

Article

A Forgotten Eminent Buddhist Monk and His Social Network for Constructing Buddhist Statues in Qionglai 邛崃: A Study Based on the Statue Construction Account in 798

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Abstract: By transcribing, punctuating, and analyzing the Statue Construction Account undertaken in 798, this article attempts a refreshed study of the construction background of the Buddhist statues and niches at Huazhi Temple 花置寺 in Qionglai. The aim of this article is twofold. Firstly, it brings to light an eminent monk named Sengcai, who has been forgotten in both secular and monastic histories. Secondly, it tries to clarify the social network formed by various figures recorded in the Statue Construction Account by tracing their roles and relationships in the course of constructing the Buddhist niches. The analysis of this article expounds that in the process of the statue construction project, Sengcai made full use of his social network to support this project and to seek protection for Huazhi Temple. The construction activities of the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple not only brought people of different identities together through politics, Buddhism, economics or kinship, but also connected Qiongzhou (in Sichuan) and the capital of Chang'an to the formation of a multi-identity and cross-regional network of power in which emperor, officials, monks, military generals, craftsmen, literati, and so on, participated and interacted with each other. The whole social network can be divided into two sub-networks in Chang'an and Qiongzhou, with Sengcai as the central figure connecting these two sub-networks. Although the Buddhist niches of Huazhi Temple were carved in Qiongzhou, both the decisive preparatory work and the composition of the Statue Construction Account took place in Chang'an. Hence, the power of the Chang'an sub-network was greater than that of the one based in Qiongzhou. This means that the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple from Sengcai's project were not merely a local project, but one that was strongly connected with the capital Chang'an in 798. Lastly, the Statue Construction Account in 798 at Huazhi Temple indicated mutual aid and support between Sichuan Buddhism and Chang'an Buddhism.

Keywords: Huazhi Temple 花置寺; Qionglai 邛崃; Statue Construction Account 造像記; Zhangjing Temple 章敬寺; Sengcai 僧采; Ma Yu 馬宇



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1. Introduction

Southwest of Chengdu 成都 City in Sichuan 四川¹ is a city called Qionglai 邛崃 (Qiongzhou 邛州 in the Tang dynasty since 758), in which several important sites with a cluster of Buddhist niches and statues from the Tang dynasty (618–907) have survived to the present day. They are Mount Shisun 石筍,² Helin 鶴林 Temple,³ Pantuo 盤陀 Temple, Huazhi 花置 Temple,⁴ Tiangong 天宮 Temple,⁵ and so on (Figure 1). Among these Buddhist sites, Huazhi Temple distinguishes itself from other sites not only by its inclusion of various niches and statues, but also by the miraculously extant Statue Construction Account 造像記, on a stone tablet dated to the fourteenth year of Zhenyuan 貞元 era (798). This valuable composition documents key information (such as the titles and roles) of many participants in the statue construction project and several key aspects of the complicated process of constructing the niches.

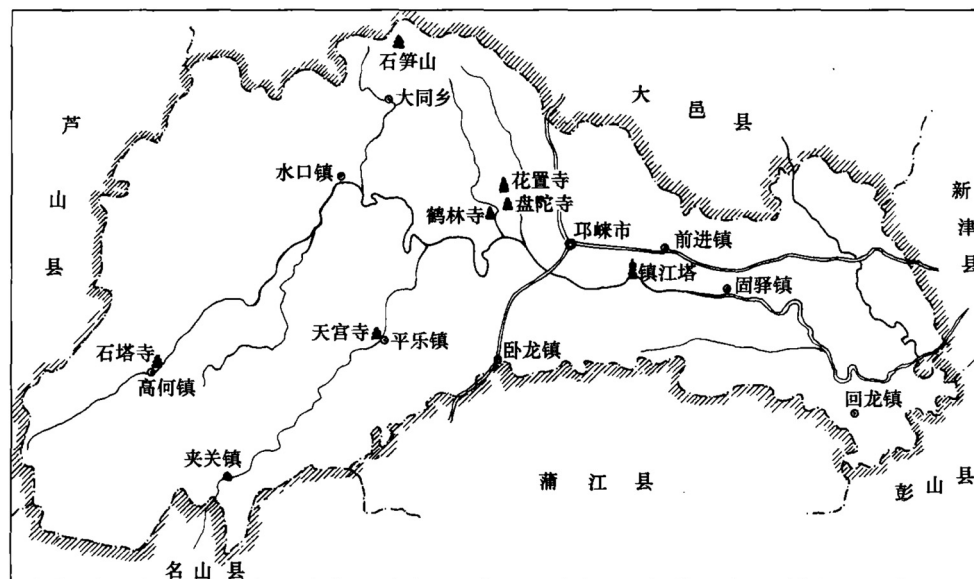


Figure 1. A map of the Spread of the Cliff Carvings at Qionglai (from [Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2006](#), p. 485, illustration 1).

According to the Statue Construction Account, the project of carving the Buddhist niches at the Huazhi Temple was launched by a monk named Sengcai 僧采 (active 760s–790s), who was first a great virtue (*dade* 大德) of Huazhi Temple before being summoned by the then-emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779) to the Chang'an 长安 cosmopolitan monastery at Zhangjing Temple 章敬寺, where he served as one of its Administrators. Given that Zhangjing Temple was one of the famous national monasteries in the capital Chang'an under Daizong and Dezong's 德宗 (r. 779–805) reigns, Sengcai was definitely an eminent monk at that time. Surprisingly, there is no record whatsoever of Sengcai in either monastic or secular history, and it seems that Sengcai was completely forgotten by historical texts. Thanks to the Statue Construction Account at Huazhi Temple, Sengcai's life and social activities and the background of the construction of Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple can be disclosed as well. Therefore, the Statue Construction Account at Huazhi Temple will be the key research subject of this article.

On the basis of this account, this article will, on the one hand, attempt to bring to the forefront as many layers of Sengcai's life as possible, and, on the other, reconstruct the relationships between the major agents of Sengcai's project and explore how the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple were carved on the cliff. In concluding, it will also try to shed new light on the relationships between Sichuan (local) Buddhism and Chang'an (capital) Buddhism at that time.

2. An Overview of the Statue Construction Account in 798

2.1. Research History of the Statue Construction Account

There are 13 niches extant at the Huazhi Temple in Qionglai, Sichuan (Figure 2).⁶ Of all the niches, Niches 5 and 6 of Thousand Buddha statues (Figure 3) constitute a grand whole.⁷ These two meticulously designed niches occupy the central and most prominent position in the entire cliff statue group at the Huazhi Temple. Their large scale and central positions indicate that these two niches were the first constructed among the entire niche group at this site.

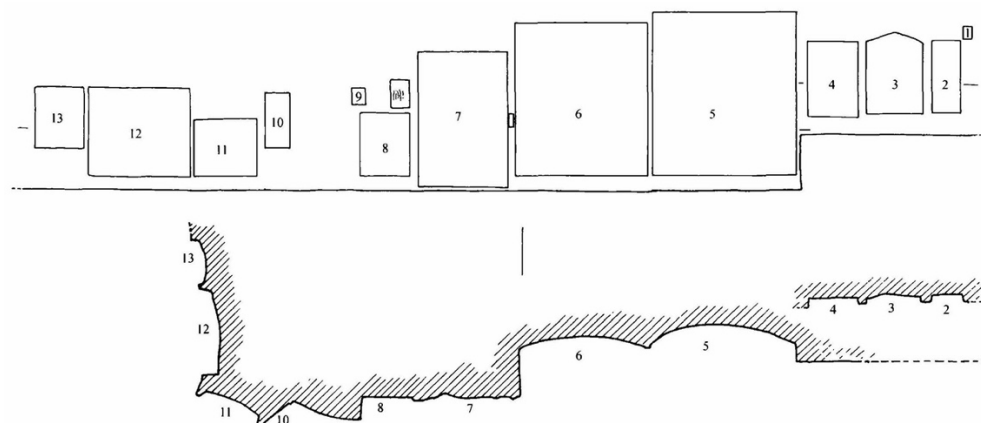


Figure 2. The sketch layout of niches at Huazhi Temple (from [Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2005a](#), p. 497, illustration 8).



Figure 3. Niches 5 and 6 of Thousand Buddha statues at Huazhi Temple, Qionglai (Photograph by Wang Youkui 王友奎).

The rest of the niches and statues were constructed after Niches 5 and 6. From the middle to the sides, they are: one giant standing buddha (*lifo* 立佛) in Niche 7; two standing bodhisattvas (*li pusa* 立菩薩) in Niche 4, Fifty-three Buddhas (*Wushisan fo* 五十三佛) in Niches 3⁸ and 8, respectively; two Vaisravana statues in Niches 2 and 10, respectively; one tableau of Thousand-Hand Guanyin (*Qianshou Guanyin bianxiang* 千手觀音變相) in Niche 12; and two transformation tableaux of *The Sutra of Visualizing Amitāyus Buddha* (*Guan Wuliang shou jing bianxiang* 觀無量壽經變相) in Niches 11 and 13, respectively.

There is an extant stone epitaph at the bottom of the right side wall in Niche 6 (Figure 4a,b), entitled “Da Tang Jiading zhou Qiongqian Huazhi si xinzhao Wuliang zhufu shi kanxiang ji” 大唐嘉定州邛縣花置寺新造無量諸佛石龕像記 [The Account of Newly Built Stone Niches and Carvings of the Immeasurable Buddhas at Huazhi Temple, Qiong County, Jiading Prefecture, Great Tang Dynasty].⁹ The current inscription comprises four parts that extend from right to left:¹⁰ (1) a re-carved title from the Ming Dynasty (between April 29, 1376 and April 3, 1483); (2) the Statue Construction Account in 798 (hereinafter “the

798 Account”, see Appendix A); (3) a re-carved record on the eighth day of second lunar month of the second year of the Yuanyou 元祐 era of the Northern Song Dynasty (Yuanyou 2.2.8 = March 15, 1087); and (4), a record from the twentieth year of the Daoguang 道光 era (1840) in the Qing Dynasty. The characters from the above four dynasties show the consistent style of calligraphy, such as the characters of *hua* 花, *zhi* 置, *fo* 佛, *si* 四, and so on, which tells us that all of the current inscriptions were all re-carved in the Qing dynasty.

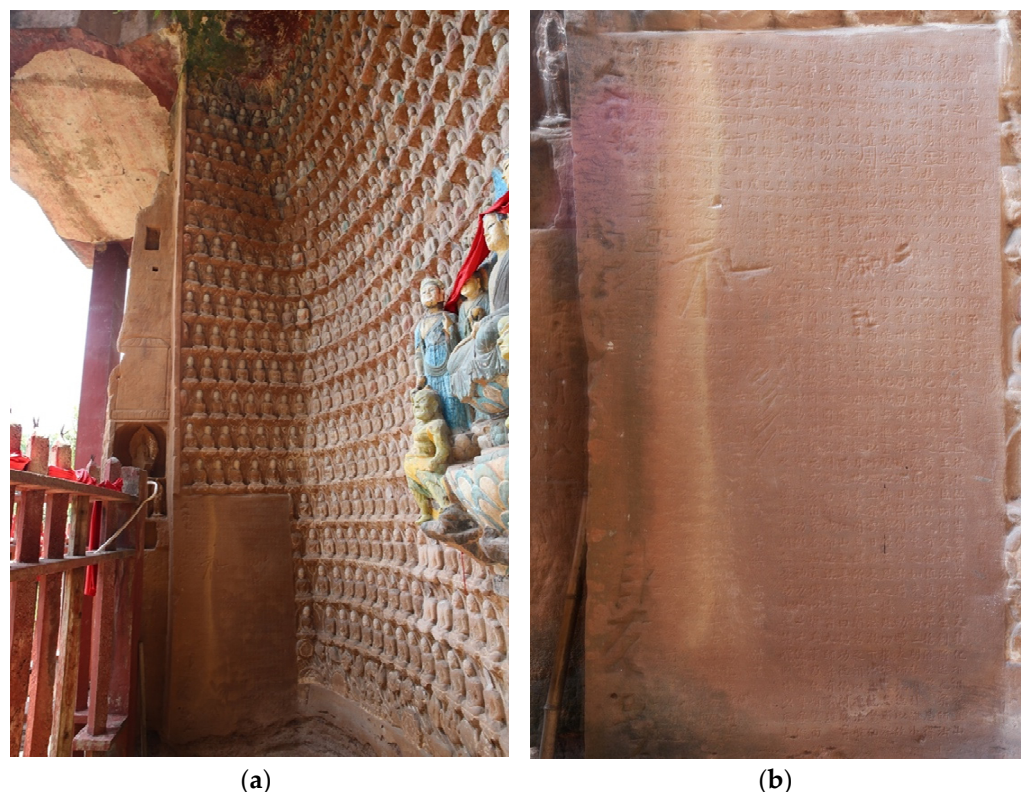


Figure 4. (a) The right side wall of Niche 6 at Huazhi Temple (Photograph by Wang Youkui). (b) The stone epitaph on the right side wall of Niche 6 at Huazhi Temple (Photograph by Li Jingjie 李靜傑).

Although the currently extant 798 Account resulted from repeated re-carvings in later generations and several characters were mis-carved (see Appendix A), its overall content still seems to have been convincingly kept almost intact when compared to its original state in 798.

