) (*Jingang pi lun* 金剛鉈論 (*Adamantine Scalpel Treatise*), one *juan*, T 1932). As a metaphor for reawakening deluded beings' thoughts, the term "*Jinpi*" relates to the surgical knife used by a skilled doctor who is able to remove cataracts from blind people's eyes. Without this context, the word *jinpi* 金鉈 in Chinese might mislead the readers to think it is a special tool made of metal or in the color of gold, stressing its rareness or exquisite craftsmanship. Despite the fact that *Jinbi* is short for *Jingangbi*, many translators simply translate it as "golden scalpel" or "golden needle".

One of the earliest texts on this tool for cataract-like eye disease can be found in the eighth *juan* of the *Niepan jing* 涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*), which records a dialogue between the Bodhisattva Kashyapa and the Buddha. Kashyapa asks the Buddha why the Buddha nature (*foxing* 佛性) is very profound and difficult to enter into. The Buddha then tells a story about how a blind person visits a skilled doctor (*liangyi* 良醫) in order to cure his eyes. This doctor with exquisite technique scrapes off his cornea with a golden arrow-like tool (*jipin* 金鉈). Then, the doctor asks him if he could see, but the blind person still cannot see anything. In the end, all the Bodhisattvas say that countless Bodhisattvas cannot even see the Buddha nature, let alone ordinary sentient beings. Finally, the Bodhisattvas gradually realize the true meaning of "emptiness" during the process of the Buddha's teachings, and see the Buddha nature, while the blind man also gains enlightenment by meditating, understanding the true meaning of emptiness, and obtaining enlightenment (T12. 374. 411c20–412a17).

This story illustrates the intricate nature of the Buddha nature and its difficulty in understanding. Similar to a blind person struggling to see, many Bodhisattvas and sentient beings tirelessly pursue spiritual awakening but remain unable to grasp the deeper essence of the Buddha nature.

Through the use of analogies that help to explain the concept of "emptiness," the Bodhisattvas ultimately gain insight into the true essence of the Buddha nature and attain enlightenment. Likewise, through meditation, the blind man comes to understand the true nature of emptiness and achieves spiritual illumination. Overall, the use of the golden scalpel to treat eye diseases is recognized as an essential method in early Buddhist medicine, reflecting not only the technical expertise of practitioners but also the deep-seated philosophical beliefs underlying Buddhist teachings.

This story highlights the prevalence of using an adamantine scalpel to treat eye ailments in ancient India. It emphasizes the idea that gaining enlightenment or illumination requires transcending the physical senses and comprehending abstract concepts such as the nature of emptiness and the Buddha nature, which are significant tenets of Buddhist philosophy. The notion and practice of using a golden tool to treat eye conditions has been documented in various works of Buddhist literature. Scholars have attributed its importance to the overall system of Buddhist healthcare. One of the earliest written records of this kind of treatment appears in the *Zhoushu* 周書 (*The Book of (Northern) Zhou Dynasty* (557–581), compiled from 629 to 636 by Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (583–666)), where the narrative is portrayed in a more mystical manner. However, it has provided more concrete examples of how this concept of using the adamantine scalpel for eye disease was applied in Buddhist medical practices.

2.2.2. Zhang Yuan's 張元 (d.u.) Story

The earliest records of to whom this technique was applied can be traced back to Lady Fei 費太妃 (d.u.), the birth mother of Xiao Hui 蕭恢 (476–526). Xiao Hui is the younger brother of Emperor Wudi 梁武帝 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍 464–549, ruled 502–549) in the Southern Liang Dynasty (502–557). When Lady Fei could not see, a master from the North called Huilong 慧龍 (d.u.) cured her.

Overall, the story is about Xiao Hui's filial respect for his mother, and the Huineng mentioned is most likely a Buddhist monk from the Northern Dynasty. In particular, when he uses the needle to treat eye disease, a holy monk appears in the air. Who the holy monk was is not explained, but this magical detail implies that Huineng learned this technique from a Buddhist monk (see Yao 1973, p. 350). Additionally, this is not the only case where such a technique is mentioned in the Six Dynasties. Another famous story comes from the biography of Zhang Yuan in *Zhoushu*, in which Zhang Yuan's grandfather is treated by *jinpi* in a dream of Zhang Yuan.

By the time Zhang Yuan was sixteen, his grandfather had been blind for three years. Zhang Yuan had been wailing and grieving, reciting Buddhist sutras day and night, bowing and praying for his grandfather's well-being. Later, when he recited the Medicine Master Sutra and saw the words "the blind will regain their sight", he invited seven monks, lit seven lamps, and recited the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* for seven days and seven nights as a creedal statement. Each time he says, "O Master of gods and men (*tian ren shi* 天人師, *śāstā devamanusyānām*)! As a grandson, I (Yuan) was unfilial and made my grandfather blind. Now with light shining universally in the Dharma world, hoping that my grandfather's eyes will see the light, I am willing to be blind instead of him." After repeating this routine for seven days, Zhang Yuan dreams at night of an old man who treats his grandfather's eyes with a golden scalpel. He told Yuan, "You shall not be sad. Your grandfather's eyes will be good after three days." Yuan was extremely happy in his dream, then he wakes up suddenly, and Zhang Yuan tells the family members one by one. After three days, his grandfather do regain his sight. 及元年十六，其祖喪明三年，元恒憂泣，晝夜讀佛經，禮拜以祈福祐。後讀藥師經，見盲者得視之言，遂請七僧，然七燈，七日七夜，轉藥師經行道。每言：“天人師乎！元為孫不孝，使祖喪明。今以燈光普施法界，願祖目見明，元求代闇。”如此經七日。其夜，夢見一老公，以金鑿治其祖目。謂元曰：“勿憂悲也，三日之後，汝祖目必差。”元於夢中喜躍，遂即驚覺，乃遍告家人。居三日，祖果目明。(see Linghu 1971, p. 833).

Although this account is canonized in the official historical records, it is a complex miracle tale conveying several multifaceted and nuanced details. There are several elements of significance worth discussing.

Firstly, the narrative underscores the centrality of faith in Buddhism as represented by the Medicine Buddha. This theme aligns with prevailing medieval Buddhist practices, most notably prevalent within the Six Dynasties period in China. The *Yaoshijing* 藥師經

(*The Medicine Buddha Sutra*) mentioned here is an abbreviated title for the *Yaoshi liuliguang rulai benyuan gongde jing* 藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經 (*Original Vows of the Medicine-Master Tathāgata of Lapis Light*, see T450.14.404–409; Birnbaum 1979, pp. 173–217). However, in the ritual of treating blindness, Zhang Yuan calls for the help of *tian ren shi* which is normally the name of the Buddha. This might have two explanations, the first one is that *tian ren shi* here refers to the Medicine Buddha, or this ritual is under the name of the Buddha, or at least a combination of these two.

Secondly, the motivations of the characters in this story bear distinctive Chinese features, wherein the principal objective of their religious devotion centers around the imperative of manifesting filial piety to the grandfather.

Thirdly, although the technological means of treatment were concrete and efficacious, given the use of a golden scalpel to scrape the eyes, the telltale mode of expression is through an enigmatic and mystical storyline anchored around healing that occurs seemingly in a dream-like state. The biography of Zhu Fayi 竺法義 in *Gaosengzhuan*, tells the story of him being cured by Guanyin 觀音 (Avalokiteśvara). In the second year of Xian'an 咸安二年 (372), he suddenly feels sick in his heart, so he develops the practice of chanting Avalokiteśvara, and then he dreams that a man appears in his dream and “broke his abdomen and washed his intestines” (see T.50.2059.350c16-26). The story of Dao Tai 道泰, who was ill, chants Avalokiteśvara and then dreams of Avalokiteśvara at night, sweating with joy, and is cured when he wakes up (see Dong 2002, p. 41). *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* in the Tang Dynasty, also contains two stories of people being cured in a dream. However, instead of focusing on Guanyin, it places more of an emphasis on Moonlight¹ (T.50.2060.572a4-7) and Moonlight Bodhisattva (T50. 2060. 585b16-22).²

In sum, this account offers valuable insights into salient aspects of medieval Buddhism, including the cardinal role of faith as a critical component of spiritual practices, the cultural significance of filial piety within Chinese traditions, and the deployment of esoteric tales to foster comprehension of religious dogmas despite the utilization of tangible surgical methodologies.

2.2.3. *Jinbi* in Tang Poetry

The stories of Huineng and Zhang Yuan, along with Ba Juyi's poems, suggest that the golden scalpel technique for treating eye disease was introduced to China in the Northern and Southern Dynasties and continues to benefit people from the Tang Dynasty. Other poets of the Tang dynasty also mentioned *jinbi*; however, it is used in a more metaphorical sense as a tool to pursue the wisdom of the Buddha. Apart from the two poems by Bai Juyi, there are five poems that mention *jinbi* in *Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩 (*The Complete Collection of Tang Period Poems*).³ Two are by Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) (Peng 1960, pp. 2316, 2512), two by Liu Yuxi (Peng 1960, pp. 4028, 4126) and one by Li Shangyin (Peng 1960, p. 6147).

In Du Fu's *Ye wengong shangfang* 謁文公上方 (*Paying My Respects at the Monastery of His Reverence Wen*), he describes the beautiful environment of the mountain when he visits a monk, and expresses his worship towards *diyī yī* 第一義 (the highest meaning), and he states that “The golden scalpel scrapes the film from my eyes, its value is a hundred *chequ* (agate/cornelian, *musāragalva*, one of the seven jewels of Buddhism) gems 金篋刮眼膜, 价重百車渠”. (see Du 2016, vol. 11, p. 169; 1979, p. 951). Here, *jinbi* is just a metaphor for the technique for enlightenment. Similar way of using the word *jinbi* can be found in *Qiuri kuifu yonghuan fengji zhengjian libinke yibaiyun* 秋日夔府詠懷奉寄鄭監李賓客一百韻 (Writing My Feelings in Kui on an Autumn Day) which says, “The golden scalpel shaved my eyeballs in vain, I have never left the measure of my image in a mirror. 金篋空刮眼, 鏡像未離銓.” (see Du 1979, p. 1715; 2016, vol. 19, p. 211). *Jinbi* appears to be used by Du Fu as a fable about seeing beyond the visible realm. While his assertion that the technique is priceless and deserving of a hundred *chequ* expresses this, it does not provide us with any other details. The intriguing aspect is that most Song Dynasty poems focus on this metaphorical connotation rather than the real technique when using the word *jinbi*.⁴

Yet, for Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–770), this *jinbi* was not just a metaphor for wisdom but something one can use for eye disease. In *Zeng yanji poluomen seng 贈眼醫婆羅門僧* (*Presenting the Poem for a Brahmin Monk Who is an Eye Doctor*), it reads, “I have been grieving over my own eyes for three autumns (years), crying every day at the end of the road. My eyes are now dark, and I look like an old man in my middle age. Seeing red things gradually turn green, and my eyes cannot bear the sun or the wind. The master has the golden scalpel technique; how can it be used for enlightenment. 三秋傷望眼，終日哭途窮。兩目今先暗，中年似老翁。看朱漸成碧，羞日不禁風。師有金篦術，如何為發蒙。” (see Liu 1990, p. 397) The title of the poem clearly identifies the monk as a Brahmin, indicating the fact that he came from India. This specificity serves as a reminder that the adamantine scalpel technique is more of an Indian than a Buddhist practice. The complexity of the doctors’ identities should be fully discussed in understanding the ophthalmology of the Tang dynasty is greatly aided by.

In *Pei shilang dayi xuezhong wei jiu yihu jian shi xi yanji ping feiran yangchou* 裴侍郎大尹雪中遺酒一壺兼示喜眼疾平... 斐然仰酬 (*Pei sent me a bottle of wine in the snow and congratulated me on my recovery from my eye disease, to whom I replied happily and respectfully*), “The breeze cleared the light clouds, making the moon appear brighter. I did not need the golden scalpel anymore and I walked around freely. I would like to bring out all the fine wine in my house to entertain the visitor, and it does not need to wait until the time when spring grass grows next to the pond. 卷盡輕雲月更明，金篦不用且閑行。若傾家釀招來客，何必池塘春草生。” (Liu 1990, p. 542).

Li Shangyin 李商隱 also writes sentences such as “If you want to scrape the cover of the eye, you should ask for (thinking of) the golden scalpel 刮膜想金篦。” (Li 2004, p. 936). All these poems indicate that *Jinbi shu* as a metaphor as well as a Buddhist surgery was well known by literati.

2.3. Buddhist Eye-Related Records in *Waitaimiyao* 外臺秘要 (*Secret Essentials of an Official*)

2.3.1. *Longshu Lun*

Longshu lun, which Bai Juyi mentioned in his poems, is short for *Longshu pusa yanlun* 龍樹菩薩眼論 (*Nāgārjuna Treatise on Eyes*) which is a medical book on the eye attributed to Longshu 龍樹 (*Nāgārjuna*). As this original ophthalmology monograph is not available, there are conflicting accounts of who wrote it, when it was published, and what its contents were. Most people agree that the book *Longshu lun* is a compilation of certain Tang Dynasty materials on ancient Indian ophthalmology attributed to *Nāgārjuna*. *Nāgārjuna* is considered to be the king of medicine in Buddhist culture, and in the “Treatise on the Classics and Other Writings” (“*Jingji zhi*” 經籍志) of *Suishu* 隋書 (*The Book of Sui* (581–618)), three medical books of Indian and Western Regions are attributed to *Nāgārjuna*. They are *Longshu pusa yaofang* 龍樹菩薩藥方 (*Medical Prescriptions of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva*) in four *juan*, *Longshu pusa hexiang fa* 龍樹菩薩和香法 (*Methods of Mixed Incense of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva*) in two *juan*, and *Longshu pusa yangxing fang* 龍樹菩薩養性方 (*Methods of Spiritual Cultivation of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva*) in one *juan* (Wei 1973, pp. 1047–49). It is most likely *Longshu pusa yaofang* also contains some prescriptions for the eyes. None of these books is available today. The eye-related medical book attributed to *Nāgārjuna* available today is called *Michuan yanke longmu lun* 秘傳眼科龍木眼論 (*Longmu (Nāgārjuna) Secret Treatise on the Eyes*). *Longmu* is another name for *Longshu* recorded in books in the Song Dynasty. This *Michuan yanke longmu lun* is considered a compilation of documents of *Longshu lun* and other medical books in the Tang Dynasty by doctors in the Song and Yuan Dynasties and finally published during the Wanli Period 萬曆 (1575) in the Ming Dynasty. This book systematically describes the common internal and external ophthalmic diseases and introduces a variety of external ophthalmic treatment methods, especially the classification, examination, indications, and contraindications for cataract surgery (Yu and Wang 2009, pp. 416–19).

In the beginning of this book, it collects several methods in the form of poetic verses (*ge* 歌 songs), which are *Neizhang yanfa genyuan ge* 內障眼法根源歌 (*Song of the Root of the*

Method of Treating Cataract), *Zhen neizhang yan fa ge* 針內障眼法歌針 (*Song of the Method of Treating the Cataract with Needles*) and *Zhen neizhang yan hou fa ge* 針內障眼後法歌 (*Song of the Method of Post Care of Treating the Cataract with Needles*), in which the preoperative assessment, preoperative planning, surgical procedure, and aftercare of treating the cataract with a needle are introduced in detail (Longshu 2006, pp. 5–7). Additionally, it has 16 types of cataracts in 5 categories with different treating methods and needles.

Some prescriptions for the eyes in this book were also adapted by Chinese medicine books. As the famous *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (*Compendium of Materia Medica*) by Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1519–1593) quotes from *Longshu lun*: “For all diseases of the head and eyes: all diseases of the eyes, blood fatigue, headache from wind, giddiness and dizziness, grind herba schizonepetae to powder, take three qian (around 12 g) with wine every time. 頭目諸疾：一切眼疾，血勞，風氣頭痛，頭旋目眩。荊芥穗為末，每酒服三錢。(Li 2005, p. 916).

However, since *Michuan yanke longmu lun* is a book published in the Ming Dynasty, it is impossible to know the exact content of *Longshu lun* was like in the Tang Dynasty. However, we can use the materials in *Waitai miyao* to see the outline of such eye-related documents, treatments and knowledge.

2.3.2. The Eye-Related Materials in *Waitai Miyao*

Waitai miyao 外臺秘要 (*Secret Essentials of an Official*) in 40 *juans* contains 6900 prescriptions for 1104 different ailments. The author, Wang Tao 王焘 (670–755), worked as a librarian. As a result, he had the opportunity to read numerous medical texts written before the Tang Dynasty, which he then summarized to finish this work in the eleventh year of the Tianbao Period 天寶十一年 (752). Not only was Wang Tao’s collection of prescriptions frequently cited, but it was also carefully chosen. Many of the remedies and medications listed in the book seem to be quite practical and helpful. This book contains medical concepts, and remedies attributed to Qipo 耆婆 (Jivaka), and various medicines (Fang et al. 1984, pp. 68–73). Additionally, the prescriptions in *Waitai miyao* contain one-third of all the prescriptions coming from India (Fan 1936, p. 145). The golden scalpel method described in the book is the first detailed record of this treatment in Chinese history. More importantly, this book is a systematic presentation of Indian concepts, remedies, and ideas for the treatment of the eye.

Juan 21 of *Waitai miyao* contains all kinds of medical treatment for eye-related diseases, and the first document in the connection is called *Tianzhu jing lunyan xu* 天竺經論眼序 (*Preface to the Tianzhu Sutra on Eyes*) written by Master Xie (daoren 道人, a man of the Way) from Longshang 隴上 (around the north of Shaanxi Province, east to Gansu Province), with the common surname Xie. It states that Master Xie resides in Qizhou 齊州 (Ji’nan, Shandong Province), he was taught at the location of a *hu* monk from the Western countries.” It is said that the way of heaven and earth values only human beings. Among all parts of the human body, the eyes are the most precious because they are closely connected to the entire body and possess a wondrous ability to communicate with the divine. Among the six senses, the eyes are the most remarkable, thus it is not easy to heal eye diseases. 天竺經論眼序一首（隴上道人撰，俗姓謝，住齊州，于西國胡僧處授）蓋聞乾坤之道，唯人為貴，在身所重，唯眼為寶，以其所系，妙絕通神，語其六根，眼最稱上是以療眼之方，無輕易爾。” (Wang 2011, p. 695). The placement of this at the beginning of this part (*juan*) not only demonstrates the significance that Indian medicine attaches to the eye but also the related concepts inherited by Wang Tao, which become a general overview of this whole part. Although it is likely that Master Xie was Chinese, the teacher of his medical practice was clearly an Indian monk. This means that, overall, monks from India mastered the art of the golden scalpel as shown by poems written by famous writers, but they also passed the technique on to Chinese doctors.

Apart from this Preface, this book also contains one piece on *Xieyan shengqi* 斜眼生起 (*The Reason for Crossed Eyes*), which uses the theory of Four Elements (*sida* 四大) in Buddhism to talk about the structure of the eye. It states that there is nothing but water inside the visual faculty (眼根尋無他物，直是水耳), discrediting the common view that there is

a ball inside the eye (眼有珠) by Chinese doctors (Wang 2011, p. 696). Various eye diseases (*yanji pinl* (such as dim-vision (*heimang* 黑盲), glaucoma (*qingmang* 青盲), cataracts (*yansheng baizhang* 眼生白障), pterygium (*shengrou* 生肉), ophthalmodynia (*yantong* 眼痛), and pinkeye with itchiness and tears (*yan chi yang leichu* 眼赤養淚出)) and their treatments are also discussed. Master Xie also takes traditional Chinese theory into account and states that the liver is the root of the eyes, and one should take medicine for the liver and protect the body carefully. Additionally, *Waitai miyao* also collects 11 prescriptions by Master Xie on eye-related diseases (Wang 2011, pp. 697–700).

Most importantly, the technique of the golden scalpel was fully discussed by Master Xie in *Waitai miyao*. Master Xie clarifies that there are only three layers in the eye, dispelling the myth that there are five or seven. From eye disease to blindness, there is a progression with many diseases occurring at various stages and having corresponding titles. The golden needle should be applied to the eyes when the patient starts to see flying flies. Then, the patient should take *Dahuang wan* 大黃丸.⁵ (Wu 2021, pp. 305–8).

Master Xie has a deeper understanding of the structure of the eyes, so he has a more scientific and delicate approach when it comes to treating the eyes. He shows the different stages of eye diseases, warning doctors of future generations to be extra careful about eye injuries because they often go unnoticed and gradually worsen until blindness occurs. The introduction of Indian theory, methods, and medicines for treating the eyes undoubtedly improve Chinese doctors' surgical skills. Additionally, this particular technique, *jinbi shu*, was improved in the following dynasties⁶ (Sun 1999, pp. 403–4; 2006, pp. 125–26), and in the medical text in the Qing Dynasty, we can find the detailed eight steps method on how to remove cataracts out of the eyes.⁷ (Huang 2006, pp. 155–56; Mou 1992, pp. 33–37).

Apart from the texts attributed to Master Xie, *Waitai miyao* also collects one prescription by Master Shen 深師 in the title of *shenshi liao yi fang* 深師療翳方 (the Prescription Master Shen on Healing Eye-opacity). Yi 翳 in Chinese means cover, which refers to the cover of darkness or cataract of the eye. It states that putting lead powder on the cover of the eye can heal three years of eye-cover 胡粉注翳上, 以疗三年翳 (Master Shen on Healing Eye-opacity). Master Shen was a famous Buddhist doctor in the Song and Qi Dynasties, who wrote a medical work in thirty volumes, yet his works were lost in history, and we can only find some fragmentary pieces in medical books in the Tang Dynasty. *Waitai miyao* contains 280 prescriptions of Master Shen's works.⁸ (Wang 2004, pp. 60–62)

This demonstrates how Buddhist medicine, particularly the many eye treatments, and remedies, gradually infiltrated the Chinese medical canon.

3. The Case of Li Shangyin

3.1. Zhixuan (809–881) Treat Li Shangyin's Eye Disease

The biography of Master Zhixuan 知玄, entitled as *Tang Pengzhou Danjingshan Zhixuan zhuan* 唐彭州丹景山知玄傳 (Biography of Zhixuan of Danjing Mountain of Pengzhou in the Tang Dynasty) can be found in *juan* six of *The Song Gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 "Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled During the Song Dynasty" by Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001) in the Song Dynasty 宋 (960–1279). This biography tells the story of Zhixuan who cured Li Shangyin's eye disease, which is as follows:

Li Shangyin was the leader of the literary world of his generation, and there was no one who could compete with him at his time. Li used to work as a counsellor for Lord Liu of Hedong (Liu Zhongying 柳仲郢, ?–864) in Zitong (Mianyang, Sichuan Province). Li has admired Xuan's practice and knowledge for a long time. Later he treated Zhixuan with a pupil's deference. At that time, Xuan lived in Xingshan Temple (Xi'an) and Li Shangyin lived in Yonchong li. Li Shangyin suffered from an eye disease, and his eyes were too dim to see, so he could only make out the Chan Palace from far away. He meditates, prayed, and begged for his wish to be granted.⁹ The next day, Zhixuan sent a poem, and after reading it, Li Shangyin's eyes were cured. Later, Li Shangyin fell ill

and told Monk Lu and Monk Che that, “I would like to become a monk and become a disciple of Zhixuan, and he prayed at night, making this wish. The next morning, (Zhi)xuan sent him *Tianyan ji* (Heavenly-eyes Verses (*gāthā*)) in three chapters. Once he finished reading, Li Shangyin recovered from his disease. At the time when Li Shangyin was sick in bed, he told Sengche (d.u.), the Monks Registrar,” I wish to become a monk (cut off impurities) and be Xuan’s pupil. I will write a farewell verses to him.” This is a short quote of his words. 有李商隱者，一代文宗，時無倫輩，常從事河東柳公梓潼幕，久慕玄之道學，後以弟子禮事玄，時居永崇里，玄居興善寺。義山苦眼疾，慮嬰昏瞽，遙望禪宮，冥禱乞願。玄明旦寄《天眼偈》三章，讀終疾愈。迨乎義山臥病，語僧錄僧徹曰：“某志願削染為玄弟子，臨終寄書偈決別”云。(T50: 2061. 744b21-28)

There are two significant questions related to this record. The first one, which concerns the veracity of the content, is who Zhixuan was and what kind of interactions he had with Li Shangyin. The second one is what is *Tianyan ji* 天眼偈 “heavenly eye verse” and is there any historical records that monks of the Tang Dynasty utilized it to treat eye disorders?