So far, the only known comprehensive and in-depth study of the 798 Account was conducted by Hida Romi 肥田路美 of Waseda University, Japan. Hida paid great attention to the 798 Account when she researched the images of Niches 5 and 6 at the Huazhi Temple in Qionglai. She attached to her article the text of the epitaph that was transcribed by Hamada Tamami 濱田瑞美, with her (Hida’s) own punctuation and interpretation. Hida focused on the relationship between the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple and Chang’an Buddhism and tried to explore the background of constructing the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple. Hida’s research yielded two important points. First, her successful identification of the “Gongde shi, Kaifu Dou” (功德使、開府[寶]), mentioned in the 798 Account as Dou Wenchang 竇文場 (active 783–798). Second, her exploration of the background of Chang’an Buddhism, especially Fazhao’s 法照 (active 760s–770s) advocacy of chanting the Buddha’s name in a loud, cadenced voice, and Feixi’s 飛錫 (active 760s) advocacy of chanting the names of Buddhas in “Ten Directions of Three Periods” (十方三世). She also emphasized that although it cannot directly link Fazhao and Feixi’s advocacies with Sengcai’s statue construction project at Huazhi Temple, it can state the Buddhist background in which Sengcai was living.¹¹

However, Hida's research is marred. First, she erred in punctuating and interpreting the text in some parts. Second, some key players—especially Ma Yu 馬宇 (739–818), the author of the 798 Account, *yuanrong* 元戎 (supreme commander) and *fangbo* 方伯 (governor)—and their interrelationships eluded her attention. Last but not least, she fell short of recognizing the importance of the social network formed by various participants of the Huazhi statue construction project.

In view of the research history outlined above, this article will focus on the social network revealed in the 798 Account at Huazhi Temple. First, I will re-transcribe and re-punctuate the 798 Account, highlighting the differences between my reading and those conducted by other scholars, and will translate the original Chinese account into English, paragraph by paragraph (see Appendix A). Then, I will fully investigate the backgrounds, roles, and relationships of the individual agents in this project, as recorded in the 798 Account. This reconstruction will hopefully lay a solid foundation for revealing the social network in support of the statue construction project that has been obscured throughout history, which will benefit both the fields of Buddhist history and Buddhist art history in the Tang dynasty. The iconographic and religious research of the Buddhist niches at Huazhi temple will be studied in a separate paper.

2.2. The Summary of the 798 Account

Composed by Ma Yu, the 798 Account was initially carved in the fourteenth year of the Zhenyuan era. It narrates the complicated process of constructing the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple. In this article, I divide the 798 Account into five parts (see the five paragraphs in Appendix A): the first part demonstrates the importance of constructing niches and carving statues; the second part explains the background of the monk Sengcai, who was the initiator of the project; the third part describes the splendid geographical environment where the Huazhi Temple was located; the fourth part details the statue construction process of the Niches 5 and 6, including its chronology, project manager, supporters, donors, craftsmen, vows, and so on; and finally, the fifth part records the time, author, and calligrapher of the 798 Account.

According to the 798 Account, in the fourth lunar month (in which the reigning emperor's birthday fell) of the fourteenth year of the Zhenyuan era (798),¹² Sengcai petitioned Dezong to approve the statue construction project and grant a name tablet to the Huazhi Temple. Subsequently, Dezong commissioned the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue (*gongde shi* 功德使) and Commander (*kaifu* 開府) whose last name was Dou 竇 to announce his edict and bestow some funds upon Sengcai on behalf of Dezong to support Sengcai's statue construction project. In order to construct the statues at the Huazhi Temple, Sengcai was eager to donate all of his secular family property and to return to his hometown (in Qiongzhou 邛州), to make plans for the statue construction project at Huazhi Temple in person. To this end, he reported to the throne his intention to leave Chang'an for Qiongzhou. Regretfully, his request was rejected. As a result, Sengcai had to rely on the monk Daoying 道應, a Precept-Platform Presider of Great Virtue (*lintan dade* 臨壇大德) at Baihe Temple 白鶴寺 in Qiongzhou, to jointly plan the statue construction at Huazhi temple. The local military and civil officials (rhetorically referred to as "supreme commander" [*yuanrong* 元戎] and "governor" [*fangbo* 方伯], respectively) also did their best to financially aid the statue construction. Thousands of Buddhas were then carved on the cliff facing the sun. The so-called one thousand billion and ten thousand Buddhas (*qianyi wan fo* 千億萬佛) in the 798 Account was obviously an exaggeration of the number of Buddhas carved. As a matter of fact, less than 1,000 Buddha statues were carved in Niches 5 and 6 respectively, meaning both Niches 5 and 6 could also be named as "Thousand Buddha Niches".¹³

After Sengcai's statue construction project at Huazhi Temple was completed, the Buddhist niches and statues were revered by monks (*senglü zhanyang* 僧侶瞻仰) and protected by the commoners in Qiongzhou (*zhuoren huchi* 州人護持). Ma Yu, Sengcai's first cousin once removed (*congshi* 從姪), composed the 798 Account, and Xu Qing 徐清, from Gaoping 高平 (in present-day Shanxi 山西), performed the calligraphy.¹⁴ As for the craftsmen

who carved the statues and inscription, the 798 Account only claims that skillful craftsmen as proficient as Lu Ban 魯班 (a.k.a. Gongshu Ban 公輸班 [507 BC–?]) arrived voluntarily and vied to demonstrate their skills (*Gongshu zilai er siqiao* 公輸子來而肆巧). Craftsmen's names were omitted here for two probable reasons. First, Ma Yu, based in Chang'an, did not know these craftsmen. Second, the main agenda of Ma Yu's writing was to promote Sengcai and his achievements.

With this brief summary of the background and content of this important document in the 798 Account, we are now ready to successively analyze the main characters in the statue construction project.

3. The Initiator Sengcai 僧采

3.1. Who Was Sengcai?

It can be inferred from the 798 Account that the initiator of the Huazhi statue construction project was Sengcai, whose secular surname was Ma and whose ancestral place was Maoling 茂陵 in Fufeng 扶風 (in contemporary Shaanxi 陝西 province). It was alleged that Sengcai was a descendant of General Fubo 伏波 Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 BC–49 AD) of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). Sengcai became a monk when he was young and was a great virtue at Huazhi temple in Qiongzhou. Thanks to his erudition, Sengcai was able to educate people from various levels in Qiongzhou, earning himself a reputation that spread to the two capitals (i.e., Chang'an and Luoyang 洛陽). He was then summoned by Emperor Daizong from the Huazhi temple in Qiongzhou to the Zhangjing temple in Chang'an in the fourth year of the Dali 大曆 era (769).

According to Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, if a monk or a nun was registered in a certain monastery, it meant that he or she had to reside at the monastery. As a rule for Tang monastics, this prohibited members of the *Sangha* from leaving their affiliated monasteries without authorization. Besides, if a member of the *Sangha* wanted to move his or her registration from one temple to another, he or she had to secure permission, either by application or by imperial favor.¹⁵

Sengcai's case matched this rule. After Sengcai became a monk, he was affiliated with Huazhi Temple (隸[=隸]此州花置寺). Then, he was summoned into the Zhangjing Temple by Daizong in 769. In 798, Sengcai wished to go back to Qiongzhou and planned to construct the Buddhist niches in person (方欲再踐鄉園, 躬宏制[度]). Regrettably, he did not receive Dezong's approval (大師尋有表辭, /△恩 旨[旨]未許).

From the above, it is certain that Sengcai was affiliated with Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou before 769, and during the thirty years from 769 to 798 he was affiliated with Zhangjing Temple in Chang'an. After 798, Sengcai might have continued to stay in Zhangjing Temple, as his request to leave Chang'an for Qiongzhou was not approved by Dezong. From 798 until Sengcai's death, the material currently at our disposal does not allow us to verify whether Sengcai returned to Huazhi temple or not.

It was noteworthy that Sengcai spent at least thirty years at Zhangjing Temple between 769 and 798. The time period of his stay at this temple ranged from the Dali era (766–779) to the Zhenyuan era (785–805), which were two prosperous eras for Buddhism under Daizong and Dezong's reigns.

Tsukamoto Zenryu 塚本善隆 (1898–1980), who studied Chang'an Buddhism in the Daizong and Dezong periods, pointed out that Zhangjing Temple was one of the central monasteries during Daizong and Dezong's reigns. He also stated that Buddhism during the Dali and Zhenyuan eras was similar to the Buddhism of the Tianbao period (742–756). It had a strong aristocratic feature as Buddhism flourished under the protection of aristocracy and influential officials. At the same time, it had characteristics of popularization by being widely popularized among the general public. The Buddhism that prevailed in these periods was characterized by the promotion of mystical experiences, the practice of simplicity, and the prevalence of dharma rituals (Tsukamoto 1976, pp. 232, 238–239). Hida Romi indicated that the thirty years in which Sengcai stayed at Zhangjing Temple was the most brilliant period after this temple was constructed, and that Buddhism in the Dali and

Zhenyuan eras demonstrated that Tiantai 天台, Huayan 華嚴, Chan 禪, Pure Land 淨土, Esoteric Buddhism 密教, and Vinaya 律 were all developed and integrated together (Hida 2005, pp. 84, 87).

Currently, the 798 Account at Huazhi Temple is the only source for Sengcai. In order to gain a better understanding of Sengcai and his work on the construction of Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple, it is essential to discover the Buddhist and social background of Zhangjing Temple when Sengcai stayed there. Hence, below is a comprehensive overview of the important events and resident monks at Zhangjing Temple from its founding in the second year of the Dali era (767) under the Emperor Daizong's reign to the Zhenyuan era under the reign of Emperor Dezong.

3.2. The Background of Zhangjing Temple in 767–805

Zhangjing Temple was located outside the Tonghua Gate 通化門, northeast of the outer city of Chang'an (Cao 1991, pp. 147–50). On the nineteenth or twentieth day of the seventh month of the second year of the Dali era (August 17 or 18, 767), Yu Chao'en 魚朝恩 (722–770), a famous eunuch, offered his manor which was bestowed by the emperor as a temple in the name of Empress Dowager Zhangjing 章敬, the biological mother of Emperor Daizong.¹⁶ Shortly before the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the third year of Dali era (August 31, 768), the construction of Zhangjing Temple was completed.¹⁷

3.2.1. Important Events at Zhangjing Temple between 768–805

From the third year to the end of the Dali era (768–779) under Daizong's reign, Zhangjing Temple had two main functions.

On the one hand, it acted as the stage for three kinds of royal rituals or celebrations; namely, the anniversary of Empress Dowager Zhangjing's death on the twentieth day of the first lunar month,¹⁸ the Ullambana Festival (*Yulanpen jie* 盂蘭盆節) on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month,¹⁹ and Emperor Daizong's birth (*Tianxing jie* 天興節) on the thirteenth day of the tenth lunar month between 769–778.²⁰

On the other hand, once Zhangjing Temple was completed, it started to propagate the idea of protecting and guarding the country by taking advantage of Buddhist power through two events. This was a highly promoted and paramount idea during Daizong's period (Weinstein 1987, p. 82). First, from 768 when the Zhangjing Temple was completed to the next few years (possibly between 768–771), it advocated the *Renwang huguo bore boluomiduo jing shu* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經疏 [Commentary on the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra for Humane Kings Who Wish to Protect Their States]. Hundreds of people were attracted to the temple to learn this new commentary on the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 [The Scripture for Humane Kings]. The court even provided food and drink for listeners.²¹ Second, on the twenty-eighth day of the tenth lunar month of the third year of the Dali era (December 11, 768), it held a unique national performance, showing the Buddhist power to guard the country and extinguish disasters.²²

The functions of Zhangjing Temple during Dezong's reign were more complex than those of Daizong's period, and were mainly reflected in four aspects.

First, Zhangjing Temple served a military function in 784. At the beginning of Dezong's reign, Dezong fled Chang'an due to a rebellion. On the twenty-ninth day of the fifth month of the first year of Xingyuan 興元 era (June 21, 784), Luo Yuanguang 駱元光 (d.u.) stationed troops at Zhangjing Temple, which played an important role in the restoration of Chang'an.²³

Secondly, Zhangjing Temple played an important role in holding ceremonies for the death anniversaries of Empress Dowager Zhangjing and Daizong from 786 onwards.²⁴

Thirdly, Zhangjing Temple fully demonstrated its Buddhist function as one of the most important royal monasteries in Chang'an.

Emperor Dezong visited Zhangjing Temple to receive the Bodhisattva precepts (*pusa jie* 菩薩戒) under Chan Master Daocheng's 道澄 (?–803) supervision on the eighth day of the second month of the second year of the Zhenyuan era (March 12, 786). Three years later,

in 789, Emperor Dezong visited Master Daocheng at Zhangjing Temple again, to consult him on the Buddhist teachings of cultivating the mind (*xindi famen* 心地法門).²⁵

In the eighth month of the fourth year of the Zhenyuan era (September 5–October 3, 788), Emperor Dezong visited Tonghua Gate and watched a ceremony happening at Zhangjing Temple, in which monks were welcoming a name tablet. This name tablet was bestowed by Emperor Dezong to one of the cloisters at Zhangjing Temple.²⁶

On the fourth day of the fifth month of the sixth year of the Zhenyuan era (June 20, 790), Emperor Dezong wrote a preface for the newly translated sūtra, *Dacheng liqu liu boluomiduo jing* 大乘理趣六波羅蜜多經 [Scripture of the Six Pāramitā of Mahāyāna], and hand-copied his preface at the beginning of this sūtra. Zhangjing Temple was honored to receive one copy of this sūtra, and the monks at this temple recited this sūtra to make it popular under the Emperor Dezong's order.²⁷

Fourthly, Zhangjing Temple also acted as a venue where literati gathered together to compose verses. For example, Emperor Dezong held poetic gatherings with the crown prince and ministers at Zhangjing Temple on the fourteenth day of the seventh month in the seventh year of the Zhenyuan era (August 18, 791).²⁸

3.2.2. Monks at Zhangjing Temple and Their Activities in 767–805

After Zhangjing Temple was constructed, world-renowned monks of great virtues who were good at the three disciplines (*sanxue* 三學) of Buddhism (morality [*jie* 戒], meditation [*ding* 定], and wisdom [*hui* 慧]) gathered at this temple under Emperor Daizong's order during the Dali era (大曆中勅應天下名僧大德三學通贍者並叢萃其中).²⁹ It was against this backdrop that Sengcai was summoned into Zhangjing Temple.

As an effort to compensate for the dearth of material on Sengcai, I will list the monks associated with the Zhangjing Temple throughout the reigns of Daizong and Dezong, with the hope of revealing the context of the temple during Sengcai's time there.

According to my incomplete statistics, under Daizong and Dezong's reigns, the following 18 monks were affiliated with the Zhangjing Temple in 768–805:

1. Faqin 法欽 (715–793), residence from 768 onward for a period of unknown length;
2. Biancai 辯才 (724–778), 768–778 residence;
3. Fengguo 奉國 (d.u.), 768–771 residence;
4. Huilin 惠林 (d.u.), residence in 771;
5. Sengcai 僧采 (d.u.), 769–798 residence;
6. Fazhao 法照 (d.u.), residence at the end of the Dali era (766–779);
7. Yuanying 元盈 (d.u.), residence in 773;
8. Youze 有則 (d.u.), 777–778 residence;
9. Xizhao 希照 (d.u.), 778–780 residence;
10. Puzhen 普震 (d.u.), 778–781 residence;
11. Lingming 令名 (d.u.), residence in 779;
12. Daoxiu 道秀 (active in 770s–800s), 777–779 residence;
13. Biankong 聶空 (d.u.), residence in 788;
14. Zhitong 智通 (d.u.), residence in 789;
15. Wukong 悟空 (731–?), residence in 790;
16. Weiya 惟雅 (d.u.), residence in 790;
17. Daocheng 道澄 (?–803), 781–803 residence;
18. Jianxu 鑒虛 (?–813), 796–798 residence.

The relationships that the above 18 monks held with the imperial court are most remarkable. They either had direct access to the imperial audience, indirectly received imperial orders to participate in Buddhist activities, or had contact with powerful courtiers.

Firstly, there were five monks who had direct contact with the emperor: Faqin, Fengguo, Fazhao, Daocheng, and Jianxu. Their contact with emperors shows that Chan and Pure Land were highly promoted by both Emperors Daizong and Dezong.

Both Chan Master Faqin and Pure Land Master Fazhao were invited into the inner court by the emperor because of their fame and were then allocated to Zhangjing Temple.³⁰

Faquin received an honored title of *Guoyi dashi* 國一大師 bestowed by Emperor Daizong.³¹ After he died on January 15, 793, Emperor Dezong also granted him a posthumous title of *Dajue chanshi* 大覺禪師.³² Chan master Faquin's case indicated that he was respected by both Emperor Daizong and Dezong.

Besides, as mentioned above, Chan master Daocheng was highly admired by Emperor Dezong, as Dezong visited Zhangjing Temple on March 12, 786 to receive the Bodhisattva precepts and inquired about the way of cultivating the mind from Daocheng in 789. Dezong also ordered Daocheng to confer Bodhisattva precepts on females, such as imperial concubines, at the imperial palace in 789.³³ Between June 1–2, 793, 11 masters gathered at imperial palace complexes on or before Dezong's birthday to answer the meaning of cultivating the mind for the Crown Prince, and Daocheng was one of these 11 masters.³⁴ Daocheng had been residing at Zhangjing Temple for twenty-three years—from the second year of Jianzhong 建中 era (781) to his death on October 7, 803³⁵—and spent the second longest time at Zhangjing Temple after Sengcai. The interactions between Daocheng and Dezong demonstrated that Dezong was Daocheng's faithful believer and Dezong actively promoted Chan Buddhism.

Fazhao was bestowed a honorable title of *guoshi* 國師 by Emperor Daizong.³⁶ During his stay at Zhangjing Temple, Fazhao wrote *Jingtu wuhui nianfo lue fashi yizan* 淨土五會念佛略法事儀讚 [Ritual Praises for the Dharma Ceremony Outlining the Five Stage Progression for Chanting the Buddha's Name of Pure Land] at the Pure Land Cloister (*Jingtu yuan* 淨土院) to promote *wuhui nianfo* 五會念佛 (Five Stage Progression of Intoning Amitābha), which was a key practice in the Pure Land teaching of chanting Buddha's names in a specific cadence.³⁷ Fazhao's advocacy of *wuhui nianfo* helped turn Zhangjing Temple into a center of Amitābha's Pure Land teaching among Chang'an monasteries. Even in 841, the monk Jingshuang 鏡霜 (active 840s) at Zhangjing Temple was ordered to promote the practice of chanting Buddha's name in the teaching of Amitābha's Pure Land in various monasteries in Chang'an.³⁸

Jianxu attended the palace debate on “the Three Religions” (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism), on Dezong's birthday in 796 (May 30, 796), as a Buddhist representative and gave a presentation in front of Dezong.³⁹

Master Biancai, who specialized in both Chan and Vinaya, was granted a posthumous title of *Nengjue* 能覺 by Daizong in 778.⁴⁰ One of Fengguo's titles was Expounder of Great Virtue (*jianglun dade* 講論大德),⁴¹ a title bestowed by the emperor. Biancai and Fengguo's titles indicated that they might have also personally met the emperor.

Secondly, about half of the 18 monks listed above (Huilin, Yuanying, Xizhao, Puzhen, Biankong, Zhitong, Wukong, and Weiya) had indirect communications with emperors. These monks participated in imperial Buddhist activities in Chang'an, such as translating or preaching on sūtras, and composing comments or notes on sūtras.

Specifically speaking, under Daizong's reign, Fengguo acted as one of the proofers of meanings (*zhengyi* 證義) in the translation team of *Xukongzang pusa suo wen jing* 虛空藏菩薩所問經 [*Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* (or *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra*); Sūtra in Response to the Queries by Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva], which was completed in 771.⁴² Huilin was invited to give a sūtra lecture at Baoshou Temple 保壽寺 on February 20, 771.⁴³ Yuanying received an order from Daizong to preach the *Xukongzang pusa suo wen jing* at Baoshou temple in 773.⁴⁴ Youze was invited to preach the *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經 [Sūtra of Golden Light] at Xingshan Temple 興善寺 on May 5, 778.⁴⁵ In 778–780, Xizhao and Puzhen acted as proofers of meanings as part of the team that modified the old and new notes of *Sifen lü* 四分律 [Skt. **Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*; Vinaya of the Four Categories] into one text.⁴⁶

During Dezong's period, Biankong participated in translating the *Dacheng liqu liu boluomiduo jing* in 788, and also acted as a meaning explainer (*yijie* 義解).⁴⁷ On May 14, 789, Zhitong received an order to compose notes for the *Dacheng liqu liu boluomiduo jing*.⁴⁸ As mentioned above, Dezong bestowed a copy of the *Dacheng liqu liu boluomiduo jing* on Zhangjing Temple. Weiya then proposed a memorial to Dezong to express the gratitude.⁴⁹

Jianxu participated in the translation team of *Da fangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 [Skt. *Avatamsaka Sūtra*] (40 *juan*) in 796–798 by polishing the translation.⁵⁰

All of the activities the above monks participated in were approved and decreed by the emperor. The communications between these monks and the emperor were mediated through a third party who acted as a messenger. The messenger could be a eunuch or an official, and they announced imperial decrees to initiate those imperially sponsored Buddhist activities in front of the related monks. After the activities were completed, the messenger delivered awards to the monks on behalf of the emperor. The monks also presented memorials to the emperor to express their gratitude via the messenger.

Thirdly, five monks (Youze, Lingming, Daoxiu, Jianxu, and Wukong) had interactions with eunuchs or officials.

Youze wrote epitaphs for the two eunuchs Zhou Hui 周惠 (711–777) and Diwu Xuanyu 第五玄昱 (718–777) in 777 (Wu 1996, pp. 111–12; Yu and Zhang 2006, p. 145). Lingming crafted an epitaph for the General Cao Huilin 曹惠琳 (726–779) in 779 (Zhou and Zhao 2001, p. 720). All of the calligraphy for these three epitaphs were performed by Daoxiu. Additionally, Daoxiu also collaborated with Wu Tongwei 吳通微 (active 760s–790s) on a stone tablet on a wall at Qianfu 千福 temple. Daoxiu drafted the text and Wu Tongwei performed his calligraphy on the tablet.⁵¹ Wu Tongwei was an official at Dezong's court (Cen 1948, pp. 73–74). Jianxu started associating with powerful eunuchs and bigwigs during the Zhenyuan era and even bribed officials. Eventually, he was sentenced to death because of his crimes in 813.⁵² Wukong returned to Chang'an in 790 and brought three newly translated sūtras, namely, *Shidi jing* 十地經 [Scripture of Ten Stages], *Huixiang lun jing* 迴向輪經 [Skt. *Parinatacakra*; the Scripture of Revolving the Wheel], *Shili jing* 十力經 [Scripture on the Ten Powers]. Dou Wenchang 竇文場, who was the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue on the Left Precinct of the Capital (*zuojie gongdeshi* 左街功德使) transcribed these three sūtras and presented them to Dezong. At the same time, Dou Wenchang proposed to Dezong to assign Wukong to Zhangjing temple.⁵³

It is noticeable that the Zhangjing monks from the Dali to Zhenyuan eras kept close ties with the court. The power of these monks must have had a great deal to do with the imperial origins of Zhangjing Temple. These monks distinguished themselves by their accomplishments in different disciplines, especially Chan, Pure Land, and Vinaya, which was in line with Daizong's summons to enter the temple of great masters skilled in the three disciplines of Buddhism.

3.3. Sengcai's Situation at Zhangjing Temple between 769–798

From the above discussion, we know that from the Dali to Zhenyuan eras, Zhangjing Temple was a royal monastery that performed multiple functions in support of the court. We also know that the monks at this temple had close contacts with the emperor and influential officials at that time. So, what roles did Sengcai play during his thirty-year stay at Zhangjing Temple?

The 798 Account of Huazhi Temple ascertains two points about Sengcai's status at Zhangjing Temple. First, Sengcai started residing at Zhangjing Temple in the fourth year of the Dali era (769), as summoned by Daizong, who appointed him the Administrator of the Zhangjing Temple because of his virtue:

In the fourth year of the Dali 大曆 era (769), Emperor Daizong's feelings turned profound as time went by (or Emperor Daizong felt endless grief for his deceased mother), [to the point that His Majesty decreed] the construction and renovation of Zhangjing Temple. By virtue of this [background], the emperor Daizong bestowed the great master (i.e., Sengcai) to reside at the temple. Because of [Sengcai's] virtue, the emperor decreed to appoint him the Administrator (*gangwei* 綱維) [of the temple]. [Sengcai's] wisdom exceeded that of his fellow monks [and his] words became the norm of public opinions. 大曆四年, 代宗感深日(=罔?)極, 創修章敬, 籍△勅賜大師。懿德以故, 主授綱維。智出縉流, 言成方物。

Second, in the fourteenth year of the Zhenyuan era (798) when the construction of the Thousand-Buddha niches was completed at Huazhi Temple and the 798 Account was composed, Sengcai was the Head-seat of Zhangjing temple:

The person who newly built the stone niches and statues at Huazhi Mountain Temple in Qiongzhou was the imperially appointed *shangying* 上應 (=shangzuo 上座 [Head-seat]) of Zhangjing Temple in the Upper Capital (i.e., Chang'an). 邛州花置山寺新造石龕像者，△御賜勅授上京章敬寺上應(=座?)。

Here, the word “shangzuo” 上座 in the 798 Account might have been mistakenly carved as “Shangying” 上應 when the 798 Account was re-engraved later on.⁵⁴ Considering that Sengcai had been residing at Zhangjing Temple for at least thirty years during 769–798, four questions arise: (1) When did Sengcai start to serve as the Head-seat of Zhangjing Temple? (2) How long did he serve in this role? (3) What exact role did he take when he was granted the position of Administrator of the Zhangjing Temple? and (4) When did this happen?