For the first question, Li Shangyin did write a farewell poem to Zhixuan 智玄 which is different from the Zhixuan 知玄 mentioned here. Most researchers believe that they are the same person. Master Shengkai states that Zhixuan 知玄 is the same person as Zhixuan 智玄 as these two characters have the same name. Li Shangyin and Zhixuan might have known each other since the fifth year of Dazhong 大中五年 (851). This is also the year when he traveled to Sichuan with Liu Zhongying, the newly appointed Commander of State of Zi as well as the Military Commissioner of Dongchuan in Jian’an (*zizhou cishi, zizhoujian’an dongchuan jiedushi* 梓州刺史，劍南東川節度使) (Liu 1975, p. 4306). Furthermore, Sengchou 僧稠 played an important role in Li Shangyin’s association with Zhixuan. Additionally, when Sengchou was in Yongle li, he stayed with Li Shangyin. Later, when Li Shangyin arrived in Chang’an, he took Zhixuan as his teacher, and Zhixuan sent Li a verse to cure his eye disease. Before his death, Li Shangyin also wrote a poem *Bie zhixuan fashi* 別智玄法師 (*Parting with the Master Zhi Xuan*) to Zhixuan (see Sheng 2001, pp. 22–27). Additionally, as for the poem in Li Shangyin’s collection, this is the text:

Your cloud-like hair bears no reason to resent this parting, ten years have already moved on since our agreement on moving to the mountain. Tears flow from all cardinal directions, for it is indeed Yang Zhu who is the true teacher.” 雲鬢無端怨別離，十年已移易住山期。東南西北皆垂淚，卻是楊朱本真師。(see Li 2004, p. 2155)

This poem is ambitious and most commentaries believe it is Zhixuan he talked about. Additionally, in Cao Xuequan’s 曹學佺 (1574–1646) *Gaoseng zhixuan zhuan* 高僧知玄傳 “Biography of the Eminent Monk Zhixuan”, it is mentioned that in Fengxiang Prefecture 鳳翔府, a statue (*xiang* 像) of Zhixuan was made, and the statues of Yi Shangyin stood by holding a whisk to serve him. This indicates that in biographies of Zhixuan, at least in the understanding from the Song and Ming Dynasties, Li Shangyin plays an important part in the worship of Zhixuan.

However, some do not agree with the idea that Zhixuan 智玄 here refers to Zhixuan 知玄. Feng Hao 馮浩 (1719–1801) argues that such a story is fictional and cannot be trusted (*juebu kexin* 絕不可信) because “the Buddhist community often relies on literati to enhance their reputation; hence, such rumors are not to be trusted. In a poem written by Wen Feiqing 溫飛卿 (aka Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠, 801–870+) after visiting Zhi Xuan, he wrote: “Huineng (638–713) refused to pass on his spiritual teachings, and Zhang Zhan¹⁰ (Fang 1974). labored in vain to develop an eye treatment. 惠能未肯傳心法，張湛徒勞與眼方”. “Therefore, the belief that Zhixuan could cure eye diseases may have stemmed from this association.” (see Li 2004, p. 2157). In other words, in Feng Hao’s opinion, Wen Tingyun and Zhixuan 知玄 had a personal connection, and the Zhixuan 智玄 in Li Shangyin’s poem is not the same person as Zhixuan 知玄 in the *Song Gaoseng zhuan*.

The poem mentioned here by Feng referred to Wen Tingyun's *Fang zhixuan shangren yu pujing yin youzeng* 訪知玄上人遇暴經因有贈 (*Presenting this Poem for the Visit of Master Zhixuan and the Encounter with Drying Sutra Under the Sun*). Wen describes the beautiful mountainside view and the peaceful monastic environment where Master Zhixuan lives (Wen 2007, p. 773).

Regarding the second question, there is no second record in the Buddhist canon referred to *tianyan ji*; instead, the key to comprehending this tale should be found in the various Buddhist texts which uses verses or *dhāraṇīs* to treat eye disorders. It cannot be definitively concluded, as Feng suggests, that Li Shangyin's story is entirely fictitious and attributed to the Song Dynasty. However, Feng's argument appears more convincing with regard to Wen Tingyun's story. In Li's poetry, it is clear that "knowing the mysterious" and a medicinal prescription are explicitly mentioned, potentially indicating treatment for vision-related issues. Therefore, the skepticism toward the authenticity of Li Shangyin's story may be due to Feng's personal bias or viewpoint. It may also suggest that in the Qing Dynasty, literati such as Feng found the use of mystical incantation-like sutra citations to treat eye problems particularly implausible. This raises two significant questions: First, since the Tang Dynasty, medical practices that incorporate spells in Buddhist medicine have gradually declined compared to the Six Dynasties. The decline of spells as a medical tool in the Tang Dynasty is reflected in the contraction and fixation of the user scale, as well as the narrowing of the range of applicable diseases. Some mainstream medical experts have expressed their denial of spells. The Southern regions that cling to witchcraft in the treatment of diseases have been criticized by the mainstream doctors in the North (see Yu 2008, pp. 61–68). Nonetheless, spells continue to exist specifically for curing eye ailments, yet it is in Esoteric Buddhism that we can see the richness and colorful details of spells or magical treatments for disease. This may reflect the cultural context of Li Yishan's story.

3.2. *Guanyin Xiyan Ji* 觀音洗眼偈 (*Guanyin's Verses on Washing the Eyes*)

The content or form of *Tian yan ji* mentioned in Li Shangyin's story can not be found in other materials. However, a similar the story that Avalokiteśvara uses a dharma verse (*faji* 法偈) to heal the eyes of a Tiantai monk could be found in *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (*The Records of Yijian*), one of the most famous novels in the Song Dynasty. Monk Chutao 處瑫 used to practice and recite the *Dabei zhou* 大悲咒 (Great Compassion Dhāraṇī) and when he suffered from eye disease. Avalokiteśvara came to his dream to teach him the dharma verse and commended him to read it 7 or 49 times to the water and used the water to wash the eye. After he did what he was told, he recovered soon. And the verse says: Avalokiteśvara, the Goddess of Mercy, gives me great peace, grants me great convenience, and destroys my ignorance and darkness. Remove all obstacles, all sins of ignorance, and bring out the light of my visual consciousness (*vijñāna-cakṣus*), so that I may see the light of things. I now say this verse to wash away and confess the sins of the eye-consciousness, to release the pure light universally, and to wish to see the wondrous appearance (of the Buddha). 救苦觀世音，施我大安樂，賜我大方便，滅我愚癡暗。除卻諸障礙，無明諸罪惡，出我眼識中，使我視物光。我今說是偈，洗懺眼識罪，普放淨光明，願睹微妙相 (Hong 2006, p. 1681).

The story explains a case of therapeutic dreaming, in which Chutao's eye afflictions are healed thanks to two main causes. Firstly, he had been consistently reciting the Great Compassion Dhāraṇī. This is a requirement for the manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, but it is not the solution to the problem of treating eye disease. This leads to the second reason why the monk was cured, which is the dharma verse in Chinese attributed to Avalokiteśvara. Evidently, the narrative serves to underscore the efficacy of mantras as remedial agents for ophthalmological maladies. The roots of this particular practice can be traced back to the pre-Tang Dynasty such as the *Foshuo zhoumu jing* 佛說咒目經 (*The Buddha's Teachings on Eye Dhāraṇī*). In addition to creating a distinct *dhāraṇī* sutra specifically for the treatment of eye problems, the Tang dynasty also included a wealth of information, rituals, treatments, and theories related to healing the eyes in the larger *dhāraṇī* texts. Es-

oteric Buddhism has preserved numerous mantras with practical applications, allowing people to obtain benefits, prevent harm, pray for blessings, and cure illnesses. Amidst this intricate process, the use of the *Tianyan ji* has persisted alone.

3.3. Reciting *Dhāraṇī* to Gain Vision

3.3.1. *Foshuo zhoumu jing* 佛說咒目經 (*The Buddha's Teachings on Eye Dhāraṇī*)

The earliest *Dhāraṇī* sutra on treating the eyes can be traced back to *Foshuo zhoumu jing* 佛說咒目經 (*The Buddha's Teachings on Eye Dhāraṇī*) with one *dhāraṇī*:

Thuciphupaciphu/acapacaphu/kuliphukulibi phu/kulakulabiphu/sale śalabodhi phu ili phu/ila iphu/ilabi phu 頹吱敷般吱敷 頹吒般吱敷 鳩離敷 鳩離比敷 鳩羅鳩蔣比敷 沙離莎蔣波提敷 伊離敷 伊羅移敷 伊臘鼈敷 (T21. 1328. 491b18-20; M-2250 Lin 2001, vol. 5, p. 374)

This sutra was translated by monk Zhu Tanwulan 竺曇無蘭 (aka Fazheng 法正, d.u.) from Western Regions during the reign of Emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝 (Sima Yao 司馬曜, 362–396) in the East Jin Dynasty (317–420) (T49.2034. 70b18-22). This *dhāraṇī* might be part of a complicated mantra. At least we can find the same *dhāraṇī* in *Fajie shengfan shuiliu daochang falun baochan* 法界聖凡水陸大齋法輪寶懺 (*Dharma-Realm Water-and-Land Ceremony Dharma-Wheel Precious-Repentance of all Sage and Ordinary Men*). This sutra contains various *dhāraṇīs*, rituals, and mantras, and this *dhāraṇī* for the eyes was chanted together with two other *dhāraṇīs* for teeth and children in a ritual called *yixin fengqing shijiarulai zhouchi zhoumu zhouxiaoer zhenyan mantuoluo fa* 一心奉請釋迦如來呪齒呪目呪小兒真言曼荼羅法 (*Inviting Śākyamuni Tathāgata for maṇḍala rituals of mantra of the dhāraṇīs for the teeth, eyes, and children with devoted heart*). This sutra was collected in the year of Kuihai of Tongzhi 同治癸亥 (1863) (X74.1499. 867a21) which is long after the translation of *Foshuo zhoumu jing*. It is difficult to put an actual date on how these three *dhāraṇīs* were put together in the name of Śākyamuni and it is possible this process happens in other Esoteric Buddhist materials of the Tang Dynasty. The Preface of this sutra did mention the materials being collected in (Hongwu) Nanzang 南藏 (1372–1398) and (Yongle) Beizang 北藏 (1421–1440), which might indicate that this ritual might be a collection in the Ming Dynasty and reprinted in the Qing Dynasty.

3.3.2. For the Pure Vision in *Dafangdeng Dajijing*

In *Dafangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經 (*Great Collection Scripture, Mahāvaiṣṭya-mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra*), there is a *dhāraṇī* called *Qingjing yan tuoluoni* 清淨眼陀羅尼 (Pure vision (caksuḥ-parisuddhi) *Dhāraṇī*) which goes as follows:

Tad yathā/caksukhaba/saraṇakhaba/karmakhaba/mananjanam/birajakha/para antajñal maṇṣiranaṭroya/ahicantraśuci/bintuśuddhe/kṛpaśuddhe/phalaśuddhe/ajetaje/taletattale/basadhasagabāsate/rūrabi/mahārūrabi/triratanaprati svāhā// 多經吽 斫芻佉婆 娑蘭那 佉婆 羯磨佉婆 阿難闍那 毘囉闍佉破 蘭多若摩 尼婆羅那 都夜 阿鞞陀羅 樹低 頻頭 輪第 吃利波輪 第頗羅輪 第阿誓 多誓 多隸 多隸 娑細陀索 繼陀索 繼 鳴盧羅 避 摩訶 鳴盧羅 避 帝腹 阿邏多 那婆羅 帝 莎呵。 (T.13. 397. 290b27-c5; M-109, Lin 2001, vol. 1, p. 142)

After citing this, the practitioner should “add five medicines (sea pumice, licorice, *haritaka* (yellow Myrobalan) *Āmra*, *vibhītaka*), grind them and mix them with honey, put them in an old tortoise shell and decoct over a fire of long-lasting butter-oil. Recite this *dhāraṇī* one thousand and eight times, cast the mantra on this medicine, then apply the medicine to the eyes, let go of all things, for forty-nine days, chanting the Buddha’s name and building statues of the Buddha every day, and making a single-minded vow that by then the evil karma of sentient beings will be removed and one will attain pure vision.” 復以海沫、甘草、呵梨勒、阿摩羅、毘醯羅此五種藥搗末蜜和，盛著舊龜甲中以久年蘇火上煎已，誦此陀羅尼一千八遍，以呪此藥用塗眼上，捨諸緣事七七日中念佛造像，至心發願，時彼眾生惡業消盡得清淨眼。(T.13. 397. 290c24-29).

As demonstrated in the text here, this *dhāraṇī* is used together with eye medication and not only benefits in eye restoration but also helps to obtain pure vision and remove all karmic impediments.

3.3.3. *Guanshiyin Shuo Chu Yiqie Yantong Tuoluoni* 觀世音說除一切眼痛陀羅尼 (*Avalokiteśvara's Teaching on Removing all Eye Pains*)

In *juan 6* of *Tuoluoni zaji* 陀羅尼雜集 (*Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇīs*), there is a *dhāraṇī* called *Guanshiyin shuo chu yiqie yantong tuoluoni* 觀世音說除一切眼痛陀羅尼 (*Avalokiteśvara's Teaching on Removing all Eye Pains*) which is as follows:

Namo ratnatrayāya/namah āryaavalokiteśva rāya/bodhisatvāya/mahāsatvāya/tad yathā susubhe carinī/mariśodhani/gacchati/mira/sarva o ja/rogaśāmani/bināśani/cchadani/bicchadani/pādasamāstam/bedhasara/mocitam/nirmasamuci tam/sannibhata/ samucitam/sarvanāśanini/mināśni/āryaavalokiteśvarāya/nāśantu satoās ca roga svāhā 南無勒囊利蛇 蛇 南無阿利蛇 婆路吉坻 舍伏羅蛇 菩提薩埵蛇 摩訶薩埵蛇 多擲哆 休休 比之座利 涅摩利 輪陀濇伽遮提蜜羅 薩婆奧廁路 伽舍摩尼 比那舍尼 車陀尼 比車陀尼 婆多三 慕啞耽 畢多三羅慕咄耽 尼利摩三慕啞耽 散尼波多三慕啞耽 薩婆那舍尼 比那舍尼 阿利蛇 婆路吉坻舍伏羅蛇 那扇兜薩比 奧廁路伽 莎呵 (T.21:1336.612c27–613a9; M-10024 see Lin 2001, vol. 16, pp. 330–32)

It is claimed that one should chant this *dhāraṇī* 108 times, then use one's hand to touch or massage one's eyes, then all pain of the eyes would be removed. The same *dhāraṇī* was collected in *juan 10* with different Chinese words for the sound and with another title as *songzhou shou mo yan chu yiqie tong tuoluoni* 誦呪手摩眼除一切痛陀羅尼 (*The dhāraṇī of chanting spells, touching the eyes to remove all pains*) (T21. 1336. 635c3-13). Within the same sutra, same *dhāraṇī* with different names suggests there are different sources from which the sutra is cited, and attributing certain *dhāraṇī* to Avalokiteśvara was a complicated development over a long time. In Esoteric Buddhism, chanting and reciting *dhāraṇīs* play an important part in the healing process (See Shinohara 2021, pp. 430–71). Additionally, these *dhāraṇīs* taught by the Seven Buddhas can be found in *The Divine Spells of the Great Dhāraṇīs Taught by the Seven Buddhas and Eight Bodhisattvas* (*Qifo bapusa suoshuo datuoluoni shenzhou jing* 七佛八菩薩所說大陀羅尼神咒經 T. 1332) (see Shinohara 2014, pp. 3–15).

However, such a tradition was somehow passed on in Chinese medical practice and Avalokiteśvara became a very important figure in treating eye disease. As we can see in *Yinhai jingwei* attributed to Sun Simiao, if the doctor wants to apply the golden scalpel on the eyes, he/she should invite both Avalokiteśvara and Nāgārjuna to attend. Nevertheless, he/she should also chant or sing the *Guanyin zhou* 觀音咒 (*Avalokiteśvara Spell*). The difference is that, in practice in the Ming Dynasty, the spell is not a *dhāraṇī* with difficult Chinese imitating the sacred and mysterious sounds in Sanskrit but a poem written in Chinese which is as follows:

We beg you Guanyin that you may wash off from our eyes the red-golden lanterns (of worldly-desires) and that the purifying water may liberate them from the yellow sands of mundane transiency. May in your sunlight, the thousand-eyed and thousand-headed Dragon kings, the wise Wenshu who rides on a lion, and of you, Boddhisattva Pu-xian who sits on the elephant king, all of whom fill the sacred books, may the cloudy membranes in our eyes dissipate and shades and membranes be rubbed away. It would be (for us) highest strength and highest happiness; we continually beg you, that in our eyes may appear clarity, purity and transcendental wisdom. 願眼紫金燈灑灑水，離易黃沙滿藏經。千眼千首千龍王，文殊大士騎獅子，普賢菩薩乘象王。日裡雲膜盡。翳膜消磨強中強，吉中吉，眼中常願得光明，清淨般若波羅蜜。(Sun 1999, p. 405; 2006, p. 126)

Even though the spell was attributed to Avalokiteśvara, we can see other Boddhisattva's names, such as Puxian and Wenshu, who serve as magical beings to enhance the power of the spell.

3.3.4. *Neng jing yiqie yanjibing tuoluoni* 能淨一切眼疾病陀羅尼 (*Removing all Eye Diseases Dhāraṇī*)

Neng jing yiqie yanjibing tuoluoni was translated by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空 705–774). The sutra tells the story of a disciple named Kṣudrapanthaka, who had an unshakable faith in attaining enlightenment and recited a *dhāraṇī* to the Buddha. The Buddha was able to hear him through divine hearing and vision, and demonstrated his ability to surpass the ears and eyes of the world. He then instructed Ānanda to go to Kṣudrapanthaka's residence and spread the *dhāraṇī* as protection to help him cleanse his eyes of afflictions. The *dhāraṇī* is as follows:

Tad yathā/hili mili lici/hili hiti/huyu huyu/huyamani/huru huru/nulu nulu svāhā 怛囉也 (二合)他, 呬裏弭裏, 黎枳呬裏, 系帝, 護庚護庚, 護也麼寧, 護魯護魯, 怒魯怒魯, 娑嚩 (二合,引)訶 (T21. 1324. 490a27-29; M-3999 see Lin 2001, vol. 9, pp. 86–87)

The story describes the supreme and marvelous *dhāraṇī* as a cure for various eye diseases, wind diseases, rheumatism, phlegm diseases, and jaundice-like diseases. The *dhāraṇī* can also eliminate all obstacles caused by heavenly beings, Yaksha and Raksha demons. In Esoteric Buddhism, demons and ghosts can be the cause of one's disease, therefore to know the name of the ghost and chant it can remove the disease as well. Additionally, the ghost causing eye disease is "*Cibhara/cibhara/cibhara/cibhara/punucibhara/bat ala svāhā* 支富羅 支富破 呼奴支富破 波吒羅 支富破 莎呵 (T.21.1332.558a8; M-2107, see Lin 2001, vol. 5, p. 201)" The name itself can be a spell which removes the pain of the disease by pointing out which ghost or supernatural being is responsible for it, that is to depower the ghost.

According to Taoist and Buddhist beliefs, ghosts can significantly affect people's health. Within Buddhist tradition, there are eight different categories of paranormal creatures that could endanger people. These include, among others, ghosts that are ravenous, spirits, and demons. These beings are thought to be capable of harming people in a variety of ways, such as by bringing about illness or bad luck. The existence of evil spirits or negative energy can cause illness, according to classic Taoist writings. This is due to the idea that these beings have the power to alter the flow of *qi* 氣 (air or energy), the essential life stream that permeates all living things. This energy can become interrupted or obstructed, which can cause emotional and physical imbalances that can be harmful to health. There are numerous strategies for overcoming these supernatural dangers in both traditions (see Stickmann 2002, pp. 58–88). To fend off bad spirits, Buddhist practitioners may recite particular sutras or mantras. They might also execute rituals to purify themselves and their environment or present offerings to the Buddha.

In summary, the story conveys the importance of faith and the power of the supreme *dhāraṇī* to cure various diseases and eliminate all obstacles, ultimately leading to enlightenment.

3.3.5. Prescriptions and Rituals in *Bukong Juansuo Shenbian Zhenyan Jing* 不空羈索神變真言經 (*Amoghapaśa's Supernatural Display Mantra Sūtra*) by Bodhiruci

The Buddhist texts contain a number of eye remedies, many of which are large, mixed with many medicines, and closely related to ritual mantras. Most of the major Buddhist texts' prescriptions with the same or similar formulas have been modified from the original Vedic prescriptions, either by mixing several formulas together or by adding a few medicines to them. The original mainstay of the medicine is still retained. More strikingly, these prescriptions have been religiously treated by Tantra, moving them from their original mono-medicinal use to a more religious one (Chen 2017, p. 88).

One of these typical prescriptions can be found in *Zhuochu yanyao chengjiu pin* 斫芻眼藥成就品 (Chapter on the Achievement of the Medicine of the Eyes (cakṣu)) in *Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* 不空羈索神變真言經 (*Amoghapaśa's Supernatural Display Mantra Sūtra*) by Bodhiruci 菩提流志:

Take manahṣīla, gorocana, patra, phena, marica, kuikuma, padma, nāgara, ut-pala, pippalā, candana, śaṅkha powder, haridre root, all these medicines fresh in the same amount, and the same amount of rasāñjana. Take karkarā, mahābhāgā, karpāra, (Chen 2017, pp. 84–87) more than those before and put them in three equal amounts. Paint them in different places of the mandala. Chant the *dhāraṇī* of Fearful Light King nonstop from beginning to end. Keep this paste in a Persian glass container in front of the statue in the middle of the mandala. Put the clean and pure images together and put them in the Persian glass container, right in front of the statue (image) inside the mandala. Take action in the first half of the month on auspicious days, take a bath, clean yourself, and put on clean clothes. Take this method and eat three white foods (milk, cream (or curd), and rice). Offer all kinds of fragrances, flowers, drinks, and food, facing west viewing the image, and sitting in the lotus position. With the *dhāraṇī* of the Great Fearful Light King, chant all to the medicine of the eyes. A light of warm smog appears and three marks (*vilakṣaṇaare*) complete. One can come to or transcend from the world. All dharmas will be fulfilled. 雄黄牛黃鈇胆囉、海沫胡椒鬱金香、紅蓮華鬚胡乾薑、青鸞鉢囉華華鉢、白栴檀香商佉末、檀黃根藥小柏煎，斯藥鮮上數等量，散惹那汁亦等量，石蜜麝香龍腦香，多前藥分三分量，塗曼拏羅各別置。大可畏明王真言，首末加持勿間絕，精潔相和而合治，盛置波斯瑠璃器，曼拏羅中像前置。白月吉宿王日作，沐浴清潔著淨衣，食三白食修是法，種種香華飲食獻，面西觀像加趺坐，大可畏明王真言，調調加持斫芻藥，煖煙光現三相成，則能作現世出世，一切諸法皆成驗。(T20.1092.376c16-28)

This stanza shows the complicated form of the prescriptions for the eye. Additionally, the medicine must be combined with *dhāraṇī* and rituals for a specific deity to be effective. Then, the sutra states that if one uses this medicine regularly, he/she will gain pure vision and the highest heavenly eye. If common folks suffer from eye disease, they can use this method for 7 days. Additionally, if he/she applies it for 21 days, all his glaucoma or night blindness will be cured, all his sins will be removed, and he will be loved and respected.