Gangwei referred to Three Cords (*san'gang* 三綱, i.e., three monastic directors): Head-seat (*shangzuo* 上座), Head-master (*sizhu* 寺主), and Rector (*duo weinuo* 都維那) of a monastery in the Tang dynasty.⁵⁵ According to Yang Weizhong's 楊維中 research on the statuses of these three roles, Head-seat was the highest, then Head-master, and the Rector was the lowest. The names and statuses of the “Three Cords” was confirmed around 630. And the “Three Cords” of a high level monastery in the Tang dynasty were appointed by the emperor (Yang 2018, pp. 76–83). Based on Lin Yunrou's 林韻柔 study, the “Three Cords” in the Tang dynasty administered the monastery together, and their responsibilities were as follows: the Head-seat was in charge of religious issues, religious discipline, education, and giving lectures. Usually, the post of the Head-seat was held by someone of a venerable age, or who was erudite or competent. The Head-master was the representative of the monastery, who mainly took charge of external work, such as communicating with the court or other monasteries. The Rector was responsible for all kinds of sundry business of the monastery, such as managing the lecture hall and dining hall, ringing the bell, and so on (Lin 2018, pp. 166–201).

Among all the materials I could find, only three Head-seats of Zhangjing Temple were found between the 760s–810s. No records were found of anybody serving as the Head-master or Rector of this temple. The three Head-seats of this temple can be listed chronologically, as below:

The first Head-seat was Fengguo under Emperor Daizong's reign. As mentioned above, Fengguo acted as one of the proofers of meanings in the *Xukongzang pusa suo wen jing* translation team.

The translation project of this sūtra was approved by Daizong on July 10, 765. It was officially launched after the twelfth day of the eleventh month of the second year of the Yongtai 永泰 era (December 18, 766), when the title of the reign was changed from Yongtai to Dali. On the twelfth day of the tenth month of the six year of the Dali era (November 22, 771), Bukong 不空 (705–774), the leader of this translation team, presented this newly finished translation of *Xukongzang pusa suo wen jing* to Daizong, in order to celebrate his birthday.⁵⁶ Ten days later, on December 2, 771, the eunuch Li Xiancheng 李憲誠 (d.u.), at the behest of Daizong, expressed greetings and sent awards, in acknowledgement of the great virtues of this translation team. The next day, on December 3, 771, these great virtues submitted a memorial to the throne to express their gratitude.⁵⁷ This timeline indicates that the great virtues of this translation team (including Fengguo) lived through the entire translation project, from the end of 766 to the end of 771.

However, the construction of Zhangjing Temple commenced in 767 and was brought to completion in 768. So, the earliest time for Fengguo acting as the Zhangjing Head-seat must be 768. Based on the information above, it was very likely that Fengguo was the first Zhangjing Head-seat and he served in this role at least between 768–771. Fengguo might have continued in the same role after 771. Regretfully, we don't have more information about him.

By 798, when the 798 Account was written under Dezong's reign, our protagonist Sengcai was the second Zhangjing Head-seat. Seeing that Dezong did not approve of Sengcai's resignation from Zhangjing Temple in 798, Sengcai might have stayed there and acted as its Head-seat afterwards.

The third Zhangjing Head-seat on record was Chan Master Huaihui 懷暉 (757–816) during the period of 808–816 under the reign of Xianzong 憲宗 (778–820; r. 805–820). In the third year of the Yuanhe 元和 era (808), Huaihui was enrolled in the Vairocana Cloister at Zhangjing Temple at the decree of Xianzong (元和三年, 憲宗詔入於章敬寺毘盧遮那院安置). Sometime between 808 and January 14, 816, on which day he passed away at the temple, Huaihui was conferred a vegetarian meal at the Linde Hall 麟德殿 and was promoted to the position of Zhangjing Head-seat (復詔入麟德殿賜齋, 推居上座).⁵⁸

Now, let's talk about Sengcai's role at Zhangjing Temple, based on the information above. Sengcai was enrolled into the Zhangjing Temple in the fourth year of the Dali era (769) and was made its Administrator. However, the 798 Account is ambiguous on the question of when Sengcai was granted the position of a Zhangjing Administrator.

In my opinion, if Sengcai was granted the role of Zhangjing Administrator upon his arrival in 769, he could only act as the Head-master or Rector. It was impossible for Sengcai to serve as the Zhangjing Head-seat in 769, as this role was taken by Fengguo between 768 and 771. Considering that the major responsibility of a Head-master was to manage external relations with the court or other monasteries, and that a Rector took charge of sundry affairs, it seems unlikely that Sengcai was competent enough to assume these two roles upon his arrival at Zhangjing Temple from Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou, which was far away from Chang'an.

It was more likely that the exact role of Administrator that the emperor bestowed on Sengcai was the Zhangjing Head-seat. As mentioned above, a Head-seat of a monastery was mainly responsible for Buddhist issues, including Buddhist discipline, education, giving lectures, explaining sūtras, and so on. Usually the post of Head-seat was held by someone who was erudite, competent, prestigious or advanced in age (Lin 2018, pp. 179, 199–200). As stated by the 798 Account, Sengcai was proficient in the knowledge of Buddhism and made his teaching extensive (識通化洽). He obtained the subtle truth of “Thus-come” (Tathāgata) in Buddhism (得釋家之如來密諦). Among the teachings of three kinds of supranormal cognition, he guided the believers to leave the Lesser Vehicle (Hīnayāna); among the “four groups of Buddhist disciples” (i.e., male and female monastics [*bhikṣu* (monks) and *bhikṣuṇī* (nuns)] and lay believers [*upāsaka* (laymen) and *upāsikā* (laywomen)]), Sengcai often disseminated Mahāyāna dharma (三明教內, 引離小/乘; 四部衆中, 常演大法). Therefore, Sengcai's reputation spread to the Upper State (i.e., Chang'an) and his name was cherished in the Divine Capital (i.e., Luoyang) (故得聲馳上國, 名重神都). These must be why Sengcai was summoned by Daizong to Zhangjing Temple. Because of his virtue, Sengcai was appointed as the Zhangjing Administrator (懿德以故, /主授綱維). Obviously, Sengcai's erudition and extensive knowledge of Buddhism was exactly in line with the requirements of a Head-seat.

If the exact position of the “Three Cords” the emperor bestowed on Sengcai was that of Head-seat, it was not possible for this to happen in 769, given that at that time the same post was taken by Fengguo. So, it must have happened after 771, when Fengguo left this post. Due to a lack of references to both Sengcai and Fengguo, the exact time when Sengcai took this position is unknown. However, Sengcai had been residing at Zhangjing Temple for at least thirty years between 769–798. He was not only the only known Zhangjing Head-seat after Fengguo and before Huaihui, but was also the only person known to have served as the Zhangjing Head-seat during Dezong's reign. Hence, it was possible that Sengcai acted as the Zhangjing Head-seat throughout Dezong's reign (780–805). The earliest time of his position might be traced back to sometime after 771, and the latest time to sometime before 808.

In addition, Sengcai was a great virtue of three disciplines [i.e., *jie* 戒, *ding* 定, *hui* 慧]. As mentioned above, on the one hand, since the Zhangjing Temple was constructed, em-

inent monks good at three disciplines of Buddhism [morality, meditation, and wisdom] were decreed to gather at this temple during the Dali era. On the other hand, the first Zhangjing Head-seat Fengguo was also a great virtue of three disciplines, as the *Xukongzang pusa suo wen jing* translation team was constituted of great virtues of three disciplines in Chang'an (京城三學大德同崇法會), and Fengguo was among them.⁵⁹

By connecting the events and monks of Zhangjing Temple under Daizong and Dezong's reigns above to Sengcai's residence at Zhangjing temple in 769–798, we may infer the following. First, in the Dali era, the most important events of Zhangjing Temple happened in 768, when it was close to completion or just completed. Regrettably, Sengcai did not participate in any of these significant events because he was still in Qiongzhou at that time. Second, during his time at Zhangjing Temple, Sengcai must have been involved in the important events that occurred at this temple, especially during his tenure as its Head-seat. Thirdly, due to his role and long stay at Zhangjing Temple, Sengcai must have had contact with the emperor, influential eunuchs, officials, and other contemporary monks at Zhangjing Temple or other temples in Chang'an.

4. Supporters and Sponsors

4.1. Emperor Dezong

According to the Statue Construction Account, Emperor Dezong did three things to support Sengcai's statue construction project at Huazhi Temple.

First, Emperor Dezong approved the statue construction project at Huazhi Temple proposed by Sengcai. Second, not only did he bestow the title of a tablet (*Jingfa Bore* 淨法般若) for Huazhi Temple, as requested by Sengcai, but also added his reign name (*Zhenyuan* 貞元) to it and performed the calligraphy, thus bestowing the Huazhi Temple with an even grander name: *Zhenyuan Jingfa Bore* 貞元淨法般若.⁶⁰ Third, Dezong granted some funding to Sengcai for the statue construction project. After penning the tablet name, Dezong ordered the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue and Commander Dou to bestow the tablet and also to announce his permission and funding to Sengcai.

There was no doubt that Dezong was the main supporter of Sengcai's Huazhi statue construction project. However, the Statue Construction Account only states that Dezong granted funding, but does not clarify how much he gave. During the Kaiyuan 開元 era (713–741), Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762, r. 712–756) granted the revenue of linen and salt (*mayan zhi shui* 麻鹽之稅) to subsidize the construction of the giant Buddha statute at the Lingyun temple 凌雲寺 in Jiazhou 嘉州 (commonly known as the “Leshan Colossal Buddha” 樂山大佛), which was managed by Zhangqiu Jianqiong 章仇兼瓊 (?–750) at that time.⁶¹ According to Li Jinxiu's 李錦繡 research, the tax of salt in the Wu area and the tax of linen in the Shu region were levied in Jiangling 江陵 as a transit duty. And this kind of tax was added by Emperor Xuanzong during his time in Sichuan and only put into effect during Xuanzong's reign (Li 2001, p. 979). The “Leshan Colossal Buddha” was constructed in nearly ninety years, from the beginning of Kaiyuan era (713–741) to 803, with an impressive height of around sixty to seventy meters.⁶² In contrast, Niches 5 and 6 at Huazhi Temple were constructed in several months and are less than seven meters high, only one-tenth of the height of the “Leshan Colossal Buddha”. From this, we may speculate that the money spent on the Huazhi construction project was much less than that for the “Leshan Colossal Buddha”. For this reason, Dezong was able to reward Sengcai with some direct funding.

Undoubtedly, this series of support from Emperor Dezong, both mentally and physically, not only gave Huazhi Temple instant royal recognition, but also enabled the opening of the statue construction project at Huazhi temple to be carried out in a perfect justifiable and smooth way. In addition, Emperor Dezong's support also had great significance for two practical issues.

Firstly, thanks to Emperor Dezong's permission, Sengcai had the right to adopt the mountain land near Huazhi Temple to carve the Buddhist statues and niches.

As mentioned above, Niches 5 and 6 of the Thousand Buddhas were the first two niches constructed at Huazhi temple, meaning that they were the groundbreaking work at this site. As is well-known, before constructing a niche or grotto, the first practical issue is site selection. Here, Sengcai had already chosen Huazhi Mountain as the site. And based on my fieldwork, the niche group at this site is adjacent to Huazhi Temple. So, I assume that the mountain land used for statue construction near Huazhi Temple was the property of this monastery or public property owned by the local authority. This means that before constructing the niches, Sengcai needed to get permission to use the mountain land, either from local authorities or the imperial court.⁶³ Obtaining permission from the Emperor Dezong was more practical for Sengcai because he had been staying at Zhangjing Temple in Chang'an for thirty years at that time and had a way to communicate with the emperor.

Secondly, Emperor Dezong's support of Huazhi Temple by bestowing a name panel (*e* 額) on this temple and even executing the name panel with his own calligraphy secured the imperially protected status of Huazhi Temple.

According to Jacques Gernet's research, "It was of paramount importance for the monasteries to obtain imperial patronage, marked by the bestowal of an official name-panel. This was the safeguard against all future confiscations and even the destruction of the sanctuary. ... At the end of the Dali era, in 778, Li Shu-ming proposed to destroy those hermitages (*lanre*) and sanctuaries (*daochang*) that did not have official designations (*wuming*)."⁶⁴

Although on the basis of the 798 Account, it seemed that Sengcai's main purpose was to build the Buddhist statues and niches at Huazhi Temple, and he asked Emperor Dezong for the name-panel of Huazhi Temple in passing. In my opinion, these two things were equally important to Sengcai. Apparently, Sengcai was seeking imperial protection for his home temple by asking Emperor Dezong for a name panel. Sengcai's two requests also indicated the close ties between the temple and the Buddhist statues nearby.

4.2. The Commissioner of Merit and Virtue

After allowing Sengcai to construct the statues and niches at the Huazhi Temple and penning the name panel, Dezong was quoted to declare: "Order Dou, who was the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue and Commander, to announce [the granting of the tablet and the initiation of the statue construction project, which] is to be funded" 詔功德使、開府[寶] 誥宣揚, 仍將錫助.

According to the *Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiao Mulu*, one of the official positions of Dou Wenchang was Commander Unequalled in Honor (*Kaifu yitongsansi* 開府儀同三司). This information, combined with Dou Wenchang's appointment as Commissioner of Merit and Virtue in the fourteenth year of the Zhenyuan era (798), has led Hida Romi to bring forward the possibility that "Gongdeshi, Kaifu Dou" 功德使、開府[寶] in the 798 Account was Dou Wenchang (Hida 2005, p. 85). I find this identification plausible. In addition, on the thirteenth day of the fourth month of the thirteenth year of the Zhenyuan era (Zhenyuan 13.4.13 = May 13, 797), Dou Wenchang's official title was Commissioner of Merit and Virtue on the Left Precincts of the Capital and Duke of Binguo in honor (*Kaifu Binguo gong* 開府鄴國公),⁶⁵ which was consistent with his title as "Gongdeshi, Kaifu Dou" 功德使、開府[寶] recorded in the 798 Account.