The poetry of Bai Juyi (and other poets) demonstrates that there were monks skilled in eye treatment with the golden scalpel technique throughout the Tang Dynasty. The interaction between Li Shangyin (Wen Tingyun) and Zhixuan indicates that asking for assistance to treat the eyes from monks was not an uncommon occurrence. However, what is more significant is that the Tantric culture represented by the Heavenly Eye Verses served as the foundation for Li Shangyin's story, particularly the use of mantra verses as a mystic method to heal the eyes. Additionally, Li Shangyin's was cured by *dhāraṇī* related verses can be understood as an example foreshadows a new transition by showing how the effect of reciting Sanskrit mantras progressively gives way to Chinese verse poetry. This modification was also represented in the Ming and Qing eye-care practices.

The Buddha is obviously the main character in the sutra's tale of eye treatment, and in the Tantric tradition, which is both inclusive and specific in its approach to the treatment of mantra diseases, and there is also a special mantra treatment for the eyes that initially belongs to various gods before becoming increasingly focused on this one particular bodhisattva (deity), Avalokiteśvara.

4. The Competition in Treating the Eye

4.1. The Case of Qin Minghe 秦鸣鹤

4.1.1. Qing Minghe Treated Emperor Gaozong

In the eleventh month of the first year of the Hongdao Period 弘道元年 (683), one month before Emperor Gaozong 唐高宗 (Li Zhi 李治, 628–683, ruled 649–683) died, he and Empress Wu 武后 (Wu Zetian 武则天, 624–705, ruled 690–705) went to Mount Song, where Gaozong suffered from a headache, resulting in blindness. Then, Qin Minghe used needles to treat him. One of the most detailed versions of this story can be found in Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑 (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*):

Emperor Gaozong felt heavy-headed and could not see anything. He summoned Qin Minghe to treat it. Qin Minghe suggested using a needle on the head which would cure the headache. Wu Zetian was behind the curtain and she did not want the Emperor to heal quickly. She said angrily, "This is something worthy of having you killed off as you want to let blood out of the Emperor's (Son of Heaven) head." Then Minghe begged for his life by knocking his head on the ground. Then the Emperor Tang Gaozong said, "You should stick it in, nevertheless. This isn't necessarily a bad thing." Then he needed the *baihui* (Hundred Convergences) and *naohu* (Brain's Door) in two places (Wiseman and Ye 1998, p. 749). Then Emperor Gaozong said, "My eyes seem to be able to see." The Empress put his hand on her head, saying, this is really a gift from Heaven." She personally gave Minghe one hundred *pi* of colorful clothes. 上苦头重, 不能视, 召侍医秦鸣鹤诊之, 鸣鹤请刺头出血, 可愈。天后在帘中, 不欲上疾愈, 怒曰: "此可斩也, 乃欲于天子头刺血!" 鸣鹤叩头请命。上曰: "但刺之, 未必不佳。" 乃刺百会、脑户二穴。上曰: "吾目似明矣。" 后举手加额曰: "天赐也!" 自负彩百匹以赐鸣鹤。(Sima 1956, p. 6415)

This story has been recorded in many books from the Tang and Song dynasties, with similar content.¹¹ As demonstrated by the power struggle between the Emperor and Empress prior to Emperor Gaozong's passing, this event is legendary and contains an intriguing scene in which Wu Zetian (behind the curtain) tried to stop Qin Minghe, showing her reluctance to let the Emperor recuperate from his illness. Additionally, we need to talk about the renowned physician Qin Minghe mentioned here.

4.1.2. Eye Doctors from Daqin

As suggested by his surname, Qin Minghe might be a doctor from Daqin 大秦, a common name for the ancient Roman Empire and a place in the Near East Asian Region.¹² Scholars such as Ma Boying 马伯英 have identified him as a Nestorian monk (missionary) who came to China with various perspectives, including medical skills, medical history, and the history of Chinese and foreign transportation (see Ma 2020, p. 393). From the history of medical technology and the history of communication between China and foreign countries, it is most likely Qin was a Nestorian Doctor from the Roman Empire (Huang 2002, pp. 61–67).

Much research has traced his technique back to the record of *kainao chuchong* 开脑出虫 (cutting the head getting out the worm) in Daqin in Du Huan's 杜环 *Jingxing ji* 经行纪 (*The Records of My Experience and Journey*).¹³ *Jingxing ji* describes the skilled doctors from Daqin as such, "Molin guo 摩邻国 (Maghrib, around Morocco), is in the southeast of Qiusaluoguo 秋萨罗国 (Spain).¹⁴ In Molin, the doctors from Daqin are good at treating eye disease and diarrhea. Some can forecast the disease in advance, and some can open one's head (brain, *nao* 脑) to get the worm out. 摩邻国, 在秋萨罗国西南.....其大秦善医眼及痢, 或未病先见, 或开脑出虫。" (Du 2000, p. 19.23). Similar material can be found in the records of Fulin 拂菻 (Byzantine Empire) in *Xin Tang shu* which say, "There are great doctors who can open one's head to get the worm out to heal the eye disease (cataract). 有善医能开脑出虫以愈目眚" (see Ouyang 1975, p. 6261).

This indicates Daqin doctors were good at treating eye-related diseases and they went to other countries to do so. Then, it will not be a surprise to see the records of doctors such as Qin Minghe treating Gaozong in the Tang Dynasty. There is another interesting story recorded by Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850). In 831, 45-year-old Li Deyu went to Nanzhao 南诏 (a state in Yunnan Province existing from 738 to 902) to bring captured people back to Chengdu. A total of 9000 people were captured and 8000 of them were from Chengdu and Huayang. He noted that among these people there were a couple of talented actors and an eye-doctor from Daqin (医眼大秦僧一人). Others were not people with skills (*gongqiao* 工巧) but ordinary folks (Fu 2013, p. 180; Li 2018, p. 249). From the context, we can assume that this doctor from Daqin was plundered from Chengdu or Deyang to the south and taken back to Sichuan by Li Deyu. This suggests that Daqin ophthalmologists practiced not only

in the capital Chang'an but also in distant locations, despite not being as well-known as their Buddhist counterparts.

In the year 635, Nestorian Christian missionary Alopen 阿羅本 first arrived in Chang'an. Additionally, he was graciously welcomed by Emperor Taizong, whose inclination towards foreign religions was open. In recognition of Alopen's sincerity, Emperor Taizong commissioned him to teach and propagate his religion among the Chinese. To foster the growth and expansion of Nestorian Christianity, imperial support was extended towards the construction of a temple for their use, which was later renamed as the Daqinsi 大秦寺 "Great Qin Temple". Subsequently, Nestorian Christianity flourished under the patronage of the Tang dynasty, with many missionaries demonstrating their benevolent expressions through medical treatment, charitable activities, and social assistance to both believers and non-believers.¹⁵ Additionally, the famous *Daqin jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑 (a Monument of the diffusion through the Middle Kingdom of the Brilliant Teaching of Ta-chin) by Shi Jingjing 釋景淨 also states that Jingjiao missionaries treated the ill and helped the poor:

Every year he gathered the monks of the surrounding monasteries together; acting reverently, serving precisely, he provided everything for fifty days. He bade the hungry come and fed them; he healed the sick and raised them up; he buried the dead and laid them to rest 四寺僧徒，虔事精供。備諸五旬，餒食者來而節之；寒者來而醫之；病者疔而起之；死者，葬而安之。(see Moule [1930] 2011, pp. 44–45)¹⁶

This text demonstrates the medical practices of the Daqin monks, also known as Nestorians, which shows that they had some influence in society, but in the case of Qin Minghe, they seem to have served the upper classes more. The growth of Nestorianism in China was accomplished by a range of adaptable strategies, the most significant of which was the practice of medicine. The consensus among academics is that Nestorians were skilled physicians, despite the fact that there is not a single instance of a Nestorian doctor in Chinese literature. Yisi 伊斯 mentioned in *Jingjiao bei* is also a Nestorian doctor (Nie 2008, pp. 119–27). However, the medicine produced by the Daqin for the treatment of the eyes did find application in China. They also brought several exotic medicinal plants and herbs, such as Meng Shen 孟詵 (621–713), a famous doctor of the Tang Dynasty. He notes that the best *shimi* is from Persia. He writes, "(*Shimi*) is for heat and upper heart, and dry mouth, the best ones are from Persin. Take a few and put them into the eyes. This can remove the hot cover of the eyes, clear the eyes. The second-best ones are from Sichuan. Nowadays, they can be found in the Dong Wu Region (around Lake Taihu 太湖 and Suzhou 蘇州, Jiangsu Province) as well, yet they are not as good as Persia's. People produce *shimi* by boiling sugar cane juice and milk, and the boiling makes them thin and white" 上心腹脹熱，口乾渴。波斯者良。注少許於目中，除去熱膜，明目。蜀川者為次。今東吳亦有，並不如波斯。此皆是煎甘蔗汁及牛乳汁，煎則細白耳 (see Meng 2007, p. 68). The interesting part about this text is that most of the time, *shimi* is considered to be something related to Buddhism, yet here Meng clearly says the best ones are from Persia. During the Tang Dynasty, many medicines from Persia were introduced into China and absorbed into the native Chinese medical texts (Chen 2022, pp. 477–81). This might give us inspiration on understanding the identity of Qin Minghe.

People in the Tang dynasty are somewhat perplexed by the medical innovations and cultural practices imported from Central Asia. Both India and Persia have lengthy histories of eye care knowledge, and they both entered China via the Silk Road. The first was intimately linked to Buddhist medical monks (or Brahmins), and these monks are highly connected with Chinese literati. Their eye-treating techniques are frequently mentioned with the *tianzhu* (the original place of medical skill), Nagarjuna (the famous doctor), and *jinbi* (the advanced technique), whereas the second was only linked to the Daqin, Persia, the Fulin (the place), then to Nestorian Christianity. On the other hand, Buddhist monks connected a broader sociality. Contrarily, the Nestorian or Persian healing arts were more limited in scope and, despite some expansion, continued to serve the elite classes of the big cities.

4.2. The Case of Li Gong

Shi zhai baiyi xuanfang 是齋百一選方 (One out of the Hundred Selected Prescription of One's Studio) was compiled in 1196 by Wang Qiu 王璆 (d.u.) in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). It recorded that Prime Minister Li Gonggong's 李恭 (Lord Li Gong 李恭 or Li Kui 李揆 (711–784))¹⁷ (Liu 1975, pp. 234, 710, 3559; Xu 1992, p. 180; Ouyang 1975, p. 1683; Longshu 2006, pp. 88–89) from the Tang Dynasty was cured by Seng Zhishen 僧知深:

When he (Li Gonggong) suffered from various eye problems such as itchiness, blurred vision, clouded corneas, intense pain, and seeing black spots as big as beans coming in dozens without ending, seeing flying insects and their wings. Despite trying numerous remedies, none proved effective. Monk Zhishen suggested that the Sir's illness was caused by wind poisonand that the kidney is the mother of the liver, so a kidney weakened by the poison of wind, could lead to a weakened liver. Then weakened liver would cause blur in the eyes, so does the five organs (and it would affect the five organs).....*Di huang yuan* would cure all these diseases. 唐丞相李恭公扈從，在蜀中日患眼，或澀，或生翳膜，或即疼痛，或見黑花如豆大，累累數十不斷，或見如飛蟲翅羽，百方治之 ineffective。僧知深云：相公此病緣受風毒.....腎是肝之母，今腎受風毒，故令肝虛，肝虛則目中恍惚，五臟亦然。(Wang 2003, pp. 170–71)

Then the text records the name *di huang yuan* is the same as *di huang wan*, which is a combination with medicines such as dried rehmannia, fresh rehmannia, and divaricate saphoshnikovia root. At least in the medical books in the Song Dynasty, people believe that Buddhist monks treated Prem Minister in Tang Dynasty. This story was also recollected in *Michuan yanke longmu lun* published in Ming Dynasty. This story suggests unlike *Daqin* or Nestorians medicine, Buddhist monks reached a wider audience in both high and middle social class in their eye treatment practice.

4.3. The Case of Du Yi 杜顛 (807–851)

Du Yi is the younger brother of the famous poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803–841). In the fourth year of the Dali Period (850), Du Mu wrote a letter to Prime Minister, entitled Writing the Second Letter to Prime Minister for a Position in Huzhou Wei Chulao 韋楚老 (803–841) (Xin 1995, p. 160) suggesting that Du Mu seek help from an eye-doctor called Shi Sheng 石生 from Tongzhou 同州 (Weinan, Shaanxi Province) as he personally saw Shi Sheng treat his patient's blindness with a needle. He was such a magical doctor (*shenyi* 神醫) as his patient covered within fifteen minutes (*yike* 一刻). Du Mu invited Shi Sheng to Luoyang and then they went to visit Du Yi at Chanzhi Temple 禪智寺 in Yangzhou. Shi said, "This is a case of poisonous heat accumulating in the brain, with fat flowing down and blocking the pupil, which is called cataract (*neizhang* 內障, internal obstruction). The method is to insert a needle into the white eye point and remove it diagonally, similar to a wax plugged tube, the wax goes away, and the tube becomes clear, but this is not yet possible. One year later, the fat will be as hard and old as white jade before we can treat it. I have been treating this disease for a long time. Additionally, since my grandfather, my father and I, no less than 200 people have been cured, so this is not enough to worry about." Although the symptoms later turned out to be the same as described by Shi Sheng, the treatment remained unsuccessful after Shi Sheng treated him twice in the third year.

In the second year of the Huichang Period 會昌二年 (842), another friend, Yu Shijun 庾使君 (aka Yu Jianxiu 庾簡休)¹⁸, suggested that he seek help from Zhou Shida 周師達 as there were two eye doctors in Tongzhou, Shi Gongji and Zhou Shida, son of Shi's aunt—what she can do is the same as Shi Sheng. Zhou is old and Shi is younger, but her medical skills are profound and subtle. Additionally, Yu Shiju's cataract was cured by her.

Du Mu hired Zhou for a lot of money and Zhou met with Du Yi and said, "What a shame, the eye has a red vein, where the internal obstruction is fatty. There is a red vein adorned with the person. The needle cannot remove the red vein. The red vein is not removed. needle cannot be applied. There must be great medicine to treat the red vein, yet

I don't know it personally". As Shi Sheng's skill is not sophisticated enough and he does not know the diagnosis, he used the needles recklessly. Zhou did not perform the surgery and went away. After this, he still did not give up and tried to seek help from Taoist monks such as Ji Muhong 蔡母宏 or and Gong Fayi 龔法義 (see Du 2008, pp. 1009–10).

This record offers insightful information about the Tang Dynasty's use of golden scalpels during cataract surgery. We can observe that Chinese doctors adopted this surgical expertise. This may indicate that although this technology is still passed down within families, it has been disseminated more widely. The fact that Zhou is Shi's cousin, yet they did not share the same surname, suggests the method of treating the eye disease can be passed to the daughter's family. Maybe the daughter also obtained this skill or at least her son was entitled to learn this technique. The fact that Du Mu tried to enlist the aid of Taoist monks despite the fact that the story did not specifically mention how they acquired this skill suggests that they are capable of performing this surgery or at the very least possess methods that are similar or the capacity to treat tough eye disorders. This implies that all the doctors at the time fought over treating eye conditions. Furthermore, the cases presented by Li Shangyin, Wen Tingyun, and Bai Juyi indicate that Buddhist monks have an advantage in this cutthroat field. Buddhist medicine also reaches out to a larger spectrum of society, in contrast to other religions such as Nestorian Christianity, which exclusively focused on healing the emperor and the nobles.

4.4. Other Materials Related to Ophthalmologists in the Tang Dynasty

Zhao Lin's 趙璘 (830–after 868) *Yinhualu* 因話錄 (*Records of Heresays*) tells a story that Prime Minister Cui Shenyou 崔慎由 (805–868) was cured by a Chinese doctor. It says that when Cui was Surveillance and Supervisory Commissioner of Zhexi (*Zhexi guanchan chuzhi shi* 浙西觀察處置使, zhexi is the area of today's north of Zhejiang and south of Jiangsu), he had a pterygium in his left eye that gradually obscured his pupil. He learned that Mu Zhong 穆中 from Yangzhou was skilled in eye surgery, yet his subordinate told him Mu was careless and introduced him Tan Jian 譚簡, who was far better than Mu Zhong in his attentiveness and scrutiny. The procedure was carried out in a quiet room with just a servant by the doctor's side on a sunny midday. Tan plucked the pterygium from Cui's left eye and used silk to apply a powdered herbal medication to stem the bleeding while he was mildly drunk from a moderate dinner. He told Cui's wife how to perform proper aftercare when the procedure was finished. Everything from the operating room's lighting, temperature, and anesthesia to the patient's food and mood, as well as halting the bleeding after the procedure and calming the family, is important for Cui's recovery (Zhao 1957, pp. 120–21). This story was first recorded in *Yinhualu* and later collected by *Tang yu lin* 唐語林 in a shorter version (Wang 1987, p. 637). This record suggests that local doctors such as Mu Zhong and Tanjian of the Tang dynasty were also skilled in treating eye-related disorders.

The case of Jianzhen 鑿真 in *Tōdaiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征傳 is also worth noting. The book records that when Jianzhen arrived in Shaoguan from Guangzhou, his "eyesight dimmed, due to his travelling in hot climates for so long. There was a foreigner from the western regions who said that he could cure (Ganjin's) eyes. He applied the treatment and (Ganjin) lost his eyesight completely" 頻經炎熱，眼光暗昧。爰有胡人，言能治目。加療治，眼遂失明 (Bingenheimer 2008, p. 12; T51.2089.991c27-28). In this story, the *hu* person, who was probably a monk from Central Asia or maybe India, treated Jianzhen. Although he claimed to be a skilled healer, he was actually a quack. This makes the material interesting. The fact that Jianzhen may also be a sign that the idea that a *hu* person was adept at curing eye diseases seems to have been widely accepted at the time, to the point where Jianzhen, a Japanese immigrant, was open to receiving care from a *hu* person. However, as this section demonstrates, the ophthalmologist's identity was complicated, ranging from Brahmin to Buddhist monk to Nestorian from Daqin and local doctors.

All of this suggests that foreign medicine's stimulation was essential to the development and advancement of ophthalmology during the Tang dynasty and that the rivalry

between Buddhism, Nestorianism, and traditional Chinese medicine might provide an essential social and political setting for the advancement of ophthalmic procedures.

5. Conclusions

Ophthalmology of the Tang Dynasty is significant in the history of ophthalmology. The accomplishments of the pre-Tang were inventively blended into Tang Dynasty ophthalmology. In addition to Master Xie and Master Shen's prescriptions on treating the eyes, *Waitai miyao* also contains eye-related treatment from *Zhouhou fang* 肘后方 (*Portable Prescriptions*) attributed to Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–363), *Xiaopin fang* 小品方 (*Short Prescriptions*) by Chen Yanzhi 陳延之 (d.u.), *Jiyan fang* 集驗方 (*Collected Prescriptions*) by Yao Senghuan 姚僧垣 (499–583) and *Cuishu fang* 崔氏方 (*Doctor Cui's Prescriptions*) by Cui Zhidi 崔知悌 (615–685). The impact of foreign medical research, particularly the Golden Grate, foreign medications, and foreign monks (including Nestorians, Brahmins, and Buddhist monks), was the second characteristic of ophthalmology in the Tang Dynasty. The Tang Dynasty was a pioneer and an inspiration in ophthalmology. Although ophthalmology did not become independent until the Song and Yuan eras, when it was a component of the Department of Ophthalmology and Otorhinolaryngology, its philosophy, methods, and medicine established the groundwork for the discipline's development throughout this time. The case of Li Shangyin and Chutao demonstrates that, during the Song Dynasty, how the Sanskrit *dhāraṇīs* used to heal the eyes was replaced with Chinese poetic verses. But the Tang Dynasty's foundations remained in place. It is very important to note how ophthalmology advanced during the Ming and Qing dynasties, when numerous specialized ophthalmology works reorganized the numerous medical instances from earlier generations (Chen 1986, p. 3).

Buddhism not only brought new religious beliefs and cultural practices to China, but it also introduced a wealth of medical knowledge and techniques that had developed in India. Such medical knowledge was applied to Tang Dynasty literati such as Bai Juyi, Li Shangyin, and Du Mu's younger brother. These individuals were able to benefit from the medical advancements made possible by Buddhist teachings and practices. As a result, they were able to lead healthier lives and achieve greater success in their work.

Moreover, we need to highlight the broader cultural implications of these medical advancements, looking beyond the medical techniques themselves and exploring the cultural natives these stories were written. This includes technological innovations such as *Jin bi shu*, medical books such as *Longshu Lun*, and a complex system of mantras, rituals, and prescriptions represented by practice in Esoteric Buddhism. Some of these techniques and medicine were still available in late Qing Dynasty and Mingguo time.

Buddhist ophthalmology technology was particularly prominent during this time period. This may have been due to the deep involvement of Buddhists in Chinese social and cultural life. As a result, doctors who were close to Buddhism were more likely to master these techniques. Over time, these medical advancements became widely adopted and served various people. Compared with other religions such as Nestorianism, Buddhist ophthalmology technology seems to occupy an advantageous position at the level of texts and cultures. This also provides more possibilities for us to understand the religious culture of the Tang Dynasty.

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Notes

- 1 In the story of Shi Tanqian 釋曇遷, he caught a fever. At night, he dreamed that the moon had fallen into his bosom, so he broke it and ate it, which was as crisp as a piece of ice. Additionally, he was so amazed at its delicious taste and smell. When he woke up, all his pain he had suffered was gone. He could still taste the left taste in his mouth even after one month later. He was helped by the holy one, eating the moon to gain benefit. Then, he secretly changed his own name, regarding himself as The Virtue of the Moon. 夜夢月落入懷，乃擘而食之，脆如冰片，甚訝香美，覺罷所苦瘵復，一旬有餘流味在口。因其聖助，食月成德。遂私改名，以為月德也。(see T.50.2060.572a4-7).
- 2 In the story of Shi Zhizao 釋智瑑, he became sick after the funeral of his parents. After years and months of ineffective medicine, he still walks out of the courtyard at night and lies down in front of the moon. He would chant with all his heart to the Moonlight Bodhisattva, saying “I wish for great compassion to help me with my chronic disease.” He thought as such. “After more than 45 days, in the middle of a night I suddenly dreamed of a man.” In the middle of the night, he suddenly dreamt that a man of extraordinary appearance came from the east and said to him “I have come to cure you.” Then, he put his mouth on Zhizao’s body and sucked (bad things out) one place after another. This happened three nights in a row and then he was thus slightly cured. 頻經歲月醫藥無効。仍於靜夜策杖曳疾。出到中庭向月而臥。至心專念。月光菩薩惟願大悲濟我沈痾。如是繫念遂經旬朔。於中夜間夢見一人。形色非常。從東方來。謂瑑曰。我今故來為汝治病。即以口就瑑身。次第吸嗽。三夜如此。因爾稍瘥 (see T50.2060.585b16-22).
- 3 There are actually eight poems in which the word is mentioned in *Quan tang shi*; however in the eighth poem, it is not the golden scalpel we are discussing. The poem *Nü guanzi* 女冠子 (Taoist Nun) was attributed to Xue Shaoyun 薛紹蘊 (d.u.) of the Qian Shu Dynasty (907–925), which states, “I will seek for immortality, left all my jade hair ornaments and golden hairpins. 求仙去也，翠鈿金篋盡捨” (see Peng 1960, p. 10095). Here, *jinbi* is the golden hairpin, the symbol of her feminine, comfortable, and rich life, which the nun gave up when she renounced the world.
- 4 For example, in Zhao Dingchen’s 趙鼎臣 (d.u.) *Bingmu wuliao yin you ciyunsi zuoshi cheng zhuyou* 病目無聊因遊慈雲寺作詩呈諸友 (*I was bored with sick eyes, so I visited Ciyun Temple and composed a poem for all my friends*), it says the best words are like a golden scalpel which can remove the cover of one’s eyes 至言若金篋，刮膜除蔽映。 Additionally, in Ge Zhongsheng’s 葛勝仲 (1072–1144) *Heyun da Ma Yonghong* 和韻答馬用宏 (*Replied to Ma Yonghong with the same rhyme*), it says, “Show me the highest truth with the golden scalpel which breaks blindness and ignorance. 示我第一義，金篋破昏瞶” This use is almost the same as Du Fu. This does not mean that *jinbi shu* as a surgical technique does not exist anymore. On the contrary, using *jinbi shu* to treat cataracts has been an integral element of traditional Chinese medicine since the Tang Dynasty, and the Western Regions’ color gradually disappeared, giving rise to numerous well-known local doctors in its wake. One of them was documented by Su Shi 蘇軾 in his *Zeng yanji wangsheng yanruo* 贈眼醫王生彥若 (*For Eye-doctor Mr. Wang Yanruo*) in which he writes down details of doctor Wang, a pupil of Master Lequan 樂全, applied this surgery (Su 2011, pp. 264–65).
- 5 *Xie* 泄 or *xie* 瀉 is a complicated term in Chinese Medicine, which can refer to the leak or excretion of the human body, diarrhea, the needle technique to reduce, purge or drain, outflow wind, etc. Here, it refers to the counterbalance technique of needle practice, which can be translated as reduce, purge, discharge, drain or expel (Wu 2021, pp. 305–8). *Dahuang wan* is a medicine to leak (causing the body to reduce or let out bad things), so here the text stresses that this reduction should be controlled within a certain range.
- 6 Examples can be found in the text recorded in *Yinhai Jingwei* 銀海精微 (*Essential Subtleties on the Silver Sea*), a renowned ophthalmology book that appeared in the Ming Dynasty. The book covers 82 types of diseases related to the eyes and includes voluminous content on the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases, integrating ophthalmic theory with medication and surgery. It gives details of *jinbi shu*, and states if one wants to apply the golden-needle surgery, “one must choose an auspicious day. The wind should be still, and it should be a warm day. One must wait until noon, burn incense, and appeal to Longshu, the king of medicine, and to the Bodhisattva Guanyin” (see Sun 1999, pp. 403–4; 2006, pp. 125–26).
- 7 In *Mujing Dacheng* 目經大成 (*Great Collections of Eye-related Texts*, compiled from 1741 to the 1850s) by Huang Tingjing 黃庭鏡 (1704–?), the eight steps (*bafa* 八法, Eight Methods) of how to perform proper surgery with the technique of *jinpi shu* is described (Huang 2006, pp. 155–56). For further discussion of the development of this technique, see (Mou 1992, pp. 33–37).
- 8 Other medical books also contain Master Shen’s prescriptions. For example, *Qianjin fang* collects 27 entries of Master Shen, and *Yixin fang* 醫心方 (*Formulas in Doctors’ Mind*) collects 160 formulas of Master Shen. There are a total of 476 medical formulas for treating various diseases, as many as 1151, most frequently related to pregnancy and labour. (Wang 2004, pp. 60–62).
- 9 In this version of *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, it seems Li Shangyin only prayed towards the temple where Master Zhixuan lives, and he did not send a letter or meet with Zhixuan. somehow Zhixuan receives this message through his supernatural power and sent Li the verses. Maybe this expression is too magical to be true. In another version of the same story written by Shi Xintai 釋心泰 from the Ming Dynasty, it says that Li Shangyin begged Zhixuan, meditated and prayed (*qixuan ming dao* 乞玄冥禱) (X87.1628.412b14). Xintai says this story comes from *Fozhuan tongji* 僧傳統紀 (*Chronicle of Monistic Biographies*). The word *qi* is to beg, which might suggest that he asked for the help of Zhixuan in a physical form, either meeting him in person or writing him a letter.
- 10 Fang Ning 范甯 (339–401) suffered from eye disease and sought the help of Zhang Zhan. Instead of prescribing a prescription, Zhang told him to do six things: do not read too much, reduce anxiety (*siliu* 思慮), focus on internal viewing (meditate, *neishi* 內視), reduce external viewing (*waiguan* 外觀), wake up late in the morning and go to sleep early (Fang 1974, p. 1988).

- 11 Examples can be found in *Datang xinyu* 大唐新語 (*New Tales of Great Tang Dynasty*, finished around 807, see Liu 2000, p. 299), *Jiu tang shu* 舊唐書 (*The Old Book of Tang* compiled in 945, Liu 1975, p. 111), *Xin tang shu* 新唐書 (*The New Book of Tang*, finished in 1060, Ouyang 1975, p. 3477), *Tang yu lin* 唐語林 (*Forest of Tales in the Tang Dynasty*, see Wang 1987, p. 438).
- 12 There are some debates over the identity of Qin Minghe. Most scholars believe that Qin Minghe is from Da Qin. Some further this conclusion, taking Qin Minghe as a missionary of Nestorianism as Jingjiao 景教 originated from the Da Qin. Some believe that Qin Minghe's healing techniques were closely related to Indian medicine. (4) Thirdly, unlike the two previous views, in recent years, some scholars have pointed out that Qin Minghe's medical techniques were within the scope of Chinese medicine and acupuncture, not extra-territorial bloodletting, and had nothing to do with the medical techniques of the Jingjiao (see Du 2016, p. 111).
- 13 Du Huan 杜環 also known as Du Hai 杜還, was a native of Jingzhao 京兆 (now Xi'an, Shaanxi Province). He was one of the nephews of Du You 杜祐 (735–812). In 751 CE, he was captured along with Gao Xianzhi 高仙芝 (?–756) while fighting against the army of the Dashi 大食 (the Arab Empire) in the city of Aulie Ata (located in present-day Talas, Kazakhstan). Subsequently, he traveled extensively in West Asia and North Africa, thereby becoming the first Chinese to visit Africa and writing a book on his journey. He returned to China by a merchant ship in the early Baoying Period (762 CE) and authored a book called "The Book of Traveling." Unfortunately, this book has been lost to history, except for a few preserved citations from Du You's *Tongdian* 通典 (*Comprehensive Statutes*, compiled in 801), which contains over 1,500 characters of Du Huan's work. *Jingxing ji* is the earliest known Chinese text that records the teachings of Islam, production techniques spread by Chinese artisans in the Arabic Emperor (Dashi 大食), as well as the history, geography, products, and customs of several countries in Asia and Africa (see Du 2000, pp. 1–5).
- 14 It is difficult to know where Molin guo and Qiusaluo guo are located. Some believe Molin guo can be a place in or near Morocco, Moghri (Maghribel Aksa), Murabit (around the south of Spain and north of Africa), and Malindi near the equator, or a place near the Red Sea. Additionally, Qiusaluoguo might refer to Castille (the ancient name for Spain), Jerusalem in Israel or Basra in Iraq (see Du 2000, p. 19).
- 15 In the second year of the Kaiyuan Period 開元二年 (714), monks from Persian and others such as Lie made all sorts of strange and exotic objects and presented them to the emperor 波斯僧及烈等廣造奇器異巧以進 (see Wang 1960, p. 1078). In the twenty-eighth year of Kaiyuan Period 開元二十八年 (740), Li Xian 李憲 (679–742), Emperor Xuanzong's 玄宗 (Li Longji 李隆基, 685–762) brother, was ill, and Chongyi 崇一 (who was a Nestorian Christian missionary) treated him (Liu 1975, p. 3012; Chen 2009, p. 457). In the fourth year of Tianbao 天寶四年 (745), Emperor Xuanzong issued an imperial edict stating that the Nestorian Christian from Persian (*bosi jingjiao* 波斯經教) originated from the Daqin and had been spread in China for a long time. So he changed the name of the temple from the Persian temple (*bosi si* 波斯寺) to Daqin temple (*daqin si* 大秦寺) (Wang 1960, p. 864). It seems for a long time, Chinese people confused monks from Persia with monks from Daqin, or they use Persian monks to describe Nestorian Christian missionaries. For more information of *jingjiao* in Tang Dynasty, see (Lin 2003, pp. 91–95).
- 16 For a clear picture of the monument and the Chinese texts on it, see <http://beilin-museum.com/index.php?m=home&c=View&a=index&aid=2577>, accessed on 10 May 2023.
- 17 The original Chinese text says *Tang chengxiang Li Gonggong hucong zai shu zhong ri huanyan* 唐丞相李恭公扈从在蜀中日患眼 which is very confusing. The proper order of the sentence should be *Tang chengxiang Li Gonggong, hucong zai shuzhong, ri huanyan* 唐丞相李恭公扈从在蜀中, 日患眼 which means Li Gonggong travels with the Empire as an entourage, when they are in Sichuan, Li Gonggong suffered from eye disease with worsen conditions every day. Yet, the name Li Gong or Li Gonggong does not appear in the Prime Minister list in the history records of the Tang Dynasties. There are two Empires that traveled to Sichuan in the Tang Dynasty. Empire Xuanzong 玄宗 (Li Longji 李隆基, 685–762, ruled 685–762) went to Sichuan from 756 to 757 due to the rebellion of An Lushan (d. 757) and Shi Siming (d. 761) (Liu 1975, p. 234). Additionally, Empire Xizong 僖宗 (Li Xuan 李僖 862–888, ruled 873–888) arrived in Sichuan in 881 due to Huang Chao (?–884) Rebellion (878–884) (see Liu 1975, p. 710). Yet, we cannot find concrete records of a Prime Minister called Li Gong or Li Gonggong at that time. However, in the Yuan Dynasty, Xu Guozhen 許國楨 wrote a medical book called *Yuyao yuanfang* 御藥院方 (*Medicine and Prescriptions of the Imperial Infirmary*). In *juan ten*, it collects many prescriptions on curing the eyes (*zhi yan mu men* 治眼目門), in which it records the medicine called *Di huang wan* 地黃丸 which is the same medicine as *Di huang yuan* 地黃圓 in *Shizhai baiyi xuanfang* here. *Yuyao yuanfang* states that *dihuang wan* can supply the *qi* (energy or air) of the kidney, which can heal the eyes. Prime Minister Li Kui 李揆 used to suffer from eye diseases. At that time, his eye cover (conjunctivitis) grows. Sometimes it hurts immediately, sometimes he sees black spots (flowers) similar to the shape of wings of the insects. Seng Zhishen prayed (for the Buddha) and answered with poetic verses (*gāthā*), saying, "This is the kidney suffering from the wind poison. 地黃丸補腎氣, 治眼。昔李揆相公患眼, 時生翳膜, 或即疼痛, 或見黑花如蟲形翹羽之狀。僧智深請謁云: 此乃腎毒風也。" (see Xu 1992, p. 180) Then, the book writes down the content of *Dihuangwan* which was the same as recorded in *Shi zhai baiyi xuanfang*. Additionally, Li Kui did work as Prime Minister (Ouyang 1975, p. 1683) and went to Sichuan with Empire Xuanzong (*hucong jiannan* 扈從劍南 (Sichuan Province)) (see Liu 1975, p. 3559), so him being treated by Zhishen would happen in 756–757 when Empire Xuanzong was in Sichuan. Additionally, in *Xin Tang shu*, it did say the posthumous title (*shihao* 諡號) of Li Kui is *gong* 恭 (Ouyang 1975, p. 4809). It is highly possible that Li Gong gong 李恭公 was Lord Li Gong, aka Li Kui. However, another possibility cannot be completely ruled out as Xu Guozhen might have seen the material from the Song Dynasty (or materials from the Tang Dynasty) and changed Li Gong to Li Kui according to his own examinations and knowledge. A similar text can be found in *Michuan*

yanke Longmu lun as well (Longshu 2006, pp. 88–89). As we examined earlier, this book was published in the Ming Dynasty, and can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty yet compiled by doctors and literati in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. That is to say, it is difficult to know if the name of Li Gong aka Li Kui was recorded in the materials as early as the time of Li Kui's passing which is 784, or at least to the time of the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, these two people might not be the same person.

- ¹⁸ Yu Jianxiu is the younger brother of Yu Jingxiu 庾敬休 (?–835) (Liu 1975, p. 4913). Additionally, Yu Jinxiu was promoted from Jianyi Dafu 諫議大夫 (Vice Grand Masters of Remonstrance, for the English translation of the title, see Hucker 1985, p. 29) to Prefect of Guoguo (*guoguo cishi* 虢國刺史) in the fourth year of Dazhong Period 大中四年 (850) (see Liu 1975, p. 618).

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Article

Whence the 8th Day of the 4th Lunar Month as the Buddha's Birthday

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Abstract: Two dates, the 8th day of the 4th lunar month (Date A) and the 8th day of the 2nd lunar month (Date B), are found in Chinese Buddhist translations as the Buddha's birthday. However, how to understand the simultaneous existence of both of these dates remains an unresolved problem. This paper proposes a rather new interpretation to try to solve this puzzle, and provide an answer to the question: whence the 8th day of the 4th lunar month as the Buddha's birthday? It is argued that: (1) The date of the Buddha's conception and the date of his birth were both translated variously as Date A or Date B in early Chinese Buddhist literature. However, many later texts referring to the Buddha's birthday do not include reference to an auspicious junction star (*puṣyanakṣatra*), which is critical for understanding these dates; (2) Both the Indian and Chinese traditions regard an individual's life to begin at the moment of conception; therefore, the so-called Buddha's birthday could be argued as the date of his conception; (3) The date of conception of the Buddha was specified as the 8th day of the *suklapakṣa* of the month Vaiśākha, the day of the vernal equinox. This corresponds to Date A in the Chinese Xia calendar.

Keywords: Buddha's birthday; *puṣyanakṣatra*; April 8; Vaiśākha; Sino-Indian calendar

1. Introduction

Two dates, the 8th day of the 4th lunar month (Date A) and the 8th day of the 2nd lunar month (Date B), are found in Chinese Buddhist translations as the Buddha's birthday. However, how to understand the simultaneous existence of both of these dates remains unresolved. As is well known, much controversy has surrounded the question of the dates of the Buddha, and in particular the year of his death, which was the main topic of an international conference organized by Heinz Bechert at Göttingen in 1988. Although the date of the Buddha's birth was also touched on (Bechert 1991–1997, p. 97), little was settled; later, other conferences also dealt with the Buddha's birth (Cueppers et al. 2010), but the topic, and in particular the question of how to account for the inconsistent dates in the Chinese literature, has largely been overlooked compared to the attention paid to the date of the Buddha's death. Date A has been tacitly recognized as the appropriate time for celebration of the Buddha's birthday in most of East Asia.¹ However, in regard to the inconsistent dates for the Buddha's birth and the reasoning for taking either as the Buddha's birthday, there is still a lack of scholarly consensus.

Noteworthy is the publication of *Shakuson no shōgai ni sotte hairetsu shita jisekibetsu genshi bukkyō seiten sōran* 釈尊の生涯にあって配列した事績別原始仏教聖典総覧, by Mori Shōji 森章司 and his research team (Shakusonden Kenkyūkai 1999–2019). Mori distinguished between the date of the Buddha's conception and that of his birth (Mori 1999). Specifically, he distinguishes “the date the Buddha descended into the womb 入胎日” (the date of conception) from “the date the Buddha came out of the womb 出胎日” (the date of birth) respectively, according to Chinese translations of the Buddha's biographical literature. However, which of the two events corresponds to Date A and which to Date B remains to be established. This inspired me to consider the unresolved confusion surrounding the two dates found for the Buddha's birthday.

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In this essay, I start from materials related to a misunderstood term in Chinese literature, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, and then look back to possible sources and their Indian Buddhist background. I not only rely on counterparts in different languages but also pay attention to information supplied by Indian and Chinese astronomy. Based on these analyses, I argue that a date combining month (月) and day (日) did not suffice for correctly transmitting the Buddha's date of birth; rather, we must take into account extra details, including reference to an auspicious junction star. In so doing, we can conclude that Date A, which has traditionally been taken as the Buddha's birthday, in fact pertains not to the date of birth but to the date of conception of the Buddha.

2. An Indispensable Element in the Moment of the Buddha's Birth: An Auspicious Junction Star

Date A is not only acknowledged in the Chinese biographical literature of the Buddha (see below), but can also be found in some non-Buddhist Chinese literature. For example, as Erik Zürcher (2007, pp. 271–72) notes, Chinese non-Buddhist literature used two systems for dating the Buddha's birth, arriving at two different dates: the first on Date A of the 10th year of King Zhuang of Zhou 周庄王 (now identified as a period ending in 682 BCE, but whose beginning is unknown), the other on Date A of the 24th year of King Zhao of Zhou 周昭王 (now identified as ?1027 BCE–977 BCE). Ancient scholars usually relied on the latter date to argue for Buddhism's superiority over Daoism, and these references are the reason that these dates are frequently quoted even by modern scholars (Liu 2017; Chen 2018). What is more, Zürcher (2007, p. 272) suggests that one of the Chinese translations of the Buddha's biography, the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經, "says that 'on the 8th day of the 4th month, when the night was bright (夜明) the Buddha was born', using exactly the words of the *Zuozhuan* [左傳] passage mentioned" (emphasis in original), and most scholars have adopted Zürcher's argument. However, it is well worth our while to reexamine the contents of the *Zuozhuan* and *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*.

The *Zuozhuan* is a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), and regarding the 7th year of King Zhuang of Lu 魯莊公 (now identified as 706 BCE–662 BCE) it says, "in the summer, a star could not be seen [because] the night was bright".² As the two Chinese characters "night 夜" and "bright 明" are also found in the later *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*, Zürcher may have thought that the latter borrowed exactly these two words from the former. Zürcher read "夜明" as "the night was bright" and assumed it refers to Date A. However, the whole content of this sentence in the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* should rather be translated, "when it was the night of the 8th day of the 4th lunar month, with the appearance of the bright star (明星出時) (emphasis added), [the Bodhisattva] came out from [Māyā's] right side".³ Therefore, it is clear that "night 夜" and "bright 明" are separate from each other, as reflected in my insertion of a comma between them (see note 3), instead of comprising one single term being a supplement for Date A, as understood by Zürcher. Thus, the meaning of the "bright star 明星" and how it influences the record of the Buddha's birth needs to be reconsidered carefully.

2.1. Star Fei 沸星

The earliest accounts of the Buddha's birth which include both the date and the name of a star are Chinese translations of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. However, it is worth noting that there is no corresponding section in the Pali *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha nikāya*.⁴

The *Youxing jing* 游行经 (one Chinese parallel of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*) in the *Chang ahan jing* 长阿含经 (the Chinese parallel of the *Dīgha nikāya*), attributed to Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍 (date unknown) and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (4–5c), states:

How was [the Buddha] born as the one supremely honored among the two-legged (human beings)? How did [he] become free from transmigration? How did [he] attain the supreme way? How did [he] enter into the citadel of *nirvāṇa*?

It was under the star Fei [that the Buddha] was born as the one supremely honored among the two-legged It was on the 8th day that the Tathāgata was born It was on the 8th day [that the Buddha was] born as the one supremely honored among the two-legged It was in the 2nd lunar month that the Tathāgata was born It was in the 2nd lunar month [that the Buddha] was born as the one supremely honored among the two-legged⁵

In this section, the star Fei 沸星 is a necessary element comprising the time of the same four events in the Buddha's life (birth; freedom from transmigration; attainment of the supreme way; entering into *nirvāṇa*) together with two expressions: on the 8th day 八日, and, of the 2nd lunar month 二月. A similar structure with star Fei, date and month is found in two other Chinese parallels of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, but they differ from the translation above in that they render the 8th day of the 4th lunar month (Date A) instead of the 2nd lunar month (Date B).⁶ I will come back to this discrepancy in the two dates later; in the following section, I demonstrate that the bright star 明星 as introduced above can be identified with the star Fei as described in the three Chinese translations of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*.

2.2. Star Fei's Other Names or Interpretations: Bright Star 明星, Fusha 弗沙, and Gui Mansion 鬼宿

A 12th century glossary of Chinese Buddhist translation terms, the *Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集, edited by Fayun 法雲 (1087–1158), explains the star Fusha 弗沙 and its several different names, including star Fei, in the following way:

Fusha 弗沙 is correctly named Fusha 富沙. [Master] Qingliang says: "It is also named 'Bo sha 勃沙'. Here⁷, it [Fusha 弗沙] means 'prosper' because of the meaning of insight and ultimate truth".⁸ [Fusha 弗沙] is also named *Tiṣya* 底沙,⁹ *Tiṣhe* 提舍 as well. Here, it is translated as 'bright' 明. In addition, it is named *Shuodu* 說度 [namely], preach the Dharma and liberate others. [Separately,] Master [Kumāra]jīva interprets the [name of] Fusha Bodhisattva: "[Star Fusha is] the name of the star Gui 鬼, [which is also the name of one of] the Twenty-Eight Mansions. When [someone is] born under the Guixiu 鬼宿, they are named after it. Alternatively, [they can be] named after the star Fei, or the star Bei 水星." (Emphasis added.)¹⁰

From the above it is clear that the star Fei has several different names and semantic interpretations; in addition to the translation "bright 明", the most commonly found names in Chinese Buddhist literature related to the Buddha's birth are Fusha 弗沙 and Guixiu 鬼宿. To take these three terms in turn, let us begin with "bright". Fayun equates Fusha with the quality bright, while Kumārajīva states that Fusha is synonymous with both Gui and Fei. Thus, it seems feasible to tentatively identify the star Fei with the quality "bright". This connection between Fusha and Fei supports our understanding that "the bright star 明星" is the star Fei, as mentioned above.