However, Hida Romi read this sentence to mean that Dezong ordered the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue to financially aid Sengcai's statue construction project (Hida 2005, p. 85). This reading seems to deviate from the original meaning of the inscription. In my understanding, it was Dezong who bestowed funding on Sengcai, not the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue, as the subject of this sentence is Dezong.

The Commissioner of Merit and Virtue was in charge of all religious affairs, and acted as a go-between for monks and the emperor. On the one hand, when monks presented memorials to the throne, these memorials were usually first screened by the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue, who was to decide if they would be passed on to the emperor or not. On the other hand, the emperor's orders to the monks would be announced through

the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue.⁶⁶ In part 3.2.2 of this article, the similar indirect communication way via the third person between the monks at Zhangjing Temple and the emperor has been disclosed. Below is another example which is closest to Sengcai's case.

As mentioned above, Zhitong of Zhangjing Temple and others received Dezong's order to compose comments for *Dacheng liqu liu boluomiduo jing* on the fifteenth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of the Zhenyuan era (May 14, 789). On the eighth day of the ninth month of the same year (October 1, 789), Zhitong and Dao'an 道岸 (active in 780s) presented their work to Dezong. Eight days later (October 9, 789), Dou Wenchang, in the capacity of the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue on the Left Precincts of the Capital, announced to Zhitong and others Dezong's edict that rewarded them with ninety bolts of silk (伏奉今日左街功德使竇文場宣聖恩, 賜智通等絹玖拾匹者). On the same day, Zhitong and others submitted a memorial to Dezong to express their gratitude. And their memorial was delivered to Dezong by Dou Wenchang (謹附左街功德使竇文場奉表陳謝, 申請以聞).⁶⁷

We can infer from the above instance that Sengcai's memorial was probably presented to Dezong in the same way: Dou Wenchang, the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue, was the person who conveyed Sengcai's memorial to the emperor and conveyed the imperial response to the monk. Therefore, Dou Wenchang can also be counted as one of the supporters of Sengcai's Huazhi project. He must have assumed a critical role in that he shuttled back and forth between the internal and external courts, acting as the inter-medium between Dezong and the Buddhist community when they negotiated the initiation of the statue construction project and other relevant business.

This said, Dou Wenchang was one of the supporters of Sengcai's project at Huazhi temple by virtue of his role. However, there was no direct proof of Dou's own financial support for the Huazhi project in the 798 Account.

4.3. Sengcai

After proudly highlighting Dezong's financial support for Sengcai, the 798 Account states: "Out of all sincerity in his will, the Great Master was willing to exhaust all of his family wealth [on this project]" (大師志存丹懇, 願罄家財). In addition to commending Sengcai's devotion, this comment also implies that the funding granted to Sengcai by Dezong was far from adequate to construct the Buddhist niches at Huazhi Temple. In this sense, Sengcai might be counted as another donor after Dezong. The four characters *yuan qin jia-cai* 願罄家財 [willing to exhaust all of his family wealth] imply the considerable amount of financial support Sengcai managed to muster for the project by exhausting his secular property. In this sense, Sengcai might be considered as the biggest donor of the Huazhi project.

However, before being enrolled into the Zhangjing Temple in 769, Sengcai had already been a monk of great virtue at the Huazhi temple. The property belonging to his secular family could not have been called his own "family property" after he abandoned his household life and became a monk. So, what does this "family wealth" refer to? Does it refer to the money Sengcai had at home before becoming a monk? Or does it refer to the family property or estate at Sengcai's home in Qiongzhou at the time he was planning to start the statue construction project? Taking into account the fact that Sengcai became a monk at a relatively tender age and had been leaving his secular home for at least thirty years, it is more likely that the so-called "family wealth" refers to Sengcai's family property in Qiongzhou. Sengcai "was willing to exhaust all of his family wealth", but Dezong did not approve his return to his hometown. So, Sengcai might have relied on his family members in Qiongzhou to deal with his family wealth and to donate it to offset the costs of the Huazhi project. This reveals that, even as a monk, Sengcai still had access to the wealth from his secular home and maintained a good relationship with his family members.

4.4. Yuanrong 元戎 and Fangbo 方伯

After Sengcai and Daoying made a plan together for the construction of the Buddhist niches at Huazhi temple, "Yuanrong, fangbo, etc., each extended their good faith to the extreme by funding Sengcai and Daoying's project" 元戎、方伯等, 各竭真誠, 以資其事. In

failing to read the character *rong* 戎 of *yuanrong* 元戎 correctly, scholars have not been able to successfully identify the *yuanrong* and *fangbo*.⁶⁸

The *yuanrong* refers to a supreme commander, while the *fangbo*, originally indicating a feudal prince in the periods of Yin 殷 and Zhou 周 (roughly 1600BC–256BC), came to denote a local governor. The prefectural governor since the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), the Investigation Commissioner (*caifang shi* 採訪使) and Surveillance Commissioner (*guancha shi* 觀察使) of the Tang Dynasty, and the Administration Commissioner (*buzheng shi* 布政使) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) were all called “*fangbo*”.⁶⁹

Therefore, *yuanrong* and *fangbo* in the 798 Account should have referred to the local military generals in Qiongzhou, and the Surveillance Commissioner of Jiannan Xichuan 劍南西川觀察使, respectively. Both the *yuanrong* and *fangbo* financially aided the Huazhi construction project, but their real names were not revealed in the 798 Account. This suggests that they might only have offered a symbolic amount of funding and might have their funding delivered by their subordinates in their names.

Then, at the time when Niches 5 and 6 were constructed at the Huazhi temple in 798, whom did *yuanrong* and *fangbo* actually refer to?

The lampstand unearthed from the original site of Longxing 龍興 Temple in Qionglai was engraved with an inscription in praise of the lampstand: *Dengtai zan bing xu* 燈臺贊並序 [The Praise of Lampstand and Preface]. The inscription records that on the fourth day of the twelfth lunar month of the eleventh year of the Zhenyuan era (Zhenyuan 11.12.4 = January 18, 796), Deng Yingjun 鄧英俊, the Commander (*bingma shi* 兵馬使) of the Zhennan Army 鎮南軍 (a garrison in the South), set up the lampstand in order to encourage the soldiers. At the end of the inscription were also carved the names of other military officials, such as Generals (*jiang* 將), Administrative Assistants (*panguan* 判官), and so on.⁷⁰ The inscription ends with a statement that people from the association will obtain the same heavenly eyes (一會之人, 得同天眼). This statement shows that Deng Yingjun and other military officials constituted a *yihui* 邑會 (association) and engaged in Buddhist activities together.⁷¹

The Zhennan Army was set up in Qiongzhou by Emperor Daizong in the first year of the Baoying 寶應 era (762).⁷² During the Zhenyuan era (785–805), Deng Yingjun served under Wei Gao 韋皋 (745–805), the Military Commissioner of Jiannan Xichuan 劍南西川, and went to attack Tubo 吐蕃 (Tibet).⁷³ Thus, in the eleventh year of the Zhenyuan era (796), Deng Yingjun, the Commander of the Zhennan Army, was a military general in Qiongzhou (that is, the *yuanrong*). However, there is no hard evidence that Deng Yingjun was still the Commander of the Zhennan Army during the Huazhi construction project in 798. We therefore only have circumstantial evidence to identify the *yuanrong* as Deng Yingjun, who might be one of the donors of the Huazhi Temple project.

Qiongzhou, where the Huazhi Temple was located, belonged to Jiannan Xichuan. In 798, when the Buddhist statues were constructed at Huazhi Temple, the Military Commissioner of Jiannan Xichuan was Wei Gao. Therefore, the *fangbo* in the 798 Account must be Wei Gao. Since the first year of the Zhenyuan era (785), Wei Gao had served in the Shu 蜀 region, up until his death in 805. During his time in Shu, he not only took part in outstanding military exploits, but was also engaged in promoting Buddhism by constructing statues and temples.⁷⁴

Textual evidence still exists of the Buddhist activities that Wei Gao funded with his own salary during the Zhenyuan era:

(1) From the fifth year to the nineteenth year of the Zhenyuan era (789–803), Wei Gao offered his own salary in the amount of 500,000 cashes to support the renewing of the Giant Maitreya Buddha project at Lingyun Temple in Jiazhou;⁷⁵

(2) Wei Gao spent his salary to make forty copies of New Commentaries (*xinshu* 新疏) and also to write out thirty copies of commentary on the Lotus Sūtra (*Fahua shu* 法華疏) (以俸錢繕寫《新疏》四十本, 兼寫《法華疏》三十本);⁷⁶

(3) Wei Gao used his salary to build the Baoli Temple 寶曆寺 in Chengdu, to which Emperor Dezong bestowed a plaque.⁷⁷

When the Buddhist niches were constructed at Huazhi Temple in 798, Wei Gao's project of building the Giant Maitreya Buddha at Lingyun temple in Jiazhou was under way. It might be possible that Wei Gao, in his dual identity as the Military Commissioner of Jiannan Xichuan and a Buddhist believer, offered some symbolic funding for Sengcai's Huazhi statue construction project.

5. Sengcai and Daoying 道應 as Project Co-Managers

Though Sengcai stayed at Zhangjing Temple in Chang'an for more than thirty years, he did not forget where he came from. One of the reasons for Sengcai requesting Dezong's approval of the statue construction project and the bestowal of a tablet on Huazhi Temple was that Huazhi Temple was Sengcai's home temple in his hometown (i.e., Qiongzhou).

As mentioned in the first part of this article, Niches 5 and 6 of the Thousand Buddhas were the founding niches at Huazhi Temple because of their large scales and central position in the entire cliff relief group. Hence, Sengcai was not only the initiator of the Thousand Buddhas niches, but was also the inaugurator of all Buddhist niches of the Huazhi Mountain Temple. By virtue of Sengcai's effort, an imperially approved statue carving project was executed at Huazhi Temple, along with a tablet showing a monastic name bestowed by Dezong. As a result, Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou was no longer a local temple, but a renowned monastery under imperial protection.

After Dezong approved Sengcai's petition to construct statues and niches at Huazhi Temple, Sengcai intended to go back to his hometown to manage the statue construction project in person (方欲再踐鄉園, 躬宏制度). Unfortunately, his request to leave Chang'an did not get Dezong's approval (大師尋有表辭, /△恩旨未許). Here, the character 辭 either means leaving or resigning. But, if Sengcai was only away from the capital for a few months for Qiongzhou to manage the statue construction project at Huazhi Temple, he would not have felt the need to officially submit a memorial to request a short-term leave. Before Sengcai presented his memorials, the 798 Account also mentioned that Buddhist believers in Chang'an, out of their admiration for him, were reluctant to let him go and begged him to stay. So, the meaning of the character 辭 should be understood as resigning. That is, Sengcai submitted a memorial to Dezong requesting his resignation from his role as the Zhangjing Head-seat and leave for Huazhi temple in Qiongzhou. Same as the characters of *luan qin jiacai*, Sengcai's intension of resignation also indicates his determination at the Huazhi project.

Given the above-mentioned Tang rule of forbidding long-term residence at a temple other than one's officially affiliated temple, we may speculate that due to Dezong's disapproval of Sengcai's petition to leave the Zhangjing Temple, Sengcai could only continue to stay in Chang'an, which compelled him to rely on Daoying in Qiongzhou to plan the Huazhi statue construction project together (乃仗本州白鶴寺臨壇大德沙門道應講論、同製規模). This rendered Sengcai and Daoying to become the co-managers of the Huazhi statue construction project.

Daoying was a Precept-Platform Presider of Great Virtue (*lintan dade* 臨壇大德) at the Baihe 白鶴 Temple in Qiongzhou. Hida has pointed out that the Baihe Temple was the old name for the Helin 鶴林 Temple in Qionglai, which included six areas of Buddhist carvings. The three temples, namely Baihe Temple, Huazhi Temple, and Pantuo Temple, are all located close to each other on Mount He 鶴山 (see Figure 1). Moreover, the inscription in Niche 1 of the seated Amitābha Buddha at Pantuo Temple, dated to the fifteenth year of the Yuanhe era (820), indicates that the statues were also managed by monks from the Baihe temple (Hida 2005, pp. 85–86). Undoubtedly, Daoying was a perfect collaborator because he was a local, renowned monk.

Considering that Sengcai was in Chang'an while Daoying was based in Qiongzhou, they might have discussed the statue construction plans through correspondence. The four characters of *tongzhi guimo* 同製規模 reveal that the sizes of the niches and statues were the joint decision of Sengcai and Daoying. So, Niches 5 and 6 were Sengcai and Daoying's teamwork, and their cooperation is also reflected in these two niches.

With regard to the design of the niches, Niches 5 and 6 were two almost symmetrical joint niches. They also constitute a whole niche by arranging the small seated buddhas in rows that converge in the middle, where Niches 5 and 6 are connected. Then, a line of small buddhas are seated in the middle and facing the viewers (Figure 3). The ingenious design of these two niches might relate to the situation of the two eminent monks jointly planning together.

Considering Sengcai's location in Chang'an and Daoying's in Qiongzhou raises the following questions: Where did the theme(s) and style(s) of the buddhist statues in Sengcai's Huazhi project come from? Did they come from Chang'an, or from Sichuan, or even both?

From my point of view, although the 798 Account gives us a great deal of information about the background of the Huazhi project and reveals a strong connection between the Huazhi project and the capital Chang'an, it is insufficient to account for the source of the statues' images. The 798 Account only states that the Buddhist statues at Huazhi temple were designed by Sengcai and Daoying together, and that the contents of the Buddhist statues were immeasurable buddhas (無量諸佛), or one thousand billion and ten thousand Buddhas (千億萬佛). Besides this, it does not mention where the images come from. If we want to solve the question of the images' source(s), we still need to rely on the archaeological and iconographic study of the Buddhist statues.

On the one hand, I figure Sengcai might be in charge of determining the theme(s) of the Buddhist statues. My reasons are as follows. First, Sengcai was the initiator of the entire Huazhi project and the biggest donor. He also had close ties with Huazhi Temple. Second, he had made all of the early-stage preparations for the Huazhi statue construction project and intended to personally supervise the project on site. These two factors suggest that Sengcai had a clear understanding of what he wanted to construct at Huazhi Temple.

Third, the Thousand-Buddha belief seems prevailing in Chang'an in 798. The 798 Account clarified that Sengcai's wish, in constructing the Buddhist niches at Huazhi temple, was to help extend the national fortune and save all living beings (資國祚以延長, 濟羣生而何極?). And Sengcai's Huazhi project was launched in the fourth lunar month of 798. Also, on the first day of the fourth lunar month of the fourteenth year of the Zhenyuan era (April 21, 798), Yuanzhao 圓照 (727–809) of Ximing Temple 西明寺 made vows, wishing that the Thousand Buddhas could appear and save the sentient beings from sufferings.⁷⁸ Sengcai's Huazhi project and Yuanzhao's vows are closely related to each other. These two events happened in the fourth lunar month of Zhenyuan 14 (798); they both prayed for the emperor, the crown prince, officials, master monks, parents, and sentient beings; they both believed in the Thousand Buddhas. All of these overlaps imply that the motive of Thousand-Buddha believe in 798 is to save all of the sentient beings from sufferings and to protect the nation. And both Sengcai's Huazhi project and Yuanzhao's vows might have sprung from the context of the drought disaster in Chang'an in the spring of 798.⁷⁹

Fourth, the statues at Huazhi Temple share the same themes as contemporary statues at a Buddhist site in Linyou 麟游 county, Shaanxi province.

At Huazhi Temple, in Niches 5 and 6, Thousand Buddhas are carved. On the left side of Niche 5, Niche 4 represents two standing bodhisattvas. And on the right side of Niche 6, there is a giant standing buddha in Niche 7 (Figure 2). Niches 5 and 6 were the first two niches constructed at Huazhi Temple in 798. Niches 4 and 7 should have been carved not long after Niches 5 and 6. In a manner of speaking, Niches 4 and 7 might have been carved by the end of the eighth century.

Coincidentally, at the Thousand Buddha Cloister 千佛院 (on Mount Lamamao 喇嘛帽, Linyou County, Shaanxi province), Niche 4 represents thousand buddhas and two standing bodhisattvas. In Niche 3, a standing buddha is carved at a height of 196cm. According to Chang Qing's 常青 field survey and research of this site, the standing buddha in Niche 3 might have been carved between Dezong's reign to 809, namely from the late eighth century to the early ninth century. And the first stage of the thousand buddhas in Niche 4 might have been carved during Daizong and Dezong's time, slightly earlier than the standing buddha in Niche 3. Two standing bodhisattvas, on the right side of the thousand

buddhas, should have been derived from the same time as Niche 4 but were left unfinished (Chang 2016, pp. 39–42).

In my opinion, it was not a coincidence that the three same themes were represented together both at the Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou and at the Thousand Buddha Cloister in Linyou so proximately in time. Linyou County is located to the northwest of Chang'an and Sengcai was based in Chang'an when he planned to construct the Buddhist niches at the Huazhi temple. Thus, this suggests that the three themes, of thousand buddhas, a standing buddha, and two standing bodhisattvas, at the two sites of Qiongzhou and Linyou should reflect the Buddhist trend in Chang'an.

On the other hand, on the grounds that the Buddhist statues were carved at Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou, obviously Daoying was the actual supervisor of the statue construction project, who was in charge of multiple practical matters, such as managing funding, and communicating with local authorities, monasteries, monks, common people, the craftsmen, and so on. Visually, the styles of the Thousand Buddha statues at Huazhi Temple also indicate its local features in Sichuan.

For example, in Niche 6, lotus stems emerge from a jar with drum abdomen in the central bottom of the niche and then split into thinner branches. These thinner lotus branches stretch outward and upward, culminating in lotus thrones with small buddhas seated above. This kind of image, known as the Transformation of Thousand Buddhas (*Qianfo huaxian* 千佛化現), which was popular in Sichuan during the Tang dynasty. Except the small seated buddhas, the similar pictorial style of growing lotus can also be found in the Amitābha's/Western Pure Land images which were prevailing in Tang Sichuan (Sun 2016, pp. 200–3). The remarkable jar in the central bottom is popular among the Buddhist statue tablets from the Southern dynasties in Chengdu.⁸⁰ But Li Jingjie has noticed that the decorated pattern on the jar's surface in Niche 6 indicates its Indian origin, which is not found in the previous examples from Southern dynasties in Sichuan (Li 2023, p. 204). So, the image sources for the Thousand-Buddha statues at Huazhi temple are complex and deserve further research.

To sum up, Huazhi Niches 5 and 6 were the result of teamwork by Sengcai and Daoying in the sense that they discussed and made the plan for these two niches together. However, the 798 Account is not sufficient to resolve the question of the images' source(s). So I plan to revisit this issue in a following article that will focus on the themes and styles of the Huazhi statues.

6. The Author of the 798 Account

The 798 Account was written by Ma Yu, who was Sengcai's first cousin once removed. In 798, Ma Yu served as a Gentleman for Court Discussion (*Chaoyi lang* 朝議郎) and Left Grand Master Admonisher for the Crown Prince (*Taizi zuozanshan dafu* 太子左贊善大夫). Before this, he also served as a Palace Censor (*dianzhong yushi* 殿中御史). Taking into account his positions in the court, he was then presumably living in Chang'an.

According to the *Tang gu mishusheng zhuzuo zuolang jian dianzhong shiyushi zhanggong muzhiming bing xu* 唐故秘書省著作佐郎兼殿中侍御史張公墓志銘並序 [The Epitaph, with a preface, for Deceased Mr. Zhang who was an Assistant Editorial Director at the Palace Library and a Palace Censor in the Tang Dynasty] (Hu and Rong 2012, pp. 684–85) by a homonymous author (Ma Yu), Zhang Pan 張瓌 (726–793) passed away on the twelfth day of the eighth lunar month of the ninth year of the Zhenyuan era (Zhenyuan 9.8.12 = September 21, 793), and was buried on November 5, 793. In the same year, Ma Yu, who also served as a Palace Censor and Palace Attendant (*nei gongfeng* 內供奉), wrote the epitaph for his colleague Zhang Pan. Considering that one of Ma Yu's titles in 798 noted in the 798 Account was a former Palace Censor (*qian dianzhong yushi* 前殿中御史), it becomes evident that Ma Yu—the author of Zhang Pan's epitaph—and Ma Yu—the author of the 798 Account and Sengcai's first cousin once removed—must have been one and the same person.

Ma Yu left more traces of his life on different sources. First, according to the *Shunzong shilu* 順宗實錄 [Veritable Record of Emperor Shunzong] by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), in the first year of the Yongzhen 永貞 era (805), Ma Yu was dispatched to Silla 新羅 on a diplomatic mission while he served as the Vice Director of the Bureau of Receptions (*zhuke yuanwailang* 主客員外郎) and director of the Palace Administration (*dianzhong jian* 殿中監).⁸¹ Second, Cui Yan 崔郾 (768–836) mentioned that “Ma Yu was ordered to go to [the area of] Eastern Barbarians” (馬宇奉命東夷) in the epitaph for Li Yi 李益 (746–829).⁸² Third, the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New History of the Tang] attributes to Ma Yu the *Duangong biezhuàn* 段公別傳 [A Separate Biography of Mr. Duan] in two fascicles.⁸³ Finally, *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 [Essentials of the Tang] and *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 [The Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau] ascribe the authorship of *Fengchi lu* 鳳池錄 [Record of Phoenix Pond] to Ma Yu, who was a Vice Director of the Palace Library (*mishu shaojian* 秘書少監) and Senior Compiler in the Historiography Institute (*shiguan xiuzhuan* 史館修撰).⁸⁴ All this information about Ma Yu recorded in these four sources, including official positions, writings, and the status of his envoy, matches that of the tomb owner who was also known as “Ma Ruzi” 馬孺子 (Gentleman Ma).⁸⁵ Also, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) recorded the story of Fufeng Ma Ruzi 扶風馬孺子 (Gentleman Ma of Fufeng), who, according to Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝宣 (1924–2009), was none other than Ma Yu.⁸⁶

We are now ready to verify Ma Yu’s identity by comparing what we know about Ma Yu as the author of the 798 Account with the information extracted from all the other available sources about Ma Yu or Ma Ruzi. On the one hand, two of the official positions—Gentleman for Court Discussion and Left Grand Master Admonisher for Prince and a Palace Censor—that attributed the authorship of the 798 Account to Ma Yu are consistent with Ma Ruzi’s early official positions, as recorded in *Mishu shaojian shiguan xiuzhuan Majun muzhi* 秘書少監史館修撰馬君墓誌 [The Epitaph for Mr. Ma Who Was the Vice Director of the Palace Library and Senior Compiler in the Historiography Institute] by Li Ao 李翱 (774–836). On the other hand, the 798 Account gives Ma as Sengcai’s secular name, refers to Maoling 茂陵 in Fufeng as his ancestral origin, and claims that General Fubo Ma Yuan was one of his distinguished ancestors. As Sengcai’s first cousin once removed, Ma Yu was also surnamed Ma, indicating that Ma Yu and Sengcai were from the same clan in Fufeng. Liu Zongyuan called Ma Yu “Fufeng Ma Ruzi”, which means that Ma Ruzi was from Fufeng as well. All these coincidences imply that Ma Yu and Ma Ruzi are identical.

The above analyses show that the Ma Yu mentioned in all the above materials should be the same person. Ma Yu died on the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh lunar month of the thirteenth year of the Yuanhe 元和 era (Yuanhe 13.11.29 = December 30, 818) at the age of eighty (hence, the dates of his birth and death are 739–818) and was buried in the second month of the following year at his ancestral cemetery in Yanshi 偃師 (in contemporary Luoyang, Henan). Ma Yu was sixty-years-old when he wrote the 798 Account. It seems that Sengcai was roughly of a similar age at the time, considering that he stayed at the Zhangjing Temple for thirty years after becoming a great master at the Huazhi Temple.

Ma Yu’s father Ma Tian 馬恬 (698–761), who was an Assistant Editorial Director (*zhuzuo lang* 著作郎) and was granted the posthumous title of the Directorate for Imperial Manufactory (*shaofu jian* 少府監), and Sengcai should be cousins. Moreover, Ma Yu was buried in Yanshi, where his ancestral cemetery was located, whereas Sengcai regarded Qiongzhou as his hometown. This means that Fufeng was only their ancestral place, not the birthplace of Sengcai or Ma Yu.

His kinship ties with Sengcai, his positions in the court, and his literary fame made Ma Yu the best candidate for authoring the 798 Account for the Thousand Buddha niches at Huazhi temple. It is notable that Sengcai, even after taking up a monastic career, still maintained a close relationship with his relatives.

7. Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analyses have gradually brought to light the key characters recorded in the 798 Account, their relationships, and the social networks they wove. Regarding

the Huazhi statue construction project, the initiator was Sengcai; the planners were Sengcai and Daoying; the supporters included Dezong and his courtier (and eunuch) Dou Wenchang; and the donors included Dezong, Sengcai, *yuanrong* (local military general in Qiongzhou), *fangbo* (Wei Gao); the author of the statue account is Ma Yu, a first cousin once removed of Sengcai; and the calligrapher of the 798 Account is Xu Qing of Gaoping. As for all the craftsmen involved in this project, no traces of their lives have survived.

Through the Huazhi construction project, these characters were united by different patterns of relationships that were political, religious, and familial. Characters of different identities played various and varying roles and jointly promoted the statue construction project from start to completion.

As the initiator of the Huazhi project, Sengcai naturally became the central nexus of the social network. The preparatory work for the statue construction project was completed by Sengcai in Chang'an. He made up his mind to construct the niches and to carve statues at the Huazhi Temple and, to this end, presented a memorial to Dezong. After approving the proposal, Dezong ordered Dou Wenchang, the then-Commissioner of Merit and Virtue, to announce an edict that would bestow a name tablet on Huazhi Temple, as well as approving and granting some financial support to Sengcai's Huazhi statue construction project. The relationships among Sengcai, Dezong, and Dou Wenchang were both political and religious.