Secondly, regarding Fusha, we can locate it in one of the Chinese translations of the *Lalitavistara*, the *Fanguang dazhuangyan jing* 方廣大莊嚴經 (henceforth FGJ) translated by Divākara 地婆訶羅 (613–687). There, the Chinese Fusha appears to be a transliteration of the Sanskrit *puṣya*, the name of the *nakṣatra* (constellation) of the month Pausa: "The Bodhisattva did not enter the womb in Kṛṣṇapakṣa, but in conjunction with the star Fusha in Śuklapakṣa."¹¹ The relevant Sanskrit text, which does not exactly correspond to the Chinese, reads: "na khalu punar mārśāḥ kṛṣṇapakṣe bodhisattvo mātuh kuṣṭhāv avakramati, apī tu śuklapakṣe evaṃ pañcadaśyām pūrṇāyām pūrṇimāyām puṣyanakṣatrayoge" (Hokazono 1994, p. 316). We also find a very similar description about the conception of Dīpamkara in the *Mahāvastu*: "pūrṇāyām pūrṇamāsyām puṣyanakṣatrayogayuktāyām."¹² J. J. Jones (1949, p. 162) renders this passage as "on the day of the full moon in the month Pausa". In a footnote regarding this translation, Jones states: "Literally 'when the full moon is in conjunction with

the asterism or lunar mansion, *puṣya*, *pūrṇāyām pūrṇamāsyām puṣyanakṣatrayogayuktāyām*; whence the name of the month *Pauṣa*, corresponding to December–January”. Jones’s interpretation as “the month of *Pauṣa*” seems reasonable because in India a month’s name follows the *nakṣatra* in which there is a conjunction with the full moon in *Śuklapakṣa*.¹³ However, if this interpretation is correct, then there is a contradiction regarding the month of the *Bodhisattva*’s conception: if it is during December–January,¹⁴ then the birth would be during September–October. This is far from both Date A and Date B. I will come back to this question of the date later. Returning to the star *Fuṣha* and its relation to *puṣyanakṣatra*, K. V. Sarma (2008, p. 1242) states, “*Yogatārā* (junction star) is the cardinal star in a *nakṣatra* which is made up of several stars. Normally, the *Yogatārā* would be the brightest star in the group, and the zodiacal signs would mostly be named after that star”. Thus, the star *Fuṣha* should be the junction star of *puṣyanakṣatra*.

This brings us to the third term connected to *Fuṣha*, the *Guixiu* 鬼宿. According to *Kumārajīva*, *puṣyanakṣatra* (*Fuṣha*) corresponds to the *Guixiu*.¹⁵ Further, in the *Foben xingji jing* 佛本行集經, translated by *Jñānagupta* 闍那崛多 (523–601?), we find the following reference to *Guixiu*: “On the day of *Guixiu* 鬼宿日, the *Bodhisattva* descended into his mother’s womb”.¹⁶ In contrast to the *FGJ*, the inclusion in the *Foben xingji jing* of the character 日 in the phrase 鬼宿日 provides a more specific date regarding the conjunction between star *Fuṣha* and the moon. This phrase appears to have a parallel in the passage from the *Mahāvastu* presented above, dating the conception of *Dīpaṃkara* to *puṣyanakṣatra*.¹⁷ Thus, this further supports the hypothesis that the two terms, *Guixiu* and *puṣyanakṣatra*, are equivalents.

Pingree and *Morrissey* (1989, p. 99) argue that “there is no basis for identifying the stars included in the Vedic *nakṣatra*, and therefore no grounds for comparing them, for example, with the Chinese lunar mansions”. However, as *Needham* (1974, p. 69) states, “only nine of the twenty-eight *hsiu* determinatives are identical with the corresponding *yogatārās* or ‘junction stars’ of the Indians, while a further eleven share the same constellation but not the same determinative star”. Further, *Stephenson* (2008, p. 1241) affirms that “it has been shown that early Indian astronomers did not fully agree on which stars were regarded as *yogatārā*”. Thus, the star *Fei* may well be the junction star of *Guixiu* (*puṣyanakṣatra*), but we cannot decide whether it would also appear as part of some other constellations. Moreover, the day of *Guixiu* has been dealt with as a separate topos in Chinese translations of non-biographical Buddhist literature, where it is often treated as an auspicious omen in contexts which do not discuss the date of the Buddha’s birth. For example, we see, “A day with the star *Fei* would be an auspicious day” in the *Shisong lü* 十誦律,¹⁸ “*Guixiu* is the owner of all kings or ministers”,¹⁹ and “among all of the *nakṣatras*, *Guixiu* is the best”, according to *Śubhakarasiṃha* 善無畏 (637–735).²⁰

What is worth noting is that this auspicious junction star has been conceived of as a symbol of the Buddha’s birth in two editions of a particular Chinese Buddhist translation related to astrology entitled **Ratnaketudhāraṇīsūtra* 寶星陀羅尼經 translated in 630 by *Prabhāmītra* (*Prabhākaramītra*) 波羅頗蜜多羅 (565–633): the second edition of the Korean canon 高麗藏再雕版 and the Jin canon 金藏, which may reflect the *Kaibao* canon’s 開寶藏 readings, attributed to the Central lineage 中原系統 of the Chinese *Tripitaka* transmission (*Fang* 1991, p. 246; *Chikusa* 1993, pp. 10–17). These two texts read: “*Śākyamuni* was born under the star *Fuṣha* [*Fei*] (which is called *Guixiu* in the Tang Dynasty).”²¹ However, the reading “*Śākyamuni* 牟尼今者” is not found in the following four canons: Song *Sixi* canon 宋思溪藏, Yuan *Puning* canon 元普寧藏, Ming *Jiaying* canon 明嘉興藏 (corresponding in Japan to the *Ōbakuzō* 黃檗藏), and the Song edition belonging to the Library of the Imperial Household 宮內省圖書寮本.²² The appearance of “牟尼今者” in the former two editions implies that people in some Chinese regions knew the connection between this auspicious junction star and the Buddha’s birth.

Furthermore, when we trace the auspicious junction star *Fei* back to early Chinese translations of the Buddha’s biographical literature, we will notice that the bright star

(明星) has been taken as indicating the date of both the Buddha's conception and his birth. For example, on the one hand the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經 states that "it was during the appearance of the bright star on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month (Date A) [that the Bodhisattva] descended into his mother's womb".²³ However, as cited above, according to the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*, "when it was the night of the 8th day of the 4th lunar month (Date A), with the appearance of the bright star, [the Bodhisattva] came out from [Māyā's] right side".

So far, we have confirmed two facts: (1) we are not able to establish the precise time of the Buddha's birth based only on the month (月) and day (日). It is necessary also to incorporate the auspicious junction star, star Fei, known earlier as bright star (明星), along with the month and day; (2) the dates of conception and birth of the Buddha were translated, sometimes with the bright star, sometimes without, variously as Date A or Date B in early Chinese Buddhist literature.

It is widely accepted that as an auspicious omen, the star Fei with Date A or Date B has been taken as the same time for the four main events of the Buddha's life. However, the inconsistent Chinese renderings raise a vexing question, that is, how and why has Date A prevailed rather than Date B as a definite date of the Buddha's birthday?

3. The Derivation of the Buddha's Birthday: The Date of Conception Instead of Birth

In order to resolve the confusion between Date A and B, it is necessary to clarify the difference between the date of conception and the date of birth when it comes to the Buddha's birthday.

3.1. Conception Month: Vaiśākha

A comprehensive survey of the following two relevant portions from the *Lalitavistara* and its two Chinese translations, *Pu yao jing* 普曜經 (henceforth PYJ) attributed to Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (239–316), and the FGJ, reveals that a specific date is indicated for the Buddha's conception but not for his birth. Regarding conception, we read the following:

Garbhāvakrānti-parivartaḥ

iti hi bhikṣavaḥ śīśirakālavīrṅgate vaiśākhmāse viśākhānakṣatṛānugate ṛtupravare vasantakālasamayā . . . ṛtukālasamayam pañcadaśyām pūrnāmāsyām pośadha(peri)grhītāyā mātuḥ puṣyanakṣatrayogena bodhisattvo tuṣitavarabhavanāc cyutvā . . . jananyā dakṣiṇāyām kuṣāv avakrāma[ti] . . . (Hokazono 1994, pp. 386.1–8)

Chapter on Descending into the Womb

Thus, o Bhikṣus! Winter had passed and it was the month of Vaiśākha, during the *viśākhā nakṣatṛā*, the best season, at the time of the spring equinox . . . at the proper time, on the 15th day, at the full moon, by his mother observing a fast, when [the moon] was in conjunction with *puṣya nakṣatra*, the Bodhisattva left his excellent palace in Tuṣita and . . . entering into the right side of the belly of the mother . . .

PYJ: "降神處胎品": 佛語諸比丘: "于時菩薩過冬盛寒, 至始春之初, 修合星宿, 春末夏初 適在時宜, 沸星應下, 菩薩便從兜術天上, 垂降威靈" (T no.0186, 491: a25–a29)

FGJ: "處胎品": 佛告諸比丘: "冬節過已, 于春分中毗舍佉月, 叢林花葉, 鮮澤可愛, 不寒不熱。氏宿合時, 三界勝人, 觀察天下, 白月圓淨, 而弗沙星, 正與月合。菩薩是時從兜率天宮沒" (T no.0187, 548: c07–c10)

As for the Buddha's birth, we read the following:

Janma-parivartaḥ

iti hi bhikṣavo daśamāseṣu nirgāteṣu bodhisattvasya janmakālasamayā pratyupasthite rājñāḥ śuddhodanasyōdyāne dvātriṃṣatpūrvanimitāni prādūrabhūvan . . . puṣyam ca nakṣatrayu ktam (abhūt). (Hokazono 1994, pp. 428.1–3, 430.2–3)

Chapter on Birth

Thus, O Bhikṣus! When ten months passed and the time of the Bodhisattva’s birth had drawn near, thirty-two previous signs appeared in the garden of King Śuddhodana ... [the moon] was in conjunction with *puṣya nakṣatra*.

PYJ: “欲生時三十二瑞品”：佛語比丘：“滿十月已，菩薩臨產之時，先現瑞應三十有二 ... 沸宿下侍 ... ” (T no.0186, 492: c26–493: a22)

FGJ: “誕生品”：爾時佛告諸比丘：“菩薩處胎，滿足十月，將欲生時，輪檀王宮先現三十二種瑞相 ... 弗沙之星將與月合 ... ” (T no.0187, 551: b29–c23)

As we can see, for the *Lalitavistara* and its two Chinese counterparts, there are several quite particular and rather definite phrases for the date of conception, while there is only one expression emphasizing ten months’ pregnancy in the chapter on birth. Moreover, while in the chapter on conception star Fei (*puṣyanakṣatra*) appears as an element of the combination with other time expressions indicating a precise date, it is simply one of the thirty-two auspicious appearances in the chapter on birth.²⁴

The month Vaiśākha is the first and the most vivid indication suggesting when the Buddha descended into the womb. Its counterpart cannot be found in the PYJ, but in the FGJ it is transliterated as “毗舍佉月 Bi she qu yue” and translated as “氏宿 Dixiu”. In addition, Fayun says: “Vaiśākha 毘舍佉, otherwise [may be called] ‘Bi she qu’ 鼻奢佉. Here [in China] it is called ‘Bie zhi’ 別枝, that is ‘Dixiu’ 氏宿”.²⁵

Although the month Vaiśākha only appears in the chapter on conception in the *Lalitavistara*, it would be hasty to think of it as exclusively the time of conception. According to Xuanzang (602–664), who stayed in India for approximately 17 years, all eight junctures of the Bodhisattva’s life were taken as occurring in the month Vaiśākha (See Ji (2000, pp. 523, 533, 539, 678)). In the same way, all those key events in the life of the Buddha are considered either as Date A or Date B by the above three Chinese counterparts of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. That is, the information regarding the date of conception does have a connection with all the dates of the main events of the Buddha’s life.

3.2. The First Step of the Buddha’s Life: Conception

At first, *Jiangsheng pin* 降生品 of FGJ and *Jiangshen chutai pin* 降神處胎品 of PYJ state that Māyā had been decorating exquisitely to prepare for the Bodhisattva entering and staying in the womb, when all the gods declared that they would be in the service of the Buddha from “the beginning of his entering the womb, to his coming out of the womb, his childhood, his feeling of recreation and indulgence of desires, leaving home and practicing austerities, reaching the Bodhi tree, subduing Māra, rolling the wheel of the true Dharma, manifesting divine powers, staying in the Trayastriṃśa, and entering *nirvāṇa*”.²⁶ All of these formulations suggest that conception, rather than birth, is taken as the start of the Buddha’s present life.²⁷

Next, let us observe the importance of this information from the whole picture of the three stages of the Buddha’s birth: the conception, the pregnancy, and the birth (see Table 1).²⁸

Table 1. The three stages of the Buddha’s birth in the *Lalitavistara* and their Chinese translations (PYJ and FGJ).

Three Stages	Chapter of <i>Lalitavistara</i>	Chapter of PYJ	Chapter of FGJ	Chapter of Hokazono’s Japanese Translation
1. Conception	Pracalana-parivartaḥ	a. 所現象品 + b. 降神處胎品	降生品	出立品
2. Pregnancy	Garbhāvākraṅti-parivartaḥ	b. 降神處胎品	處胎品	入胎品
3. Birth	Janma-parivartaḥ	c. 欲生時三十二瑞品	誕生品	誕生品

What is noteworthy is that:

- (1) The second chapter of the PYJ (*jiangshen chutai pin* 降神處胎品) corresponds to the latter part of the first Sanskrit chapter and all of the second.
- (2) The PYJ and the FGJ translate the title of the first Sanskrit chapter differently, though they both use the Chinese character *jiang* 降.²⁹
- (3) For the conception stage, FGJ adopts *jiangsheng* 降生; for the pregnancy stage, PYJ uses *jiangshen* 降神; and for the birth stage, in FGJ we find *dansheng* 誕生.

Different translations of the titles of the three chapters in which the above three stages occur lead to some difficulty clearly identifying them. For example, if we do not separate the whole birth process into three stages, both *jiangsheng* 降生 and *dansheng* 誕生 might be taken as giving birth, but the former pertains to the stage of conception while the latter has been accepted to express an individual's birthday in modern society.

In the early 20th century, the scholar Zhou Zumo 周祖謨 gives a commentary on the following entry in the 6th century text *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記, a report on the monasteries of Luoyang: "A white elephant with six teeth carried Śākyamuni on its back through the void 作六牙白象，負釋迦在虛空中". Zhou's commentary is as follows³⁰:

案《修行本起經》卷上云：‘能仁菩薩化乘白象，來就母胎。’《普曜經》卷二云：‘菩薩從兜術天上化作白象，口有六牙，降神母胎。’此云作六牙白象，負釋迦在虛空中者，即佛降生之相也。

According to the *Xiuxing benqi jing*: 'Bodhisattva Nengren transformed into a white elephant and entered [his] mother's womb.' According to the second chapter of the PYJ 'The Bodhisattva transformed into a white elephant with six teeth and descended from Tuṣita Heaven into [his] mother's womb.' Here [in *Luoyang qielan ji*], it is written: 'A white elephant with six teeth carried Śākyamuni on its back through the void'; this means, the sign of the descent [降生]³¹ of the Buddha.

Zhou here cites content from *pusa jiangshen pin* 菩薩降神品 of the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經, and refers to similar details from *jiangshen chutai pin* 降神處胎品 of the PYJ. They both clearly refer to the Buddha entering into his mother's womb rather than the stage of giving birth. Therefore, if we solely rely on Zhou's commentary we can see that 降生 is to be understood as conception.

However, when Zhou explains the following text from the *Luoyang qielan ji*: "This [kind of] statue usually appears around the 4th day of the 4th lunar month 四月四日此像常出", he cites information related to the birth stage of the Buddha and connects it with Date A (the 8th days of the 4th lunar month). He comments as follows³²:

案：‘佛於四月八日夜從母右脅而生’。佛既涅槃，後人恨未能親觀真容，故於是日立佛降生相，或太子巡城像……

'The Buddha was born from his mother's flank on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month [Date A]. After the Buddha reaches *nirvāṇa*, later generations regret not having the chance to see the original face of the Buddha. Therefore, [some people] on this date erected an image of the descent [降生] of the Buddha or [others carried] a statue of the Buddha around the city……

This passage describes how the statue of the birth of the Buddha is usually taken out on the 4th day of the 4th lunar month, even though Zhou adopts Date A (the 8th day of the 4th lunar month) in his commentary. He does not explain the connection between the 4th day of the 4th lunar month and Date A, but stresses that the Buddha comes out from his mother's flank on the night of Date A and people erected an image of the descent of the Buddha for celebrating Date A. In other words, Zhou understands that Date A is related to the Buddha's birth according to this commentary. However, "the descent [降生] of the Buddha" has been indicated in the first commentary above in which 降生 is to be understood as conception, not the birth of the Buddha. Therefore, it is not clear how Zhou arrived at his second interpretation.

In brief, in the two commentaries above, Zhou is inconsistent in his understanding of 降生. In the first case, he takes 降生 to pertain to the conception of the Buddha, although he does not connect it with Date A. In the latter case, he mistakenly uses 降生 to pertain to the birth stage, not the conception, when establishing links with Date A. This fallacy about the conception raises two issues that need to be considered carefully: (1) How to understand the date of the Buddha's conception; (2) Whether the conception occurs on Date A.

Thirdly, both the Indian and Chinese traditions regard an individual's life to begin at the moment of conception. In the Abhidharma of the Sarvāstivāda School, the **Mahāvibhāṣā* 大毗婆沙論 refers to the idea of conception or "entering the mother's womb 入母胎".³³ It suggests "only when three factors work in combination is it possible to enter the mother's womb".³⁴ Here, the "three factors" mean "the male parent, the female parent, and the *gandharva*".³⁵ The *gandharva* 健達縛 is the state in which one resides immediately after "death 死有" and before the stage of "(re)birth 生有",³⁶ but it is also called "intermediate existence 中有 (*antarābhava*)" according to the **Mahāvibhāṣā*.³⁷ In the continuum of death and rebirth, the "intermediate existence" would start only after the disappearance of "death".³⁸ And not until "intermediate existence" or "death" has passed, does "(re) birth" begin.³⁹

Gotō Toshifumi's 後藤敏文 (Gotō 2009, p. 32) analysis of Vedic literature shows that contexts related to descending from heaven are mostly connected to discussions about entering the womb and the *gandharva* is critical for the ascent and descent. What is more, according to late Vedic sources (3 BCE) regarding the *upanayana*, a person's age is calculated from the date of conception (Kajihara 2003, p. 73, note 11). It is therefore clear that, already from the time of the Vedic literature, the start of someone's life is measured not from the day they are born, but from the date of conception.

Interestingly, this Indian tradition is perfectly in agreement with traditional Chinese ideas. The critical study of Zhang Rongqiang 張榮強 (Zhang 2015, p. 51) reminds us that there are two ways to calculate the age of Chinese people. The way called "Zhou sui 周歲" means someone is zero years old when born. The other one is called "Xusui 虛歲", according to which someone will be one year old on the day of birth. Further, Zhang Rongqiang points out that "Xusui" was the mainstream way of counting for historical figures until the 1950s, which indicates that historically, the Chinese also took the moment of conception as the start of life. Therefore, the so-called Buddha's birthday could be argued as his date of conception.

4. The 8th Day of the 4th Lunar Month: The Connection to the Month of Vaiśākha

As already seen, both the PYJ and FGJ agree that the month of Vaiśākha, along with some additional information related to the season, is the core of the date of conception. Additionally, I have argued that the Buddha's birthday should be understood as marking the date of conception. Therefore, it is time to ascertain how Vaiśākha corresponds to the Chinese calendar in ancient China.

As Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) wrote, "The date of the Buddha's birth could not be known. There are no years or dates written in Buddhist *sūtras*, and the way [of matching the Indian calendar to the Chinese] has not been transmitted into eastern areas yet. Thus, how could we know that [the date of the Buddha's birth] was during the Zhou and Zhuang [of the Spring and Autumn period]"⁴⁰ This suggests that few people knew the conversion between Indian and Chinese calendars, or we can say that Indian astrology was not widely studied or popularized in Shen Yue's time.⁴¹ They mostly relied on the record of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Zuozhuan*, or the *Bamboo Annals* 竹書紀年 and other Chinese chronicles when discussing the date of the Buddha's birth (Liu 2017, p. 72; Chen 2018, p. 121; Franke 1991, p. 443). However, if we do not refer to the Indian calendar, understanding the materials related to the month of Vaiśākha and *puṣyanaḥṣatra* is not possible.

There are three main texts presenting the Indian astrological elements in Chinese Buddhism. These are Dharmarakṣa's (223–316) translation of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*,⁴²

the chapter on astrology 星宿品 of the *Sūryagarbhaparivarta* 日藏分 of the *Da fangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經 translated by Narendrayaśas 那連提耶舍 (489–589),⁴³ and a compilation of astrological lore known by its abbreviated title of *Xiuyao jing* 宿曜經. However, Dharmarakṣa’s translation, unlike later Chinese translations, semantically translated Indian *nakṣatra* rather than using the Chinese lunar mansions (xiu 宿). The *Xiuyao jing* is based on non-Buddhist astrology, and there is no known parallel of this work in Sanskrit or Tibetan.⁴⁴ Thus I employ Narendrayaśas’s translation to discuss the correspondence between Indian and Chinese months (see Table 2).

Table 2. Dates corresponding to the Lunar Mansions according to the *Mahāsaṃnipāta*.

Date 1 ¹	Date 2	Indian Date ²	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug ³	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
16 January	16 December	1st Kṛṣṇapakṣa	軫	亢	房	尾	斗	虛	辟	胃	畢	參	柳	張
17 January	17 December	2nd Kṛṣṇapakṣa	角	氏	心	箕	牛、女	危	奎	昴	觜	井	星	翼
18 January	18 December	3rd Kṛṣṇapakṣa	亢	房	尾	斗	虛	室	婁	畢	參	鬼	張	軫
19 January	19 December	4th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	氏	心	箕	牛	危	辟	胃	觜	井	柳	翼	角
20 January	20 December	5th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	房	尾	斗	女	室	奎	昴	參	鬼	星	軫	亢
21 January	21 December	6th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	心	箕	牛	虛	辟	婁	畢	井	柳	張	角	氏
22 January	22 December	7th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	尾	斗	女	危	奎	胃	觜	鬼	星	翼	亢	房
23 January	23 December	8th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	箕	牛	虛	室	婁	昴	參	柳	張	軫	氏	心
24 January	24 December	9th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	斗	女	危	辟	胃	畢	井	星	翼	角	房	尾
25 January	25 December	10th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	牛	虛	室	奎	昴	觜	鬼	張	軫	亢	心	箕
26 January	26 December	11th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	女	危	辟	婁	畢	參	柳	翼	角	氏	尾	斗
27 January	27 December	12th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	虛	室	奎	胃	觜	井	星	軫	亢	房	箕	牛
28 January	28 December	13th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	危	辟	婁	昴	參	鬼	張	角	氏	心	斗	女
29 January	29 December	14th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	室	奎	胃	畢	井	柳	翼	亢	房	尾	牛	虛
30 January	30 December	15th Kṛṣṇapakṣa	辟	婁	昴	觜	鬼	星	軫	氏	心	箕	女	危
1 February	1 January	1st Śuklapakṣa	奎	胃	畢	參	柳	張	角	房	尾	斗	虛	室
2 February	2 January	2nd Śuklapakṣa	婁	昴	觜	井	星	翼	亢	心	箕	牛	危	辟
3 February	3 January	3th Śuklapakṣa	胃	畢	參	鬼	張	軫	氏	尾	斗	女、虛	室	奎

Table 2. Cont.