On seeing that Dezong would not allow him to leave Chang'an, Sengcai could only rely on Daoying, a prestigious monk affiliated with the Baihe Temple in Qiongzhou, to design the statues and niches together. Because Sengcai was willing to spend all of his family wealth on the Huazhi construction project, it can be inferred that Sengcai might have also depended on Daoying to manage his wealth in supporting the project. We do not know if Sengcai and Daoying knew each other or if they had any social interactions. Based on their prominent statues and titles, and cooperation on the Huazhi project, there is no doubt that they had religious contacts.

Although Sengcai became a monk at a tender age and was away from his hometown for a long time, he still maintained a good relationship with his family and relatives. This can be verified in two ways. First, he still owned—and could dispose of at will—all of his family wealth. Second, although Ma Yu was a court official and good at writing, his kinship with Sengcai must have been the overriding factor for his authorship of this 798 Account, given his status as Sengcai's first cousin once removed.

I have clarified above that Sengcai made good use of his social network, including his political, religious, familial, and economic connections, to obtain diverse support in constructing the Buddhist statues and niches at Huazhi temple.

It is evident that this statue construction project not only drew together characters of different identities, but also connected two main places: Qiongzhou and Chang'an. People in each place formed a social network: with Sengcai, Dezong, Dou Wenchang and Ma Yu in Chang'an; and Daoying, *yuanrong*, and craftsmen in Qiongzhou. It was Sengcai who connected these two sets of networks and played a vital role in connecting the social networks in these two places and bringing them into a series of intensive and productive interactions. Undoubtedly, Daoying also made great contributions to the network in Qiongzhou, such as managing funds, and communicating with local authorities, monasteries, and the head of the craftsmen's team. Regrettably, these practical considerations were omitted from the 798 Account, whose primary aim was to advocate Sengcai's merits and achievements.

The Buddhist statues and niches of Sengcai's project were carved at the Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou. However, this project was by no means a mere local event. Chang'an was the place where the project was conceived, proposed, officially approved and supported, and where the 798 Account was composed. Thus, both the preparatory and concluding work for the statue construction project was conducted in Chang'an. Moreover, in the Chang'an network, Sengcai also obtained a name tablet that was bestowed and calligraphed by Dezong for the Huazhi Temple in Qiongzhou, which placed an imperial blessing and guarantee on Huazhi Temple that protected it from the threat of being demolished.

Therefore, in terms of the background of Sengcai's Huazhi statue construction project, the power from Chang'an was obviously stronger than the local power in Qiongzhou. Without the 798 Account, those who engaged in this project (especially Sengcai) and the power of the Chang'an network would have never been known, and Sengcai's Huazhi construction project would have only been considered locally.

Therefore, the foregoing discussion on the 798 Huazhi Statue Construction Account is of great significance to the study of the relationship between Sichuan Buddhism and Chang'an Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty. It demonstrates that Sichuan and Chang'an Buddhism mutually benefited and strengthened each other.

First, before being summoned to Chang'an in 769, Sengcai's reputation had spread to Chang'an and Luoyang. And after his arrival at Chang'an, he made a positive impact on the Chang'an Buddhist community, both with his personality and Buddhist knowledge fostered from his time in Qiongzhou, Sichuan.

Second, Sengcai helped turn Huazhi Temple from a local *lanre* 蘭若 to a monastery with an imperially-bestowed name tablet that he was able to secure thanks to the political and religious power available to him in Chang'an. This adroit maneuver not only enhanced Huazhi Temple's status in Sichuan, but also protected Huazhi Temple from being devastated during the Buddhist persecutions thereafter. As a result, both Huazhi Temple and its imperially-granted name tablet lasted until the Ming dynasty. Along with the Buddhist niches and statues that were constructed near Huazhi Temple, the Buddhist power and influence of Huazhi Temple was amplified.

Third, after staying in Chang'an for thirty years, Sengcai united his resources, both in Chang'an and Qiongzhou, to construct Buddhist statues and niches at Huazhi Temple in Sichuan. On the one hand, the power of Chang'an Buddhism was transmitted to Sichuan Buddhism, and was even enhanced by the visual project carved in Sichuan. On the other hand, the Buddhist niches and statues of Sengcai's Huazhi project not only elevated Sengcai's prestige in the Chang'an Buddhist community by displaying Sengcai's merits and achievements, but also remained as a symbol in Qionglai, Sichuan that would help extend the national fortune and save all living beings, as Sengcai wished.

In a nutshell, the 798 Huazhi Statue Construction Account was Ma Yu's dedication to Sengcai, as a eulogy of Sengcai's achievement. The imperially-bestowed name tablet, the Buddhist statues, and the 798 Account at Huazhi Temple can all be regarded as Sengcai's legacies, which manifest the strong connection between Sichuan Buddhism and Chang'an Buddhism. However, in accordance with the 798 Account's records, this strong connection between Chang'an and Sichuan was limited to the social network aspect, and was insufficient to support the conclusion that the images of Sengcai's Huazhi statue construction project originated from Chang'an.

In a word, this paper only centers on the social background of the statue construction project based on the 798 Account's records, as this is the most basic and paramount work that can be used to study the Buddhist statues at Huazhi temple. In a future article, I will draw on archaeological and iconographical sources and methods to consider the themes, image sources, combination relationships, and construction sequences of the Buddhist statues and niches at Huazhi temple.

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Acknowledgments: With its first draft finished in November 2021, this paper was successively revised in September and early October, 2023. It covers several key aspects of my research on the Statue Construction Account at Huazhi Temple in 798. A more complete presentation of this project is planned for my Chinese article titled “Da Tang Jiading zhou Qiongqian Huazhi si xinzao Wuliang zhufu shi kanxiang ji fenxi” 《大唐嘉定州邛縣花置寺新造無量諸佛石龕像記》分析 [An Analysis on the Account of Newly Built Stone Niches and Carvings of the Immeasurable Buddhas at Huazhi Temple, Qiong County, Jiading Prefecture, Great Tang Dynasty] (forthcoming from the *Hualin international Journal of Buddhist Studies* 華林國際佛學學刊 7.1 [2024]). I am most grateful to Jinhua Chen for his careful and sagacious guidance in the course of preparing this article. I also want to express my gratitude to Li Jingjie and Wang Youkui for generously sharing field work photos with me and for offering me valuable suggestions. My gratitude is extended to Wang Delu and Li QiuHong, who helped me locating references I needed, Maggie Mitchell, who has significantly improved my prose, and finally, anonymous reviewers for their feedbacks.

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Abbreviations

B *Dazang jing bubian* 大藏經補編. See Secondary Sources, Lan (1985) (comp.).

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*; see Takakusu and Watanabe (1924–1934).

Appendix A

I have transcribed and punctuated the inscription below myself. This is, on the one hand, mainly based on the photos of the stone tablet taken on site by Li Jingjie, Wang Youkui and myself; and, on the other hand, I have also closely collated the transcriptions done by other scholars. The texts compared here are Huang’s 1987 text, Huang’s 1990 text, and Hida’s 2007 text (see full information in notes 9 and 11). This article only discusses the Tang dynasty inscription, and so the inscriptions added during the Song and Qing Dynasties are omitted here.

The following legends and conventions are used in the text below:

- (1) /: the original inscription is wrapped around here;
- (2) △: a word is deliberately left blank on the original stone tablet;
- (3) □: a word here has become illegible;
- (4) The word with a □ indicates that this word cannot be fully determined, due to weathering or being damaged;
- (5) A character in bold was either recognized by me or I have replaced the characters transcribed by other scholars, which are incorrect from my perspective.
- (6) Huang’s text was in simplified Chinese. For the sake of consistency, it is referred to in its simplified Chinese form.

大唐嘉定州邛縣花置寺新造無量諸佛石龕像記

The Account of Newly Built Stone Niches and Carvings of the Immeasurable Buddhas at Huazhi Temple, Qiong County, Jiading Prefecture, Great Tang Dynasty

夫釋門之教，體悟歸定，離⁸⁷懸於(=於)無着；而觀相思善，要本於(=於)有憑。匪徒作極於(=於)生靈(=靈)，實亦宏開夫教化。

As for the teaching of the Buddha, enlightenment depends on meditation, with the hanging [upside down] was severed in the detachment; One is able to think of goodness by seeing the images primarily because of [verifiable] proofs. Not only is Buddhism the ultimate principle for living beings, but it also, in fact, [should] indoctrinate [people] widely.

邛州花置山/寺新造石龕像者，△御賜勅授上京章敬寺上應(=座?)，奉為欽遵△聖主元⁸⁸臣、師僧父母、法界眾生，創斯迹(=跡)也。宗師法/號僧采，俗姓馬氏，扶風茂陵人，東漢伏波將軍之後也。承⁸⁹鐘毓之秀，標童竹之奇(=奇)。宿植真性，早捨俗塵。蒙△恩得/度，餘⁹⁰(=隸)此州花置寺，為碩德焉。而識通化洽，理造音操。誠玄境之玉潔貞姿，得釋家之如來密諦。三明教內，引離小/乘；四部衆⁹¹中，常演大法。故得聲馳⁹²上國，名重神都。大曆四年，代宗感深日(罔?)⁹³極⁹⁴，創修章敬，籍△勅賜大師。懿德以故，/主授綱維。智出緇流，言成方物。

The person who newly built the stone niches and statues at Huazhi Mountain Temple in Qiongzhou was the imperially appointed *shangying* 上應 (= *shangzuo* 上座 [Head-seat]) of Zhangjing temple in the Upper Capital (i.e., Chang'an). [He] obeyed the order respectfully and faithfully to create this merit for the emperor, high-ranking officials, master monks, parents, [and] all sentient beings in the dharma realm. The great master, whose ordination name is Sengcai and secular surname is Ma, is [originally] from Maoling in Fufeng [(in nowadays Shaanxi province) and] is a descendant of the General Fubo (a.k.a. Ma Yuan 馬援 [14 BC–49 AD]) of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). [Sengcai was] excellent [as he] was gifted with the aura [of this place and he] showed his uniqueness when he was young. [He] grew the nature [of Buddhism from his] previous lives [and in this life] he gave up secular life early. [He] was able to become a monk by receiving an [imperial] favor and [he] was affiliated with the Huazhi Temple in this prefecture (i.e., Qiongzhou) as a monk of great virtue. Moreover, [he was] proficient in the knowledge [of Buddhism] and [made his] teaching extensive. In principle, he mastered the nuances of the sound. Indeed, [he had] a steadfast aptitude as pure as jade of the mysterious place, and obtained the subtle truth of “Thus-come” (Tathāgata) in Buddhism. Among the teachings of three kinds of supra-normal cognition, [he] guided [believers to] leave the lesser vehicle (Hīnayāna). Among the “four groups of Buddhist disciples” (i.e., male and female monastics [*bhikṣu* (monks) and *bhikṣuṇī* (nuns)] and lay believers [*upāsaka* (laymen) and *upāsikā* (laywomen)]), [he] often disseminated Mahāyāna dharma. Therefore, [his] reputation was spread to the Upper State (i.e., Chang'an) and [his] name was respected in the Divine Capital (i.e., Luoyang). In the fourth year of the Dali 大曆 era (769), Emperor Daizong's feelings turned profound as time went by (or Emperor Daizong felt endless grief for his deceased mother), [to the point that His Majesty decreed] the construction and renovation of Zhangjing Temple. By virtue of this [background], the Emperor Daizong bestowed the great master (i.e., Sengcai) to reside at the temple. Because of [Sengcai's] virtue, the emperor decreed to appoint him the Administrator (*gangwei* 綱維) [of the temple]. [Sengcai's] wisdom exceeded that of his fellow monks [and his] words became the norm of public opinions.

此寺既因天⁹⁵造，宛若地城。每愜△聖心，特承榮渥。受恩之情既切，報(=報)⁹⁶德之志逾深。/愿布懇誠，上資△福庇。以鶴山之殊勝，方鷲⁹⁷嶺之標奇(=奇)。掃⁹⁸層漢以崢嶸，上齊雲日；瞰長江之澄澈，下洽魚龍。靈仙之所往(=往)來，賢哲之所棲隱。將⁹⁹崇飾像，捨此何¹⁰⁰之？

Built in accordance with [its] natural settings, this monastery looks like a city emerging from the underground. Every time [he] satisfied the emperor's heart, [Sengcai] received great [imperial] favor specially. The more keenly he felt the gratitude of receiving imperial grace, the more profound his will went of repaying imperial kindness. [Sengcai] wished to announce [his] sincerity, in order to support the blessing and protection. The extraordinary scenic view of Mount He 鶴山 matches the beautiful and peculiar scenery of Vulture Peak. [Mount He] reaches to the upper air to [display its] loftiness and steepness, which is on a level with the clouds and sun above; [it] overlooks the clarity of the Yangtze River, which is in harmony with fish and dragons below. [This is the place in which] celestial beings go back and forth and the wise and capable live in seclusion. [When] decorated sculptures are to be promoted, what [better] a spot can be found if this place is excluded?