Date 1 ¹	Date 2	Indian Date ²	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug ³	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
4 February	4 January	4th Śuklapakṣa	昴	觜	井	柳	翼	角	房	箕	牛	危	辟	婁
5 February	5 January	5th Śuklapakṣa	畢	參	鬼	星	軫	亢	心	斗	女	室	奎	胃
6 February	6 January	6th Śuklapakṣa	觜	井	柳	張	角	氏	尾	牛	虛	辟	婁	昴
7 February	7 January	7th Śuklapakṣa	參	鬼	星	翼	亢	房	箕	女	危	奎	胃	畢
8 February	8 January	8th Śuklapakṣa	井	柳	張	軫	氏	心	斗	虛	室	婁	昴	觜
9 February	9 January	9th Śuklapakṣa	鬼	星	翼	角	房	尾	牛、女	危	辟	胃	畢	參
10 February	10 January	10th Śuklapakṣa	柳	張	軫	亢	心	箕	虛	室	奎	昴	觜	井
11 February	11 January	11th Śuklapakṣa	星	翼	角	氏	尾	斗	危	辟	婁	畢	參	鬼
12 February	12 January	12th Śuklapakṣa	張	軫	亢	房	箕	牛、女	室	奎	胃	觜	井	柳
13 February	13 January	13th Śuklapakṣa	翼	角	氏	心	斗	虛	辟	婁	昴	參	鬼	星
14 February	14 January	14th Śuklapakṣa	軫	亢	房	尾	牛	危	奎	胃	畢	井	柳	張
15 February	15 January	15th Śuklapakṣa	角	氏	心	箕	女	室	婁	昴	觜	鬼	星	翼

¹ I add the columns “Date 1” and “Date 2” for the Chinese calendar. The additional data are based on the *Da fangdeng daji jing*, except the column of “Aug”. ² For the sake of brevity, “day of the” inside “1st [day of the] Kṛṣṇapakṣa” is omitted in the column “Indian Date”. ³ Narendrayāśas does not provide the *nakṣatra* dates of “Aug”, this column is calculated by me according to the preceding and succeeding *nakṣatra* dates.

Indian months were divided into fortnights called *kṛṣṇapakṣa* and *śuklapakṣa* as reported in the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* 大唐西域記 narrated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). The *śuklapakṣa* is from the new moon day to the full moon day, and the *kṛṣṇapakṣa* is from the full moon day to the day before the new moon. A whole month starts with *kṛṣṇapakṣa* and is followed by *śuklapakṣa*.⁴⁵ Xuanzang provided his rendition for each Indian month and its periods (see Table 3).

As can be seen in Table 2, the 15th day of the *śuklapakṣa* of the first Indian month corresponds to the constellation Jiaoxiu 角宿. There are two possibilities when matching the numerical dates in China with their counterparts in India. For example, 16 January corresponds to the 1st day of the *kṛṣṇapakṣa*, and then the 15th day of the *śuklapakṣa* corresponds to 15 February. According to this system, the month of Vaiśākha (Dixiu) is from 16 February to 15 March, which is exactly what Xuanzang shows. The other possibility is that December 16th corresponds to the 1st day of the *kṛṣṇapakṣa*, and January 15th corresponds to the 15th day of the *śuklapakṣa*. Then the month of Vaiśākha is from 16 January to 15 February.

Table 3. The Indian 27 Nakṣatra and months according to Xuanzang 玄奘.

Nakṣatra ¹	Chinese Name of Nakṣatra ²	Chinese Names of Month	Transliteration of Month ³	Month	The Period of Month (According to Xuanzang)
Aśvayujau	lou 婁	婁月 / 八月 August ⁴	頰濕縛戾闍月	Āśvina	from July 16 to August 15
Bharanyaḥ	wei 胃				
Kṛttikāḥ	mao 昴	昴月 / 九月 September	迦刺底迦月	Kārttika	from August 16 to September 15
Rohinī	bi 畢				
Mṛgaśīras	zi 紫	紫月 / 十月 October	末伽始羅月	Mārgaśira	from September 16 to October 15
Ārdrā	shen 參				
Punarvasū	jing 井				
Puṣya	gui 鬼	鬼月 / 十一月 November	報沙月	Pauṣa	from October 16 to November 15
Āśleṣāḥ	liu 柳				
Maghāḥ	xing 星	星月 / 十二月 December	磨祛月	Māgha	from November 16 to December 15
Pūrva-phalgunī	zhang 張				
Uttara-phalgunī	yi 翼	翼月 / 一月 January	頗勒婁拏月	Phālguna	from December 16 to January 15
Hasta	zhen 軫				
Citrā	jiao 角	角月 / 二月 February	制咀羅月	Caitra	from January 16 to February 15
Svāti	kang 亢				
Viśākhe	di 氏	氏月 / 三月 March	吠舍佉月	Vaiśākha	from February 16 to March 15
Anurādhā	fang 房				
Jyesthā	xin 心	心月 / 四月 April	逝瑟吒月	Jyaiṣṭha	from March 16 to April 15
Nūla	wei 尾				
Pūrvāśādhāḥ	ji 箕	箕月 / 五月 May	頰沙茶月	Āśādhā	from April 16 to May 15
Uttarāśādhāḥ	dou 斗				
Śravaṇa	nü 女	女月 / 六月 June	室羅伐拏月	Śrāvaṇa	from May 16 to June 15
Dhaniṣṭhāḥ	xu 虛				
Śatabhiṣa	wei 危				
Pūrva-proṣṭhapadāḥ	shi 室	室月 / 七月 July	婆羅鉢陀月	Bhādrapada	From June 16 to July 15
Uttara-bhadrapadadāḥ	bi 壁				
Revatī	kui 奎				

¹ For the Sanskrit names of the *nakṣatra* and months, see Renou (Renou 1979–1981, pp. 363–64), and Yano (1992, p. 95, Table 2). ² See the *Wenshu shili pusa ji zhuxian suoshuo jixiong shiri shane xiuyao jing*, T no. 1299, 21: 394c20–23, and Yano (2013, p. 76). ³ To compare with Table 2, this column is based on the *Datang xiyuji* 大唐西域記. ⁴ For the sake of brevity, I use the western month names, e.g., “January”, “February”, to indicate corresponding Chinese terms “yiyue 一月”, “eryue 二月”. However, it should be noted that the Xia, Shang and Zhou calendars of China adopt different months as the first month of the year.

These two methods of converting the month of Vaiśākha to the Chinese calendar can also be noticed in the Chinese translations of Pāli texts. For example, the time of the Buddha's nirvāṇa suggested in the Samantapāsādikā is *visākha* (the month's name) *puṇṇama* (full moon) *divasa* (day) *paccūsamaya* (dawn moment) (Takakusu 2008, p. 4). The Chinese translation by Saṃghabhadra 僧伽跋陀羅 (5CE?) is "the dawn of February 15th".⁴⁶ There is *visākha* (the month's name) *puṇṇamāya* (full moon) *hi'ssa* (his) *abhisekaṃ* (consecration) *akamsu* (to be) in the same text (Takakusu 2008, p. 76), but its Chinese translation is suggested as "at March 15th, [Devānappiyatissa] accepts his consecration".⁴⁷ The difference of February 15th and March 15th in Chinese translations here is strong evidence for the above two possibilities.

Another issue is the divergence between the views of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhists on the Buddha's birthday. Xuanzang pointed out that "[the date of the Buddha's birth is on] the 8th day of *śuklapakṣa* in the month of Vaiśākha which corresponds to the 8th of March. [But] Theravāda [Buddhism] holds that it is on the 15th *śuklapakṣa* in the month of Vaiśākha and it corresponds to the 15th of March".⁴⁸ This also leads to the question whether the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* in the month of Vaiśākha was considered as Date A or Date B.

Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Śārdūlakarnāvadāna* tells us that "On the 8th day of the 12th lunar month during winter, there are 18 *muhūrta* 須臾 in the night and 12 *muhūrta* in the day. On Date A during the spring, there are 18 *muhūrta* in the day and 12 in the night."⁴⁹ Another text that describes the length of day and night in India, the *Jushelun shu* 俱舍論疏 by Fabao 法寶 (625?–733?), a disciple of Xuanzang, is a commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*. He mostly refers to the *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā* in his commentary.

Because India and China are both in the Northern Hemisphere, their vernal and autumnal equinoxes should be consistent. According to the expression in the *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā* "on the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* in the month of Kārttika, there are equal 15 *muhūrta* both in the day and in the night",⁵⁰ we know that the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* in the month Kārttika should be the vernal or autumnal equinox. Moreover, "after that (the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* in the month Kārttika), daytime will decrease one *lava* and the time of night will increase one *lava*".⁵¹ This indicates that the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* in the month Kārttika must be the autumnal equinox. In a similar way, we know that the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* in the month of Vaiśākha is the vernal equinox in India (see Table 4).

Significantly, all equinoxes in India are recorded as the 8th *śuklapakṣa* of a month, which strongly implies that the date of conception, the 8th *śuklapakṣa* of the month Vaiśākha, should be one of the equinoxes. The time references in the Chinese translations of the *Lalitavistara* show that the climate during the month Vaiśākha should be "neither cold nor hot".⁵² This is the exact climate of the vernal equinox recorded in Chinese sources as well. The *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋繁露 states that "The vernal equinox, is half *ying* and half *yang*. Therefore, the day and night are equal to each other and there is an even balance of cold and heat".⁵³ Thus, it is assured that the date of conception of the Buddha is the vernal equinox in China as well.

Careful comparison of Tables 3 and 4 reveals that the correspondence of the Indian and Chinese months is different. The *Jushelun shu* vividly describes Fabao's consideration, which is different from Xuanzang's.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, Fabao pointed out that Xuanzang included additional text in the Chinese translation of the *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā* to facilitate understanding.⁵⁵ This point suggests Fabao may have had reason to consider Xuanzang less reliable and thus he proposed an alternative interpretation, without reference to Xuanzang, of the correspondence between the Indian and Chinese months.

Table 4. The duration of the Indian day and night, and Chinese solar terms according to Fabao.

Transliteration of Month	Month	Date (Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra)	Duration of the Day and Night	Solar Terms	Date (Jushelunshu)	Period of the Month (Jushelunshu)
羯栗底迦月	Kārttika	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	晝夜各十五 day and night are both fifteen (lavas)	秋分 autumnal equinox	八月八日 August 8th	from July 16 to August 15
末伽始羅月	Mārgaśira	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十六晝十四 night is fourteen day is sixteen (lavas)			from August 16 to September 15
報沙月	Pauṣa	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十七晝十三 night is seventeen day is thirteen (lavas)			from September 16 to October 15
磨伽月	Māgha	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十八晝十二 night is eighteen day is twelve (lavas)	冬至 winter solstice	十一月八日 December 8th	from October 16 to December 15
頗勒窣那月	Phālguna	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十七晝十三 night is seventeen day is thirteen (lavas)			from December 16 to November 15
制怛羅月	Caitra	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十六晝十四 night is fourteen day is sixteen (lavas)			from November 16 to January 15
吠舍佉月	Vaiśākha	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	晝夜各十五 day and night are both fifteen (lavas)	春分 spring equinox	二月八日 February 8th	from January 16 to February 15
誓瑟捩月	Jyaiyaṣṭha	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十四晝十六 night is fourteen day is sixteen (lavas)			from February 16 to March 15
阿沙荼月	Āṣāḍha	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十三晝十七 night is thirteen day is seventeen (lavas)			from March 16 to April 15
室羅筏拏月	Śrāvaṇa	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十二晝十八 night is twelve day is eighteen (lavas)	夏至 summer solstice	五月八日 May 8th	from April 16 to May 15
婆達羅鉢陀月	Bhādrapada	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十三晝十七 night is thirteen day is seventeen			from May 16 to June 15
阿濕縛庚闍月	Āśvina	白半第八日 The 8th day of the <i>śuklapakṣa</i>	夜十四晝十六 night is fourteen day is sixteen			from June 16 to July 15

There is evidence that Fabao was active during the period of Wu Zetian's 武則天 rule (r.690–705 CE).⁵⁶ At the beginning of the *Jushelun shu*, Fabao refers to different calendars of India and the Tang Dynasty: “India takes the first month (*zi* 子) of the earthly branches as the first month, but here, previously China employed the third month (*yin* 寅) of the earthly branches as the first month”.⁵⁷ Afterwards, he explains “the 8th day of *śuklapakṣa* in

the month of Vaiśākha (here, it should be the 8th day of the 2nd lunar month [Date B]).⁵⁸ If we pay attention to “here, previously 此方, 先時” and “here 此方”, we will notice that at the time when he wrote this work, the calendar in use differed from the “previous” one. In fact, Wu Zetian reformed the calendar during her rule. The *Ritual Annal of Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書·禮儀誌 states that “the first year of Zaichu 載初 (690), on the Gengchen 庚辰 day, the first day of the first month, an amnesty was declared and from then, the Zhou calendar was applied”.⁵⁹ Then, in the tenth month of the first year of Jiushi 久視 (700) “there was a return to the previous calendar, *Yiyue* 一月 was changed to *Zhengyue* 正月 and it was the beginning of the year again”.⁶⁰ Therefore, “the 8th day of the 2nd lunar month [Date B]” should be understood according to the Zhou calendar of the period of Wu Zetian’s rule. Nevertheless, “*eryue* 二月” of the Wuzhou calendar, based on Wu Zetian’s reforms, is the 4th lunar month of the Xia calendar (see Table 5).

Table 5. The calendars of Zhou, Xia and Wuzhou.

Order of Month	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Xia	正月 January	二月 February	三月 March	四月 April	五月 May	六月 June	七月 July	八月 August	九月 September	十月 October	十一月 November	十二月 December
Zhou	正月 November	十二月 December	一月 January	二月 February	三月 March	四月 April	五月 May	六月 June	七月 July	八月 August	九月 September	十月 October
Wuzhou	正月 November	臘月 December	一月 January	二月 February	三月 March	四月 April	五月 May	六月 June	七月 July	八月 August	九月 September	十月 October

So far, I have verified the date of conception of the Buddha, the 8th day of the *śuklapakṣa* of the month Vaiśākha, as the vernal equinox. It is Date B according to the Wuzhou calendar, but it is also Date A in the Xia calendar. Accordingly, after ten months’ pregnancy, the date of delivery of the Buddha is Date B in the Xia calendar.

Hence, the confusion about Date A or Date B for the four main events of the Buddha’s life, especially for his birthday, should probably be traced to the failure to notice the difference between the date of conception and the date of birth. Early Chinese translations of the Buddha’s biographical literature were not translated during the Zhou or Wuzhou dynasties and therefore did not use those dynasties’ calendars; rather, Date A and Date B were both converted to the Xia calendar and respectively indicate the date of conception and the date of birth of the Buddha.

5. Concluding Remarks

The Buddha’s birthday is celebrated on various dates across Asia, even today. Although Japan has adopted the Gregorian calendar, and consequently the birth of the Buddha is celebrated there on a different date from other countries in Asia, it is universally admitted that Date A (the 8th day of the 4th lunar month), corresponding to 8 April in modern Japan, derives from the Chinese Buddhist literature. It is, however, not easy to solve the contradiction caused by both Date A and Date B (the 8th day of the 2nd lunar month) being taken as the Buddha’s birthday in some texts in Chinese Buddhism.

I proposed a rather new interpretation to try to solve this puzzle, and provide an answer to the question, “whence the 8th day of the 4th lunar month?”. My suggestion may be summarized in the following three points:

1. In addition to the date indicated by month (月) and day (日), there is an auspicious junction star, star Fei, which is also an indispensable element for establishing the Buddha’s birthday. The date of conception and the date of birth of the Buddha, both of which refer to this auspicious junction star, were variously translated into both Date A and Date B in early Chinese Buddhist literature.

2. Of the three stages of the Buddha’s birth, his conception contains the most detailed time expressions, in particular reference to the month Vaiśākha. The fact that, in India, all the main events in the Buddha’s life are celebrated on the same day in Vaiśākha likely

derives from the date of conception, which is understood as the beginning of the Buddha's present life.

3. The date of conception of the Buddha could be specified as the 8th day of the *suklapakṣa* of the month Vaiśākha, the vernal equinox in India and China. Its Chinese date is Date A in the Xia calendar. Date B is the date of birth of the Buddha after ten months' pregnancy.

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Abbreviations

T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taoshō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–1932.
JTS	<i>Jiutangshu</i> 舊唐書. Ed. Liu Xu 劉昉. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局. 1975.
DN	<i>The Dīgha Nikāya</i> . Eds. T.W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society. 1996.

Notes

- Most places in China and Korea celebrate on April 8 under the Asian lunisolar calendar, while the Japanese have celebrated on April 8 under the Gregorian calendar since the Meiji era. See Gorai (2009).
- 夏, 恒星不見, 夜明也。 *Chunqiu jingzhuān jijie* 春秋經傳集解, p. 142.
- 到四月八日夜, 明星出時, 化從右脇生。 (T185: 473c).
- The end of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* extends only up to the disputation on the Buddha's śarīra among eight kings. See DN: pp. 167–68.
- 何等生二足尊? 何等出叢林苦? 何等得最上道? 何等入涅槃城? 沸星生二足尊... 八月如來生... 二月如來生。 (T1: 30a).
- 佛以四月八日生, 八日棄國, 八日得道, 八日滅度, 以沸星時, 去家學道, 以沸星時得道, 以沸星時般泥洹。 (T5: 175c). 佛从四月八日生, 四月八日捨家出, 四月八日得佛道, 四月八日般泥洹, 皆以* 佛星出時。 (T6: 190c). *The Second Edition of the Korean Canon has 佛, while the Three editions have 沸。
- "Here" is used in a general sense to refer to various places in Ancient China, to contrast with or distinguish from the text's Indic origins.
- A near-parallel passage can be found in the commentary by Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839, who was known as Master Qingliang 清涼國師), on the Avatamsaka Sūtra [*Da fangguangfo huayan jing*] 大方廣佛華嚴經, the *Da fangguangfo huayan jingshu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏: "Fusha is also named 'Bo sha'. Here, it means 'prosper'. Because the meaning of insight and ultimate truth is 'prosper'. 沸沙亦云勃沙。此云增盛。明達勝義是增盛也" (T1735: 628c).
- Tiṣya and puṣya (the star Fei's Sanskrit counterpart) are two Buddha's names as well. See Tournier (2017, pp. 158–60).
- 沸沙, 正名富沙。清涼[大師]云: "亦云勃沙。此云增盛, 明達勝義故也"。亦云底沙, 亦云提舍。此翻明, 又云說度, 說法度人也。什師解沸沙菩薩云: "二十八宿中鬼星名也。生時相應鬼宿, 因以為名。或名沸星, 或名孛星"。 (T2131: 1058c).
- 菩薩不於黑月入胎, 要以白月弗沙星合。 (T187: 543a).
- Windisch (1908, p. 159). I express my gratitude to Professor Gotō Toshifumi 後藤敏文 for this reference. There is no study about the relationship between the *Mahāvastu* and the *Lalitavistara*, but there are some identical sentences which they share; see Tournier (2017, pp. 118–19).

- 13 “據白月十五日夜太陰所在宿為月名”, see T1299: 388a.
- 14 According to Xuanzang and Fabao (see below), the month of Pausa does not correspond to December–January but rather to October–November and September–October (see Tables 3 and 4); ten months later is July–August and June–July. They are still not close to Date A or Date B.
- 15 弗沙菩薩曰, 什曰: “二十八宿中鬼星名也。生時所值宿, 因以為名也”。肇曰: “弗沙星名也, 菩薩因以為字焉”。(T1775: 397b).
- 16 菩薩欲入母胎之時, 取鬼宿日, 然後乃入於母胎中。(T190: 679c).
- 17 Importantly, a connection between the the *Foben xingji jing* and the *Mahāvastu* has been identified. See Mizuno (1964).
- 18 用沸星吉日。(T1435: 90b28).
- 19 鬼宿主於一切國王大臣。(T397: 371a).
- 20 諸宿中, 鬼宿為最。(T893: 625c).
- 21 牟尼今者, 富沙(唐言鬼宿)星生。(T402: 555c). I express my gratitude to Dr. Liu Chang for this reference.
- 22 See note No.8 of the T402: 555.
- 23 以四月八日明星出時, 降神母胎。(T189: p. 624a).
- 24 This difference might suggest that the four events in the Buddha’s life sharing the same date, with the same auspicious star, may all derive from references to the date of conception of the Buddha in the early tradition.
- 25 毘舍佉, 或鼻奢佉。此云別枝, 即是氐宿。(T1231: 1086a).
- 26 從初入胎及以出胎, 童子盛年, 遊戲受欲, 出家苦行, 詣菩提座, 降伏魔軍, 轉正法輪現大神力, 下切利天入般涅槃(T187: 546b–c). For its Sanskrit, see Hokazono (1994, p. 356). Its other Chinese translation renders as “降神入胎不離其側, 如影隨形, 乃至成佛, 降伏魔官, 而轉法輪, 和慈四等至大滅度”。(T186: 489a).
- 27 The most detailed description of conception among the Buddhist texts is in the *Garbhāvākāntisūtra*, in one of its Chinese translations titled *Baotai jing* 胞胎經 T317. For studies, see Kritzer (2014), and Langenberg (2017). However, neither of these notice this point. Furthermore, Kritzer does mention the process of rebirth, but as he says, rebirth begins at the moment of death in one life and the moment of conception is no more than one step of rebirth. See Kritzer (2009, p. 73). However, this is different from taking conception as the beginning of one’s life.
- 28 These three parts are according to the *Fang guang dazhuangyan jing* 方廣大莊嚴經。(T187: 545–57).
- 29 Neither *jiangsheng* nor *jiangshen* have their Sanskrit correspondence in the *Lalitavistara*. See Kawano (2007, pp. 195–98).
- 30 *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記: 36.
- 31 It is not possible to state with certainty how Zhou understood this term here. The English “descent” retains the ambiguity in *jiangshen*, which as we have seen is interpreted as both conception and birth.
- 32 See Note 30 above.
- 33 See T1545: 363b.
- 34 三事和合, 得入母胎。T1545: 363a.
- 35 父及母并健達縛三事和合。T1545: 363b.
- 36 See T1545: 363a.
- 37 或名中有, 或名捷達縛。(T1545: 363a). However, originally, *antarābhava* 中有 was not the same as *gandharva* 健達縛。The former is an intermediate state between death and the next life during *saṃsāra*, while the latter has a very ancient origin which could be traced back to the *Rigveda* and has been developed with different meanings in later times. See Ogawa (1990, pp. 106–8).
- 38 中有相續者, 謂死有蘊滅, 中有蘊生。(T1545: 310a).
- 39 生有相續者, 謂中有蘊滅, 或死有蘊滅, 生有蘊生。(T1545: 310a).
- 40 釋迦出世年月, 不可得知。佛經既無年曆注記, 此法又未東流, 何以得知是周莊之時。(T2103: 122b).
- 41 Kotyk argues that “astrology as an essential practice within a Buddhist framework only became popular after the introduction of Mantrayāna”, see Kotyk (2017, p. 55).
- 42 It is titled as *Shetoujian taizi ershibaxiu jing* 舍頭諫太子二十八宿經, or *Huer jing* 虎耳經。For the study of its Sanskrit, see Kotyk (2017); Zhou (2020).
- 43 T397: 280b–282a.
- 44 Zenba (1968, pp. 3–6). In addition, the recension in the Taishō is not the original version of this work; the earlier version has been stored in Japan in manuscripts and printed books. See (Yano 2013, pp. 148–51); Yano (2016, pp. 6–10).
- 45 月盈至滿, 謂之白分。月虧至晦, 謂之黑分。 黑前白後, 合為一月。Ji (2000, p. 168).
- 46 二月十五平旦。(T1462: 673b).
- 47 以三月十五日受拜王位。(T1462: 688a).
- 48 吠舍佉月後半八日, 當此三月八日。上座部則曰以吠舍佉月後半十五日, 當此三月十五日。Ji (2000, p. 523).
- 49 冬時十二月八日, 夜有十八須臾。春四月八日, 晝日有十八須臾耳, 夜有十二須臾。(T1301: 416b). Monier-Williams (1899), s.v. *muhūrta*: “a moment, instant, any short space of time [. . .]; a partic. division of time, the 30th part of a day, a period of 48 min.”

- 50 羯栗底迦月白半第八日，晝夜各十五牟呼栗多。(T1545: 701c).
 51 從此以後，晝減夜增各一臘縛。(T1545: 701c).
 52 不寒不暑。(T186: 491a), 不寒不熱(T187: 548c).
 53 春分者，陰陽相半也，故晝夜均而寒暑平 (*The Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋繁露, p. 343).
 54 For details, see T1822: 617–618.
 55 For details, see T2061: 727a.
 56 Fabao attended Śikṣānanda's 實叉難陀 and Yijing's 義淨 translation teams played important roles during Wu Zetian's rule (Wu Zetian proclaimed herself as the emperor from 690 CE, but she ruled in the name of her sons from Gaozong's 高宗 death in 683). See T2074: 176b and T2061: 727b.
 57 婆羅門國以建子立正，此方先時以建寅立正。(T1822: 453a).
 58 吠舍佉月白半第八日（此當此方二月八日）。(T1822: 617b).
 59 載初元年正月庚辰朔... . 大赦改元，用周正。(JTS, 22: 864).
 60 復舊正朔，改一月為正月，仍以為歲首。(JTS, 6: 129).

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Article

The Astronomical Innovations of Monk Yixing 一行 (673–727) †

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Abstract: The Chinese monk Yixing 一行 (673–727) is unique in being an early architect of the Mantrayāna tradition (Esoteric Buddhism) in East Asia in addition to featuring as a significant individual within the history of astronomy and calendrical science in China. His legacy in the Buddhist world is well known, but the enduring appreciation of his scientific work in later centuries is less understood. The present paper will document the achievements of Yixing’s work in astronomy while also discussing the perception and appreciation of his work in subsequent centuries.

Keywords: Yixing; Buddhism; astronomy; calendars; monks

1. Introduction

Yixing 一行 (673–727) is a well-known figure within the history of East Asian Buddhism. His lineage affiliations include Chan in China, and Zen and Mikkyō in Japan. He is also known for his work in astronomy and calendrical science. Research in Buddhist Studies concerning Yixing has generally focused on his Buddhist career, but non-Buddhist sources from the medieval period also provide ample details regarding his work in astronomy. These sources reveal that Yixing not only made an enormous contribution to Chinese science, but also that his work was positively evaluated and appreciated by Confucian writers throughout many subsequent generations. We will explore some of these sources to highlight the significance of Yixing in the history of Chinese science.

Kim observes that “during the Ming, many Confucian scholars were drawn towards the study of calendrical astronomy, long before the Jesuits’ introduction of Western astronomy aroused interest in the subject.”¹ Yixing’s work was indeed part of the corpus of astronomical literature appreciated by Confucian scholars. As I will show below, Yixing was widely read for a whole millennium until Chinese astronomy was transformed following the introduction of European astrology during the seventeenth century. Yixing’s status as a monk and his simultaneous excellence in the field of astronomy definitely calls into question some of Needham’s remarks, such as his proposal that Buddhism in China was “inimical to carrying out scientific research” and that the epistemology of Buddhism—often focused on the impermanent and tenuous quality of perceived phenomena—made “Buddhism irreconcilable with Taoism and Confucianism and tragically played a part in strangling the development of Chinese science.”² It has already been shown that, in fact, Buddhism in China neither hindered nor particularly encouraged astronomy, but rather the Chinese sangha was simply more of a passive recipient and consumer of Chinese science, in light of the careers of certain monks during the Tang period.³ Buddhists also had a long heritage of astrology and calendrical science in India and China, which requires reference to astronomy and calculation (Kotyky 2018a, 2018c). Our main concern here, then, is to discuss how Yixing impacted the development of Chinese astronomy and how he was remembered in later sources, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, rather than to revisit old ideas about Buddhism and science. Instead, I want to demonstrate that Yixing compartmentalized his

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work in astronomy from Buddhism, and later writers similarly treated his writings in the same manner.

This study will also argue that we can utilize materials from Buddhist sources, as well as those of the court and other non-Buddhist authors, to grasp Yixing's career in astronomy from a multifaceted angle. We might evaluate how his work was recognized and appreciated within the native Chinese history of astronomy. This approach of comparing and contrasting texts from court (i.e., "Confucian") and Buddhist authors has been gainfully employed in the past, and here I employ this same methodology in relation to Yixing's career in astronomy.⁴ Building on the work of past scholars, I will also show how Yixing utilized technological innovation to create a more precise system of tracking planetary movements as a brief example of how his work impacted the development of Chinese astronomy. This study will further show how Yixing represents a rare example of a Buddhist monk engaging in the development of scientific astronomy during the medieval period. I will draw attention to some significant details of his work while also showing its relevance—or lack thereof—to his other career as a Buddhist monk and author.

2. Historical Background

Past studies have documented and analyzed the biographical accounts of Yixing and his ancestry. In an earlier study, I argued that we ought to understand the "historical Yixing" as a separate figure from a later reimagined pseudo-Yixing. The latter is a legendary figure to whom various texts and practices were attributed, starting from around the early ninth century. Some modern scholars and virtually all premodern authors have conflated these two figures. This has led to problematic chronologies of Yixing's life and his activities.⁵ Again, I will emphasize in this study that we ought to distinguish between Yixing and pseudo-Yixing.

Our reconstruction of Yixing's work in astronomy depends upon several premodern sources. First is the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (*Old Book of Tang*), which is a history of the Tang dynasty produced by Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946) in 945. We can also utilize the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New Book of Tang*). This revised history of the Tang dynasty was compiled in 1060 by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061), who apparently intentionally omitted Yixing's biography, perhaps due to anti-Buddhist biases and animosity toward the *saṃgha*, yet they still added documents related to Yixing's calendar, which they treated with respect. This indirectly points to an appreciation of his achievements in astronomy, despite the fact that he was a Buddhist monk. The *Tongdian* 通典 (*Comprehensive Account*), compiled in 801 by Du You 杜佑 (735–812), provides details about Yixing's astronomical projects. The *Tongzhi* 通志 (*Comprehensive Chronicle*), compiled in 1161 by Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162), lists a number of works—genuine and spurious—attributed to Yixing that were extant during the twelfth century. One of the more underappreciated sources on the history of astronomy and calendrical science in China is the voluminous *Gujin lili kao* 古今律曆考 (*Study of Ancient and Present Tunes and Calendrical Sciences*), comprised of seventy-two fascicles, by Xing Yunlu 邢雲路 (1549–?). This text documents at length such sciences as they were understood during the late Ming dynasty prior to the introduction of European science. This work frequently mentions Yixing and his work, a point that highlights the utility and importance of his writings, even outside the Buddhist fold, some nine centuries after his death. The fact alone is highly significant, given that Yixing is arguably the sole Buddhist monk in China to have been afforded such enduring respect both in Buddhist and Confucian circles.

In brief, Yixing was born in 673. Although traditional sources give 683 as his year of birth, Chen (2000) in his study of Yixing's life and genealogy convincingly demonstrates that 673 was more likely. The historical record relates that Yixing initially studied Chan Buddhism under the monk Puji 普寂 (651–739). Yixing was simultaneously a scholar of the monastic codes (*Vinaya*, *jielü* 戒律). He became well-known to eminent persons in the capital, but evaded invitations to present himself there, until finally in 717 he accepted an official summons from the court.⁶

Yixing's career in the capital (alternating between Chang'an and Luoyang), which lasted until his sudden death in 727, was fruitful and primarily comprised two directions. First, Yixing assisted the Indian monk Śubhakarasiṃha (Shanwuwei 善無畏; 637–735) in translating the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi* (*Dari jing* 大日經; T 848), which was completed in 724. Yixing appears to have functioned more as an editor in this project, rather than as a translator (although he is credited as translator), in light of the absence of evidence that would indicate he capably understood Sanskrit enough to translate it. There are actually few examples of monks from East Asia who capably read Sanskrit in the premodern period, apart from figures such as Xuanzang, who had spent years abroad in India.⁷ The Chinese translation of the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi* was full of ambiguities, since it was from a newly introduced genre of Buddhist literature which dealt with the practices of *mantras*, *mudrās*, and *maṇḍalas*. Yixing therefore produced a commentary on the text (*Dari jing shu* 大日經疏; T 1796) based on the oral explanations Śubhakarasiṃha. This commentary in one section addresses the timing of rituals, and briefly explains the conventions of Indian astrology known to Śubhakarasiṃha, which I have argued are likely to reflect the conventions of astrology observed at the major Indian monastery of Nālanda. We can also observe in this section some astronomical theory related to lunar phases, which no doubt was penned by Yixing himself. Based on the overview of Indian astrology in the commentary, it appears that Śubhakarasiṃha certainly had some knowledge on the topic, but he does not appear to have directly affected the development of astrology or astronomy in China. In other words, Śubhakarasiṃha knew some Indian astrology, but Yixing was the astronomer, and his astronomy, as we will see, was chiefly Chinese in character and *not* Indian. Śubhakarasiṃha does not appear to have offered instruction on Indian astronomy (i.e., calculations and measurements).⁸

Yixing was indeed a pioneering figure of Buddhist Mantrayāna in East Asia. He later was enshrined in Japan as a lineage holder in Mikkyō (in both Shingon and Tendai). In contrast to Buddhist histories; however, Confucian historians in China remembered him primarily as an astronomer and reformer of the state calendar. Yixing's early official work in astronomy is recorded in the *Jiu Tang shu*, which reports the following:

In year 9 of Kaiyuan [721] under Xuanzong, the Grand Scribe repeatedly reported to the throne that (predictions of) solar eclipses were ineffective. The *śramaṇa* Yixing was summoned to reform and produce a new calendar. Yixing's report stated, "Now if we seek to create a calendar and establish an epoch, we must first understand how to convert between the ecliptic (and the celestial equator). I request that the Prefect Grand Scribe take angular and chronological measurements of sidereal parameters." 玄宗開元九年, 太史頻奏日蝕不效, 詔沙門一行改造新曆。一行奏雲: 「今欲創曆立元, 須知黃道進退。請太史令測候星度。」⁹

It is uncertain where and when Yixing acquired his expertise in astronomy and mathematics, but the court evidently agreed that he was capable, after the Prime Minister Zhang Yue 張說 (667–730) elected him as a candidate for this task.¹⁰ This nomination is reported in the *Jiu Tang shu*, which also states, "During the Kaiyuan era [713–741], the monk Yixing was proficient with the calendrical theories of various authors. He said that the *Linde li* (an earlier calendar) had been in use for a long time, and that its solar and sidereal parameters were gradually becoming different." 開元中, 僧一行精諸家曆法, 言《麟德曆》行用既久, 晷緯漸差。¹¹ This was during a time when Indian—or Sino-Indian—figures were operating at the Chinese court and practicing Indian astronomy. Bagchi (1898–1956) in 1953 already drew close attention to two of these families: the Gautamas and Kāśyapas.¹² One of the most prominent astronomers of Indian heritage at the time was Gautama Siddhārtha or Siddha (Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達), who in 718 translated the *Navagraha-karaṇa* (*Jiuzhi li* 九執曆) from Sanskrit into Chinese at the request of the throne. This manual of mathematical astronomy provides formulas for accurately calculating a number of celestial phenomena. Whether Yixing ever directly studied under these astronomers is unknown, although he was clearly exposed to their works and was likely to have been inspired by them to some

extent. Another Indian astronomer, who appears to have been a contemporary of Yixing, was the monk Kumāra (Jumoluo 俱摩羅). Yixing appears to have cited his theory for predicting solar eclipses.¹³ We ought to note that Yixing was not the only monk in China to also have been an astronomer during the Tang period, but Kumāra was not nearly so influential.

Numerous sources, including Yixing's biography in the *Jiu Tang shu*, state that Yixing learnt mathematics from an unnamed individual on Mount Tiantai 天臺山 at the monastery Guoqing-si 國清寺, but this is certainly a fantastical tale, since it also relates that the stream of water outside the temple miraculously changed course after Yixing had fully learnt everything he needed from the unnamed teacher. This story, moreover, does not provide any names or dates.¹⁴ I think it is plausible, if not likely, that Yixing was simply an auto-didactic polymath, whose background afforded him the necessary resources, particularly books on mathematics, to become a self-taught astronomer, even in the face of law codes that prohibited the private study of astronomy by commoners, as well as the Buddhist literature that discourages or forbids the practice of mundane sciences, such as astrology and calendrical science.¹⁵

In any case, the histories of the Tang dynasty relate that Yixing was charged with the task of producing a new state calendar. He was already capable of this task by the year 721. He titled his calendar *Dayan li* 大衍曆. This calendar was officially adopted between 729–761. Yixing died unexpectedly in 727 before he could see his calendar put into operation, but the court appointed officials to consolidate his draft. The *Tongzhi* (j. 68) records that the original *Dayan li* was comprised of fifty-two fascicles.¹⁶ The *Xin Tang shu*, however, only preserves an outline of the *Dayan li* (j. 27–28) and its important arguments. This is our main source of information on the calendar. Xing Yunlu (j. 15–16) gives an extensive discussion of the *Dayan li* with many details, many of which seem to derive from the *Xin Tang shu*. Upon surveying the above materials, it is clear that several specific matters were of importance to Yixing. These included, but were not limited to, the need for accurate understandings of exact solar positions relative to seasonal markers (the equinoxes and solstices), the precession of the equinoxes, and the ecliptic relative to the celestial equator. Yixing also sought to establish an exact definition for the New Moon. We will separately discuss each of these components within his research, but first we should briefly note his innovative use of number theory derived from the *Yijing*.

3. *Yijing* Number Theory

The title of Yixing's calendar reveals its rich relationship with the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*, also called *I Ching* in English). The term *dayan* 大衍 (the "Great Expansion") is derived from a section of the *Yijing* (*xici shang* 擊辭上), in which Heaven is assigned the number 25, and Earth the number 30, together totaling 55, although the 'Great Expansion' is only 50 (there are various ancient theories concerning the subtraction of 5). The number of "application" (*yong* 用) is 49. The number theory derived from the *Yijing* (which is not astrological in character) is expressly stated in the *Li benyi* 曆本議 (*Arguments on the Calendar*), which is a summary of some of the primary arguments of the *Dayan li*. This was compiled after Yixing died prematurely (Yixing died in 727).¹⁷

In later centuries, during the Ming period, Yixing was still known for his integration of *Yijing* numerology into his calendar. Xin Yunlu (j. 16) notes this and reproduces numerous details concerning this development.¹⁸ Kaji suggested that incorporation of this numerology into a calendar simply added perceived value, instead of furnishing any practical advantage.¹⁹ In other words, it appeared innovative, while at the same time quite appreciable to literati, who were steeped in classical lore and metaphysics. An important point to note here is that Yixing utilized a native Chinese framework for crafting his calendar without any express reference to Indian or Buddhist cosmological and metaphysical concepts, although he still consulted some Indian materials, apparently in translation. Gautama Zhuan 瞿曇詵 (712–776), son of Gautama Siddhārtha, the translator of the *Navagraha-karāṇa*, argued in the year 733 that Yixing—who already died in 727—had plagiarized material

from the *Navagraha-karaṇa*, although the formal investigation at court determined this claim was false.²⁰ This conclusion might have been premature, since, in fact, the use of a tangent table was an innovation that suddenly appears in the history of Chinese astronomy, as pointed out by Cullen, and its adoption by Yixing does point to a foreign source. Cullen therefore suggests that Yixing had likely learned the rules for relating gnomon shadows and solar zenith distances from one of his Indian counterparts in the capital. In other words, although his “use of the tangent was original, he ultimately depended on Indian sources for his introduction to trigonometry.”²¹ Nevertheless, while Yixing certainly understood some amount of Indian astronomy (presumably translated into Chinese), his calendar is primarily rooted in Chinese models and concepts (definition of the ecliptic, sidereal lunar stations based on the ancient Chinese system, etc.).

We might expect that a Buddhist monk such as Yixing would have been inclined to incorporate more Indian concepts into his work, but, in reality, his calendar was chiefly rooted in Chinese calendrical science and metaphysics. There actually was no precedent for adoption of foreign astronomical models until at least some members of the court took an interest in Indian astronomy, which no doubt facilitated the translation of the *Navagraha-karaṇa*, but empirical tests did not yield any positive outcome for the foreign model.

The compartmentalization of science and religion in Yixing’s life highlights the clear division of his life into two separate simultaneous careers: one in astronomy and the other in Buddhist practice. Yixing was evidently committed to receiving and building upon a legacy of Chinese astronomy from antiquity, rather than expressly introducing significant Indian models into the Chinese system. He might have even had an impetus to do so, since Mantrayāna calls for the utilization of some amount of astrology, which was based on Indian astronomy, as we see in the *Susiddhikara-sūtra* (Ch. *Suxidijieluo jing* 蘇悉地揭羅經). This was translated by his close colleague Śubhakarasiṃha in 726.²² Yixing, however, never attempted such a radical reform.

4. Gnomonic Measurements and Precession of the Equinoxes

The *Tongdian* (j. 26) relates that in the year 724, Nan Gongyue 南宮說 (d.u.) and others travelled to remote locations within the empire to take gnomonic measurements and report back to the throne. One group went to Annan 安南 (in modern Vietnam), and reported that the star Canopus (*laoren xing* 老人星) was especially high in the sky with numerous other uncharted and unnamed stars visible below it. Ohashi explains that these observations were taken between about 18° N to 51° N, whereas Cullen suggests 29° N to 52° N near the meridian 114° E (Ohashi’s proposed range of latitudes is necessary to account for a position in northern Vietnam). This would mean that the Chinese observers did not venture into the southern hemisphere, which would have presented some unfamiliar stars to Chinese astronomers. Ohashi also states that Yixing himself also travelled to take measurements, but the relevant records do not actually suggest that he went on any of these expeditions.²³ After some time, the surveyors returned to the capital. Yixing was tasked with collating and analyzing the data from these various points of observation. He calculated that the distance between the southern and northern celestial poles to be over 80,000 *li* 里 (approximately 44,800 km).²⁴ To put this into contemporary perspective, Xuanzang wrote that the borders of India are more than 90,000 *li* in diameter.²⁵ Yixing clearly attempted to work with gnomonic measurements in a scientific manner involving experimentation. As Cullen also notes, the survey of 724 “was a field test, evidently successful, of I-hsing’s (Yixing’s) method for predicting seasonal shadow lengths at any location.”²⁶ Setting aside how we might critically evaluate the conclusions today, Yixing’s project was a success at the time.

The data acquired from these missions included measurements of shadows cast from different locations at the solstices and equinoxes. This set of data was used by Yixing to produce a tangent table. Judging from what is reported in the available sources, it would appear that Yixing’s theoretical framework was hampered by the absence of reference to a spherical earth. Yixing would not have been ignorant of this alternate cosmological theory, since the aforementioned *Navagraha-karaṇa*, translated in 718, addresses the concept of

terrestrial latitude. This concept was first rendered into Chinese as *suifang yan fa* 隨方眼法 (“method according to the location of the observer”). This appears to be a direct translation of the Sanskrit *sva-deśa-akṣa*, as pointed out by Yabuuchi.²⁷ One might initially speculate that, as a Buddhist monk, Yixing would have been inclined to preserve the typical Buddhist cosmology of Mt. Meru and the four continents positioned atop a disc-world, but he did not do this.²⁸ It must be observed that Chinese astronomers also did not adopt a spherical-earth model. Cullen importantly notes that “Chinese astronomers, many of them brilliant men by any standards, continued to think in flat-earth terms until the seventeenth century.”²⁹ Yixing’s astronomical framework in the *Dayan li*, drawing from this background, was primarily based on native Chinese models without any reference to Buddhist cosmology, yet curiously when we look to the commentary on the *Vairocanaḥhisambodhi*, the cosmological worldview is clearly that of Mt. Meru and the four continents, i.e., the traditional Indian Buddhist cosmological worldview. For example, “The body of the Sun is one, but the divisions of time are each different for the four continents.” 日體是一而四洲時分各異。Elsewhere we read, “These four continents also each have two flanking continents.” 此四洲又各有二隨州.³⁰ This is, however, as much the voice of Śubhakarasiṃha as it is that of Yixing.

The aforementioned gnomonic measurements would have indicated to Yixing that determining the exact time of the solstices and equinoxes required reference to the point of observation, rather than using any single standardized number or sidereal position of the Sun. The sidereal position of the Sun at the equinoxes and solstices was also an issue that had to be addressed, since fixed stars move at a modern rate of one degree every 71.6 years.³¹ This is called the precession of the equinoxes or, more commonly in modern times, axial precession. In practice what this means is that an observer would eventually notice that the Sun rises at the winter solstice (and other seasonal markers) into the preceding degree relative to what was observed in previous eras. This was already recognized well before Yixing’s time. Xing Yunlu (j. 2) explains Yixing’s contribution in history to the understanding of precession as follows:

During the late Han, Liu Hong [c. 129–210] first realized that the winter solstice was late. During the Jin, Yu Xi [281–356] treated the sky as the sky and the seasonal year as the seasonal year (i.e., separately treating sidereal and seasonal parameters), producing a theory for calculating the differences in order to track the changes (between sidereal positions and seasonal markers), assuming that the Sun retreats one degree every fifty years, but this was erroneous. During the Song, He Chengtian [370–447] doubled that number, assuming a (solar) retreat of one degree every century, but again this was erroneous. During the Sui, Liu Zhuo [544–610] took the numbers from both schools, and assumed a (solar) retreat of one degree every seventy-five years. During the Tang, the monk Yixing calculated his *Dayan* calendrical system, and assumed a difference of one degree (between seasonal markers and sidereal positions) every eighty-three years. Each (theory) was close to one another. Guo Shoujing [1231–1316] calculated that the winter solstice was at the tenth degree of lunar station Qi. This was precise, but Shoujing thought that a difference of one degree every 66 years is also not a definitive theory. 漢末劉洪，始覺冬至後天，至晉虞喜，乃以天為天，歲為歲，立差法以追其變，約以五十年日退一度，然失之過。宋何承天，倍增其數，約以百年退一度，又失之不及。隋劉焯，取二家中數以七十五年退一度。唐僧一行推大衍曆，以八十三年差一度。各亦相近。至郭守敬，推冬至在箕十度，斯為密近，然守敬謂六十六年差一度亦非定法。³²

There was clearly a persistent awareness over the centuries that revisions were necessary and desirable to determine the rate of the precession of the equinoxes. Each figure came to their own conclusions based on the data sets available to them, a fact that highlights that innovation was appreciated (rather than dogmatic adherence to the models of antiquity). Yixing contributed to this ongoing dialogue in history, thereby securing for himself a notable position in the history of Chinese astronomy.

Yixing's theory that the Sun retreats one degree every 83 years effectively constitutes a signature of his work that reappears elsewhere in the historical record, such as the table of 24 solar terms (*jieqi* 節氣) in the *Qiyao rangzai jue* 七曜攘災決 (*Secrets of the Seven-Planet Apotropism*), a Buddhist manual of horoscopy and astral magic that was compiled between 806–865 from disparate sources.³³ This is an example of Yixing's work being directly utilized within early Chinese horoscopy. The 24 solar terms are each comprised of 15 days. They track the passage of the Sun through sidereal degrees of the 28 "lunar stations" or "lodges" (*xiu* 宿), and most importantly mark the seasons; hence the solstices and equinoxes are part of this system.³⁴ Simplified degrees are used because the table tracks 360 days in which the Sun progresses 1 degree every day. The ecliptic in China was generally treated as comprising 365.25 degrees (the nominal length of a tropical year), but the table does not address the remaining degrees, so the positions provided in the table are approximate.

With regard to the table of solar terms in the *Qiyao rangzai jue*, the text states, "There will be a difference of a degree or two if you rely upon this (table). It was calculated for after Kaiyuan 12 [724]. There occurs an error of one degree following eighty-three years." 若依此即差一兩度,從開元十二年向後計,滿八十三年即差一度.³⁵ This would indicate a connection to Yixing's model. We can cite additional evidence in support of this claim. The winter solstice (*dongzhi* 冬至) falls upon degree 9 of the station Dou 斗 in this table of solar terms. The account of the *Shoushi li* 授時曆, a state calendar which was implemented in 1281, is found in the *Yuanshi* 元史 (j. 52), the dynastic history of the Yuan dynasty. It is reported there that in 724 (year 12 of Kaiyuan) the winter solstice fell on degree 9.5 of Dou.³⁶ The solar table at hand does not use fractions, but this was presumably to facilitate ease of use for astrologers, who needed a convenient table for calculating planetary positions in horoscopes.

5. Accurate Definition of the Ecliptic

Yixing, like many other astronomers, sought to enhance and innovate, yet he simultaneously acknowledged the capabilities of the ancients (in this case, the ancients of China and *not* Buddhist India). As recorded in the *Xin Tang shu* (j. 31), Yixing and his colleague utilized improved technology, while also still offering a respectful nod to their predecessors, which perhaps was a polite necessity. Yixing, evidently, sought to carry and develop a tradition of astronomy that had been handed to him from many centuries prior, which was believed to stretch back to the sages of antiquity.

In year 9 of Kaiyuan (721), Yixing received imperial orders, and went to work on reforming a new calendar. He wanted to understand the how to convert between the ecliptic (and the celestial equator), but the Grand Scribe did not possess an instrument for the ecliptic. Administrator for Troops of the Guard Command, Liang Lingzan, produced an armillary sphere out of wood. Yixing approved this. He then said unto the throne, "During Antiquity there existed the technique for an ecliptical armillary sphere, but such a device did not exist. Ancients pondered it, but they could never achieve it. Now, Lingzan's creation has the solar path and Moon intersect so that they always naturally line up. This is especially important for calculations, and I request that a casting be made with bronze and iron." The instrument was completed in year 11 [723]. 開元九年,一行受詔,改治新曆,欲知黃道進退,而太史無黃道儀。率府兵曹參軍梁令瓚以木為游儀,一行是之,乃奏:「黃道游儀,古有其術而無其器,昔人潛思,皆未能得。今令瓚所為,日道月交,皆自然契合,于推步尤要,請更鑄以銅鐵。」十一年儀成。³⁷

This apparatus was also upgraded with additional structures, cast in metal, which represented the celestial sphere in detail. The model turned by the power of flowing water. Representations of the Sun and the Moon were added to this setup, so that they became conjunct every 29 turns. The phases of the Moon were also displayed on the instrument. A wooden figurine was placed atop the plane of the device and would strike a drum and bell to keep track of the time. Eventually this device rusted out and no longer

functioned, but the original apparatus for measuring the ecliptic enabled Yixing to take accurate measurements of the ecliptic as well as the Sun and planets.³⁸

Yixing's calendar offered revised parameters of the 28 lunar stations, which are defined in two separate sets: one relative to the celestial equator and another relative to the ecliptic. These lists commence from Dou 斗 since it was the station on which the winter solstice fell at the time. The latter set was designed to accurately track planetary movements. His work reads, "The above (values) are all ecliptical degrees. The solar path is calculated, and the Moon and five planets orbit through this." 前皆黃道度, 其步日行, 月與五星, 出入循此。The commentary then gives the following explanation:

In seeking the degrees of the lunar stations, there will always exist a remainder. Arrange the sequence to comprise the total degrees constituted with quarters (0.25), halves (0.50), and three-quarters [0.75]. When checking against the past and future, the contemporary degrees and parameters of the lunar stations will be acquired according to individual calculations for each degree that has shifted due to precession, so that you will be able to calculate the Sun, Moon, and five planets, as well as know their encroachments and holdings (in terms of omenology). 求此宿度, 皆有餘分, 前後輩之成少半太准為全度。若上考古下驗將來, 當據差每移一度, 各依術算, 使得當時宿度及分, 然可步日月五星, 知其犯守也。³⁹

The combined parameters of the ecliptical lunar stations equal 365.25 degrees, but the text notes that a "difference" (*cha* 差) is taken into account from the lunar station Xu 虛.⁴⁰ Yixing's important innovation here was creating a table and method for recalculating the ecliptical dimensions of lunar stations to account for changes in positions due to precessions, which in turn allowed for more precise calculations of planetary movements. Yixing indeed went so far as to redefine the dimensions of the lunar stations, although he still preserved the classical set of 28, which are spatially relative to native Chinese constellations. This kept his model in line with the orthodox Chinese uranography which stretched back to antiquity, but Yixing was still innovative.

This adherence to classical Chinese conventions on the part of Yixing stands in contrast to what we observe in the *Navagraha-karaṇa*, which uses a system of reformed *nakṣatras*. Older Indian texts which had been translated into Chinese in earlier centuries, such as the *Śārdūlakarṇāvādāna*, define 28 *nakṣatras* of varying dimensions using *muhūrtas* (a unit of time), but following the introduction of the zodiac signs into India during the early centuries of the Common Era, Indian astronomers redefined the parameters of the *nakṣatras* and produced a system of 27 *nakṣatras* consisting of uniform dimensions.⁴¹ The *Navagraha-karaṇa* gives the following explanation:

A formula involving the *nakṣatras* is included within these methods. The *nakṣatras* are uniformly 800 parts (minutes) each. In India they determine whether the day is auspicious or inauspicious based on the *nakṣatra* in which the Moon alights, and the activities associated with that *nakṣatra* are also undertaken. Furthermore, only 27 *nakṣatras* are employed, starting with Aśvinī, with Abhijit excluded, and ending with Revatī. The *nakṣatra* Abhijit always augurs auspicious times and is not included amongst the *nakṣatras*. 宿法於此術中, 凡是宿平等為八百分。天竺每以月臨宿, 占其日一即休咎, 仍取其宿用事。又唯用二十七宿, 命妻為始, 去牛, 終奎。其牛宿恒吉祥之時, 不拘諸宿之例。⁴²

In addition to this text, we can also observe this model of equalized *nakṣatras* and the related system of *navāṃśas* (nincths of a *nakṣatra*) explained in the commentary on the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi*, which we will recall was compiled by Yixing on the basis of the oral explanations provided by Śubhakarasiṃha.

Lunar station convergences: The 27 *nakṣatras*. Heaven (i.e., the ecliptic) is divided into twelve chambers like the twelve Jupiter stations here (in China). Each station has 9 quarters (*pāda*). The ecliptic is altogether 108 quarters. Each *nakṣatra* gets four quarters, which constitutes the course of movement that the Moon travels in

one day. The Moon has gone once around the ecliptic after transiting for 27 days. 言宿直者，謂二十七宿也。分周天作十二房，猶如此間十二次。每次有九足，周天凡一百八足，每宿均得四足，即是月行一日程。經二十七日，即月行一周天也。⁴³

It is certain that Yixing was aware of how Indian astronomers defined *nakṣatras*, in particular the model of 27 *nakṣatras* of uniformly equal dimensions, which was unprecedented in China until that point. Yixing's work would have been subject to enormous criticism had he attempted to entirely revise the system of Chinese lunar stations, which had been in use since antiquity, after his exposure to Indian models, but there is nothing to indicate he ever had such a motivation.

6. Redefining the New Moon

Lastly, another important issue to which Yixing directed his attention was the technical inaccuracy of how the New Moon (*shuo* 朔) was conventionally determined. His lunar calendrical theory is also the sole known example of one of his astronomical theories appearing in his Buddhist writings, although we should also recognize the fact that not all of his writings are extant.

The lunar months in the Chinese calendar are arranged so that generally the New Moon falls upon the first day of the month while the Full Moon falls upon the fifteenth. The Full Moon appears when the Sun and Moon are in direct opposition to one another, while the New Moon is when the Sun and Moon are conjunct. The problem is that the New Moon and Full Moon do not necessarily fall exactly on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, respectively.

Yixing proposed a scientific definition the New Moon as “when the Sun and Moon are conjunct within a degree.” 日月合度謂之朔。⁴⁴ This is relatively simple, but it shifts away from what was understood as an “averaged” or “mean” New Moon (*ping shuo* 平朔), which refers to the traditional way of determining the lunar cycle through general observation. Yixing gives the following explanation:

With respect to the averaged New Moon of the ancients, the Moon appearing in the morning is called the “Moon rising at sunrise,” while appearing in the evening is called the “Moon rising at sunset.” Now these are decreased or increased (i.e., modified) according to the progression of the Sun and the velocity of the Moon. (The fixed New Moon) will sometimes progress ahead of or fall short of that day [i.e., the averaged New Moon, which is traditionally defined as the first day of the lunar month]. This is considered a fixed New Moon. 古者平朔，月朝見曰朏，夕見曰朧。今以日之所盈縮，月之所遲疾損益之，或進退其日，以為定朔。⁴⁵

In this revised system, the New Moon and Full Moon are “fixed” (*ding* 定), i.e., scientifically defined according to the real positions of the Sun and Moon. This concept of a fixed New and Full Moon is mentioned in Yixing's commentary on the *Vairocanaḥhisambodhi*:

Also, the calendar calculates the Sun and the Moon. The averaged degrees of motion make for averaged New Moons. It will always align in a lesser (29) or greater (30) month [on the same day]. Sometimes [the date for the New Moon] will pass or be late with respect to the averaged movements of the Sun and Moon as their speeds will also differ. This is why a fixed New Moon will sometimes be ahead or behind a day. A fixed Full Moon will sometimes be on the fourteenth or on the sixteenth. Generally speaking, the time when the Moon is completely full is designated as the fifteenth day of the waxing period (Skt. *śukla-pakṣa*). The time when the Moon is exactly half like a bow string will be the eighth. It may be arranged based on this, and then one gets a fixed date. 又曆法通計日月，平行度作平朔，皆合一小一大。緣日月於平行中，又更有遲疾，或時過於平行，或時不及平行，所以定朔或進退一日，定望或在十四日或在十六日。大抵月望正圓滿時，名為白分十五日。月正半如弦時，亦為八日。但以此准約之，即得定日也。⁴⁶

In light of the parallels with Yixing's calendar, this part of the commentary is clearly Yixing's voice, and not that of Śubhakarasiṃha. The reader is being cautioned that the

true Full Moon may sometimes appear a day ahead or behind the fifteenth day of the lunar month. This matter was important for the purposes of timing rituals, since the true phase of the Moon ought to be considered, rather than simply assuming that the first or fifteenth of the calendar month always align with the New and Full Moons respectively. This was important to Yixing in particular, since the *Vairocanaḥbhisambodhi* calls for the *maṇḍala* to be produced on auspicious days, such as the day of the Full Moon. The fruits of the *maṇḍala* would be compromised if the proper phase of the Moon—among other factors such as the day of the week—were not strictly observed. Again, this is one rare instance in which Yixing’s work in calendrical science was directly applicable to Buddhist activities. Otherwise, his work in astronomy was separate from Buddhism.

7. Conclusions

The survey above shows that a newly collected data set of gnomonic measurements, the production of an improved armillary sphere with a ring representing the ecliptic, and generally improved astronomical theory, all enabled Yixing to create a more precise calendrical system at the request of the court. Yixing did not frame himself as a revolutionary in science, but rather gave a respectful nod to his predecessors and positioned himself as a developer atop the achievements of past figures. Later generations afforded Yixing a significant place in the history of astronomy.

Yixing’s incorporation of concepts from the *Yijing* into his theoretical framework is unique. Xing Yunlu in the 16th century interestingly does not mention Yixing throughout his outline of Buddhist, Daoist, Indian, and Islamic models of cosmology and astronomy (j. 28).⁴⁷ This would seem to indicate that Xing Yunlu thought of Yixing as a credible astronomer whose work belonged to the history of official court astronomy in China. The extant primary sources that discuss Yixing’s work in astronomy indeed do not display any Buddhist elements, such as the cosmology of Mount Meru and the related system of kinetics that explain planetary motions through winds. The models of kinematics we observe in Buddhist Abhidharma literature are also absent from Yixing’s astronomical work. Yixing instead was more inspired by Chinese—not Buddhist—metaphysics. This is an important point, since it demonstrates that Yixing was willing to (and probably simply had to) set aside Buddhist cosmology in order to work within a different field. This was presumably out of necessity, since the state is unlikely to have permitted any radical changes to the foundations of astronomy and astrometric models. The absence of any significant adoption of Indian astronomy in Chinese translation—such as that of the Gautamas—by Yixing or anyone else only confirms this assumption.

Another point to emphasize here is that, in reality, Yixing’s Buddhist career was largely separate from his career as an astronomer. In other words, Buddhism neither inspired nor informed his study of astronomy. The Buddhist community also does not appear to have utilized his calendar or advanced scientific work in any notable capacity beyond what we noted above. There might not have been any pressing need to do so, but this just highlights that his two professions were, in practice, quite separate from one another.

Yixing was the only court astronomer in Chinese history who served as a monk and officially worked on the state calendar (the aforementioned monk Kumāra was another figure from the Tang period, but he was not commissioned to work on the state calendar), but Yixing’s status as a monk alone cannot qualify his calendar as possessing any “Buddhist” features or quality. We can, however, observe that it was Yixing’s eminence as a Buddhist writer and practitioner that brought about an invitation to the capital. This relocation clearly brought together the “causes and conditions” which enabled his career as an astronomer to flourish. If he had not come to the capital in the capacity as an eminent monk, he might not have ever been involved in astronomy at the state level. In that sense, Buddhism only enabled Yixing’s career in science, but he was in large part separated from the Buddhist community when it came to astronomy. The Buddhist community might have celebrated his status as an astronomer, but they had little actual connection to it. In contrast to

Needham's aforementioned remarks, it would seem reasonable to affirm that Buddhism neither hindered nor directly encouraged Yixing's work in science.

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Abbreviations

SKQS Siku quanshu 四庫全書. *Yingyin Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫; 全書. 1500 vols. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1983; *T Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934. Digitized in CBETA (v. 5.2) and SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (<https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php>; accessed on 16 May 2022); *X Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書. Shanghai Guji Chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1995.

Notes

- ¹ The relationship between Chinese literati culture and science is an ongoing and important discussion. See Kim (2014, p. 146) for extended discussion.
- ² Ronan and Needham (1978, pp. 264–65) discussed the roles of Daoism and Buddhism in the development of science in China. Many of their statements require careful consideration, especially in light of recent studies that demonstrate in particular that Buddhists did not ideologically or practically restrict scientific discussions. See also Needham's study on Chinese astronomy (Needham 1959).
- ³ See especially remarks in Kotyk (2020, pp. 278–281, 287).
- ⁴ I first utilized this approach of comparing state and Buddhist texts in a critical evaluation and reconstruction of Yixing's biographical data. See Kotyk (2018d, pp. 1–37). Later, I applied this methodology to the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). See Kotyk (2019, pp. 513–44).
- ⁵ For biographical studies on Yixing, see Osabe (1963); Wu (2009); Kotyk (2018d).
- ⁶ The biographical survey of Yixing by Jinhua Chen remains the foundational study for our understanding of Yixing's life. See especially Chen (2000, pp. 25–31).
- ⁷ For a recent article on the historical study of Sanskrit in China and Japan, see Kotyk (2022b).
- ⁸ For a translation and analysis of this section in the commentary, see Kotyk (2018b).
- ⁹ *Jiu Tang shu* 35.1293. Translation adapted from Kotyk (2020, p. 278). "Sidereal" refers to positions in the sky based on fixed stars. As Cullen (2000, p. 366) points out, *jintui* 進退 is a technical term that refers to a "numerical conversion between the coordinates of a series of equal steps along the equator and a simultaneous series of equal steps along the ecliptic—but reckoned using different set of widths of lodges." This difference necessitated taking accurate measurements from the ecliptic.
- ¹⁰ Zhang Yue and Yixing had an earlier relationship before the latter moved to the capital. See Chen (2000, p. 27). The political significance of Yixing's appointment as an astronomer is also interesting, but this is a topic for another time.
- ¹¹ *Jiu Tang shu* 32.1152. See chronology of Yixing's career given in Wu (2009, p. 104). Translation adapted from Kotyk (2020, p. 278).
- ¹² Bagchi (2011, pp. 193–94) discusses Indian or "Sino-Indian" families who operated as astronomers in the Chinese court during the Tang period. He was one of the early, if not the first, scholar, to recognize their significance in the history of science in China.
- ¹³ *Jiu Tang shu* 34.1265. Kotyk (2020, p. 280). Bagchi (2011, pp. 193–94).
- ¹⁴ Kotyk (2018d, pp. 13–15). *Jiu Tang shu* 191.5113
- ¹⁵ For a discussion of the restrictions on the study of astrology and astronomy in Chinese Buddhism, see Kotyk (2017a). See also Whitfield (1998).
- ¹⁶ *SKQS* 374: 412a8–9.
- ¹⁷ *Xin Tang shu* 27a.588–591.

- 18 SKQS 787: 171–172.
- 19 Kaji (1956c). See also extended discussion in Kaji (1956a, 1956b).
- 20 *Xin Tang shu* 27a.587. Sen (1995, p. 203).
- 21 See remarks in Cullen (1982, pp. 24, 30–32). Cullen’s study is highly important for our understanding of mathematical astronomy in the Tang.
- 22 This scripture states that certain rituals should be carried out during lunar and solar eclipses, which we ought to note would require significant skill in astronomy. There is furthermore a need to consider the Moon’s position in the *nakṣatras*, which technically requires an understanding of an Indian astrometric model. See discussion of this in Kotyk (2022a).
- 23 The two scholars give different numbers, but I am unclear on how they arrived at them. See Ohashi (2011, p. 172); Cullen (1982, p. 1).
- 24 SKQS 603: 321b4–16. The length of a single *li* varied over time. 1 *li* constitutes 1800 *chi* 尺, each of which during the Tang period was 31.1 cm. During the Tang, therefore, 1 *li* equaled roughly 0.56 km (0.35 miles). See parameters for traditional Chinese measurements in Togawa et al. (2011, p. 1742).
- 25 T 2087, 51: 875b27–28.
- 26 Cullen (1982, p. 15). The objectively scientific quality of Yixing’s work has also been emphasized. See the study by the Astronomical History Research Group Shanxi Observatory (1976).
- 27 SKQS 807: 942b10. See translation and comments in Yabuuchi (1989, p. 40).
- 28 Buddhists in China during the Tang period were exposed to spherical-earth models, but continued to envision the world and write about it in flat-earth terms. See Kotyk (2021) for an extended discussion of this matter.
- 29 This is an important observation by Cullen (1980, p. 42). As he points out, it was only with the advent of new astronomy via the Jesuits that astronomers in China adopted a spherical-earth model.
- 30 T 1796, 39: 619a2–3, 693b25–26.
- 31 Note that a Chinese *du* 度 is normally translated as degree (it is a measure of circumference, and it is not angular). It would convert to 1.014583 of a modern degree, since the Chinese did not use the originally Mesopotamian parameter of 360 units when dividing the celestial equator. Instead, the Chinese divided the celestial equator into 365.25 units. For ease of understanding, I simply translate the Chinese term as degree. See Guan (1989, pp. 77–80).
- 32 SKQS 787: 19b11–20a1
- 33 For a study of these texts, see Kotyk (2017b). See also Yano (1995).
- 34 The Chinese “lunar stations” (also translated as “mansions” following the Latin) are not identical to Indian *nakṣatras*, but the former ones were used as functional equivalents for the latter in East Asia. A *nakṣatra* is also a type of lunar station, but the varying systems of parameters in Indic sources all differ from Chinese models. Indian systems employ either 28 or 27 *nakṣatras*. Cullen (2017, p. 186) translates the Chinese term as “lodge” (not “lunar lodge”), which reflects the literal semantic sense of the word. Cullen also points out that “the system of the lodges antedates the foundation of the empire by at least a few centuries: the names of all 28 lodges appear in an approximate circle on the lid of a lacquer box found in a tomb dated to 433 BCE”. The earliest list of these with measurements dates to 139 BCE.” Cullen does not accept the oft-used translation of “lunar mansion”—which in itself is a reflection of the Latin translation of the twenty-eight *manāzil* from Arabic. Cullen (2011, pp. 83–95) points out that in usage, it is not only the Moon that can lodge in these stations, but the other planets as well. However, I think that the concept in question is still connected to the Moon, given the lunar orbital period of 27.3 days. Whether the Moon was consciously associated with the stations or not also likely changed over the centuries. In the mid-Tang period (eighth century), Amoghavajra very clearly connected them to the Moon, following the example of the *nakṣatras*, a connection that already had a precedent in the Chinese translation of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*. See discussions in Kotyk (2022a).
- 35 T 1308, 21: 450c5–7.
- 36 *Yuanshi* 52.1131.
- 37 *Xin Tang shu* 31.806. Adapted from translation in Kotyk (2020, p. 279). See also relevant discussion in same article.
- 38 *Xin Tang shu* 31.806–807.
- 39 *Jiu Tang shu* 34.1241–1242.
- 40 The problem here is that the *Jiu Tang shu* reads 六虛之差十九太, but this is unclear in meaning. I believe *liu* 六 is a scribal error for *fen* 分. *Jiu Tang shu*, 34.1240–1241. Same in *Xin Tang shu* 28a.646. The parameters for lunar stations relative to the celestial equator include a comment that reads 虛分七百七十九太. This gives us 779.75. To understand this, we need to see the section concerning the solar path (*bu richan shu* 步日躔術), which gives the following parameters (*Xin Tang shu* 28a.642): Degrees of ecliptic: 365 (周天度三百六十五). Portion of Xu: 779.75 (虛分七百七十九太). [Rate of] precession: 36.75 (歲差三十六太). To make sense of the latter two numbers, we have to divide them by the “universal formula” (*tongfa* 通法) of the calendar, which is 3040 (the number of units of time within a single day according to this calendrical system). See Zhang et al. (2008, p. 497). The ecliptic becomes 365.2564 Chinese degrees, and the annual rate of precession is 0.01208. Yixing calculated that the Sun retreats 1 degree every 83 years, hence an annual rate of $0.01208 \times 83 = 1.00264$ (Chinese degree). Yixing clearly sought to account for the difference between the sidereal (avg. 365.2563 days in modern terms) and tropical years (avg. 365.2421 days), a difference of approximately

twenty minutes according to the modern standard. Also, the lunar station Xu is comprised of 10.2564 Chinese degrees. Compare also Table 2 in Yano (1986, p. 30).

- 41 The day is comprised of thirty *muhūrtas*. The dimension of a *nakṣatra* was defined based on the amount of time required for the Moon to transit through it. Although Buddhists were aware of it, this model was never actively observed in China or Japan. See discussions in Kotyk (2022a). Zenba (1952, pp. 174–82).
- 42 SKQS 807: 937a8–9. See alternate translation in Yabuuchi (1989, pp. 21–22). This system here is related to the *navāṃśas* or ninths of a zodiac sign. The *navāṃśas*, it appears, are an autochthonous Indian concept, but some scholars have connected it to a concept also attested in Hellenistic/Latin horoscopy, although this link is only speculative and tentative in character. See Gansten (2018, p. 180, fn. 60).
- 43 T 1796, 39: 618a8–11. Translation adapted from Kotyk (2018b, p. 15).
- 44 日月台度謂之朔. *Xin Tang shu* 27a.594.
- 45 *Xin Tang shu* 27a.591. Translation adapted from Kotyk (2018b, pp. 13–14). The terms *nū* 朏 and *tiao* 朏 specifically refer to the apparently irregular visibility of the first and last crescent on the calculated mean day of the New Moon, which indicates that the “New Moon” as specified in the calendar is not the true New Moon. I must thank the anonymous peer-reviewer for pointing out this fact.
- 46 T 1796, 39: 617c28–618a5. Translation adapted from Kotyk (2018b, 12–13).
- 47 SKQS 787: 320–331.

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