貞元十四年聖誕月，伏表奏聞，兼(=兼)請所舊居蘭若之額，以“淨法般/若”為名。△上允所禱(=祈?)，廣以“貞元”二字¹⁰¹。仙毫乍拂，觀鳳凰之遺文；御榜遙飛，動江山之喜氣。乃曰：“詔功德使、開府寶(=寶?)¹⁰²，/誥¹⁰³宣揚，仍將錫助。”大師志存丹懇，願罄家財。方欲再踐鄉園，躬宏制度，而都城仰恋(=戀)，法衆¹⁰⁴請留(=留)。大師尋有表辭，/△恩旨未許。乃仗本州白鶴寺臨壇大德沙門道應講論、同製規模。元戎¹⁰⁵、方伯等，各竭真誠，以資其事。

In the month of the fourteenth year of Zhenyuan era (798) in which the imperial birthday fell, [Sengcai] presented a memorial [to the throne] to report [the statues' construction at Huazhi Temple], and requested [the emperor] to bestow a name tablet on the old her-

mitage (*lanre* 蘭若) where [Sengcai] lived, with the name of “Jingfa Bore” 淨法般若. Emperor [Dezong] granted [Sengcai’s] request and expanded [the temple’s name] by [adding] the two characters “Zhenyuan” 貞元. The [emperor’s] brush spread to flick, which witnessed His Majesty’s calligraphy. The imperially bestowed tablet flew faraway, which showed the country’s joyful atmosphere. [The emperor] then decreed: “Order Dou, who was the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue and Commander, to announce [the granting of the tablet and the initiation of the statue construction project, which] was to be funded.” The great master was determined to be absolutely sincere and was willing to exhaust [his] family wealth. At the time when [he] was just about to return to [his] hometown to glorify the structure and style [of the niches and statues] in person, however, Buddhist believers in the capital [Chang’an], out of their admiration for him, were reluctant to let [him] leave and begged him to stay. Soon after, the great master presented a memorial [to the emperor] to resign, [but] was turned down by an imperial decree. Then, [Sengcai] relied on the monk Daoying, a Precept-Platform Presider of Great Virtue (*lintan dade* 臨壇大德) at the Baihe Temple 白鶴寺 in this prefecture (i.e., Qiongzhou), to discuss and design the size [of the statues and niches at Huazhi Temple] together. The Supreme Commander and Military Commissioner and so on put forth great sincerity to aid their (Sengcai and Daoying’s) project [i.e., the statue construction project at Huazhi temple].

乃依峭壁、面/炎陽，前山後山，或龕或室。公輸子來而肆巧，天龍雲¹⁰⁶集以効靈。福資△聖朝，功假△神力。於(=於)是千億萬佛，尊容儼然；三十二相、毫光普照。釋侶瞻仰，州人護持。天¹⁰⁷鼓(=鼓)時鳴，不憚怒雷之震；法雨常潤，無憂劫火¹⁰⁸之焚。資國祚以延長，濟羣生而何極？能事已畢，寧無記焉！

Then, leaning on the precipice and facing the scorching sun, [both the] frontal and rear sides of the mountain [were carved into] niches or [dug into] caves. Skillful craftsmen as proficient as Master Gongshu 公輸 (i.e., Gongshu Ban 公輸班 or Lu Ban 魯班 [507 BC–?]) arrived voluntarily and vied to demonstrate their skills. The celestials and dragon spirits gathered in crowds to show theophanies. The blessing [was] provided to the current imperial dynasty, and the works [of constructing statues and niches] depended on extraordinary power. Whereupon, the statues of one thousand billion and ten thousand Buddhas were arranged magnificently with thirty-two marks and ray of lights illuminating all things. [The statues and niches were] looked at with reverence by monks and were shielded and sustained by people of the prefecture (i.e., Qiongzhou). The celestial drum was beaten to frequently emit sound, [and people] did not fear the shakes [triggered by] fierce thunder. The rain of buddha-dharma often moistens [things], [so people] did not worry about the conflagration burning of the *kalpa*. How could there be an end to helping extend the national fortune and save all living beings? How can all living beings salvaged thereby be counted exhaustively? As this feat has now been accomplished, how could we refrain from recording it?

大唐貞元十四年歲戊寅，朝議郎、守太子左贊善大夫、前殿中御史、從姪馬△字撰，△高平徐△清書。

Written in the fourteenth year of Zhenyuan era of the Great Tang [dynasty], a *wuyin sui*, by Ma Yu, a Gentleman for Court Discussion (*Chaoyi Lang* 朝議郎), acting as a Left Grand Master Admonisher for the Crown Prince (*Taizi zuozanshan dafu* 太子左贊善大夫), a former Palace Censor, and a first cousin once removed [of Sengcai], with calligraphy performed by Xu Qing of Gaoping (in Shanxi).

Notes

- ¹ In this article, Sichuan refers to both Sichuan province and contemporary Chongqing municipality.
- ² For further insight into the reports on the Buddhist carvings at Mount Shisun, see (Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2005b, pp. 506–25).
- ³ For further insight into the reports on the Buddhist carvings at Helin Temple, see (Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2005c, pp. 526–50).
- ⁴ For the complete report of the cliff statues at Pantuo Temple and Huazhi Temple in Qionglai, see (Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2005a, pp. 489–505). The serial numbers of Huazhi Temple niches cited in this article are taken from this report. In addition, several other studies that refer to the cliff statues at Huazhi Temple are also referred to: (Huang 1987, pp. 10–14; Huang 1990, pp. 146–52; Lu et al. 2006, pp. 343–58; Hu 1994, pp. 25–26; Hu and Hu 2015, pp. 407–8). The material on Huazhi Temple in Hu’s two books are almost identical, and so my discussion will be focused on the main points in (Hu 1994).
- ⁵ The report on the Buddhist carvings at Tiangong Temple is (Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2006, pp. 485–509).
- ⁶ I conducted fieldwork at the Huazhi Temple in 2013.
- ⁷ Both Niche 5 and Niche 6 at the Huazhi Temple are in two layers. Niche 5 is of 675 cm height, 520 cm width and 50 cm depth (of the outside niche) and is of 640 cm height, 485 cm width and 200 cm depth (of the inside niche). Niche 6 is of 670 cm height, 490 cm width and 4cm depth (of the outside niche) and is of 620 cm height, 455 cm width and 132 cm depth (of the inside niche). These measurements are taken from (Lu et al. 2006, pp. 349–50).
- ⁸ For the research of the Niche 3 at Huazhi temple, see (Hamada 2016, pp. 75–83). I am grateful to Hamada Tamami for sharing this paper with me.
- ⁹ The completed texts of the inscription of the stone tablet on the right wall inside of Niche 6 at Huazhi temple (without punctuation), see (Sichuan daxue yishu xueyuan et al. 2005a, pp. 501–2; Lu et al. 2006, pp. 351–2). The text in 2005a contains many mistakes; while some characters were corrected in the latter report (Lu et al. 2006), the text is still problematic. For the punctuated text of inscriptions deriving from the Tang and Song Dynasties, see (Huang 1987, pp. 13–14) (hereafter “Huang’s 1987 text”) and (Huang 1990, pp. 150–2) (hereafter “Huang’s 1990 text”).
- ¹⁰ In this article, “right” and “left” refer to the directions of the niches and statues.
- ¹¹ (Hida 2005, pp. 73–90). Hida’s research on the 798 Account is also included in Section 3 (“Hanaki ji Magai zōzō no kaisaku to Chōan Bukkyō” 花置寺摩崖造像の開鑿と長安仏教) of (Hida 2007, pp. 194–205). The Tang Dynasty’s text account from Hida 2007 is slightly revised on the basis of Hida 2005 for the sake of accuracy (e.g., “jide zhi zhi” 扱德之志 is changed to “baode zhi zhi” 报德之志). But there are no major differences in terms of the research contents on the 798 Account between these two articles. Hida’s Tang Dynasty’s textual account was much improved in accuracy, when compared with the texts from Lu et al. (2006, pp. 351–2), as mentioned in note 9. I therefore consult the text of the 798 Account from (Hida 2007, p. 197) (hereafter “Hida’s 2007 text”) and Hida’s research in (Hida 2005).
- ¹² Dezong was born on the *guisi* (nineteenth) day of the fourth lunar month of the first year of Tianbao 天寶 era (Tianbao 1.4.19). See *Cefu yuangui* 2.22. This lunar date translates to May 27, 742.
- ¹³ The 798 Account was carved inside Niche 6 and Niches 5 and 6 were connected as a whole niche. It is beyond all doubt that Niches 5 and 6 of the Thousand Buddha statues were in Sengcai’s statue construction project at Huazhi temple. However, some other niches at this site could possibly belong to Sengcai’s statue construction project as well. So, I will use Buddhist statues and (or) niches in a broad way, instead of Thousand Buddha Niches, to refer to the contents of Sengcai’s statue construction project at Huazhi temple.
- ¹⁴ Gaoping might be Xu Qing’s ancestral home, which implied that Xu Qing was from the Xu family of Gaoping in Shanxi. This does not mean that Xu Qing was based in Gaoping when he performed the calligraphy for the 798 Account.
- ¹⁵ See (Liu 2007, pp. 252–3) for the details of her argument.
- ¹⁶ *Jiu Tangshu* 184. 4764; *Tang huiyao* 48. 847; *Zizhi tongjian* 224. 7195.
- ¹⁷ *Cefu yuangui* 52. 547.
- ¹⁸ *Cefu yuangui* 52. 546; *Zizhi tongjian* 224. 7198; *Cefu yuangui* 459. 5179.
- ¹⁹ *Zizhi tongjian* 224. 7201–7202; *Cefu yuangui* 52. 547; (Teiser 1988, pp. 78–82).
- ²⁰ *Cefu yuangui* 2. 19–20; *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no 2061, 50: 10. 767c26–768a6. As Daizong died on the twenty-first day of the fifth lunar month of the fourteenth year of Dali era (June 10, 779) (*Jiu Tangshu* 12. 319), the last time to celebrate his birthday would be in 778.
- ²¹ *Datang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu*, T no. 2156, 55: 2.758b21–c19.
- ²² *Daizong chao zeng sikong Da bianzheng Guangzhi sanzang heshang biaozi ji*, T no 2120, 52: 6. 856c20–857b24; (Wang 2022, pp. 363–6).
- ²³ *Jiu Tangshu* 133. 3669; (Wang 2009, p. 41).
- ²⁴ *Tang huiyao* 49. 860.
- ²⁵ *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no 2061, 50: 16. 806b16–25.

- 26 Cefu yuangui 52. 548.
- 27 Datang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu, T no. 2156, 55: 1. 757b3-6.
- 28 Jiu Tangshu 13.372; Cefu yuangui 114. 1243.
- 29 Song Gaoseng zhuan, T no 2061, 50: 10.767c25-768a6.
- 30 Song Gaoseng zhuan, T no 2061, 50: 9.764b14-c13; Lü Wen 呂溫 (771–811), “Nanyue Mituosi Chengyuan heshang bei” 南嶽彌陀寺承遠和尚碑 [Epitaph for Preceptor Chengyuan of Mituo Temple on Nanyue], *Quan Tangwen* 630.6355: “大曆末, 門人法照辭謁五台, 北轅有聲, 承詔入覲, 壇場內殿, 領袖京邑”.
- 31 Li Jifu 李吉甫, “Hangzhou Jingshan si Dajue chanshi beiming bing xu” 杭州徑山寺大覺禪師碑銘并序 [Epitaph, with a Preface, for Chan Master Dajue of Jingshan Temple in Hangzhou] (dated 793), *Quan Tangwen* 512.5206-5208: “(法欽) 尋求歸山, 詔允其請, 因賜策曰‘國一大師’, 仍以所居為徑山寺焉”.
- 32 Cefu yuangui 52.548.
- 33 Song Gaoseng zhuan, T no 2061, 50: 16.806b16-25.
- 34 Datang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu, T no. 2156, 55: 2.765b28-c4.
- 35 See Note 33 above.
- 36 Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), “Nanyue Mituo heshang bei” 南嶽彌陀和尚碑 [Epitaph for the Monk at Nanyue Mituo], (Zhou 2000).
- 37 Jingtu wuhui nianfo lue fashi yizan, T no. 1983, 47: 1.474 c19-23.
- 38 Nittō guhō junrei gyōki no kenkyū, B no. 95, vol. 18: 3.88a 13–16 (Kaicheng 開成 6.2.8 = Huichang 1.2.8 = March 4, 841).
- 39 (Tao and Tao 2019, pp. 54–55; cf. Zhou 1987, p. 519). For more information on Jianxu and the debating event of three religions on Dezon’s birthday in 796, see (Chen 2004, pp. 137–9).
- 40 Quan Tangwen 916.9544.
- 41 Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiao mulu, T no. 2157, 55: 16.887a27-888c13.
- 42 Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiao mulu, T no. 2157, 55: 16.887a27-888a11.
- 43 “Qing Huilin fashi yu Baoshou si jiang biao yishou” 請惠林法師於保壽寺講表一首 [A Memorial on Inviting Dharma Master Huilin to Lecture at Baoshou Temple], *Daizong chao sikong Da Bianzheng Guangzhi sanzang heshang biaozi ji*, T no. 2120, 52: 2.838a17-b1.
- 44 “Qing Jingcheng liangjie gezhi yisi jiang zhi yishou” 請京城兩街各置一寺講制一首 [A Decree on the Entreating to Select a Temple in Each of Two Precincts of the Capital to Lecture (on the *Xukongzang pusa suowen jing*)], *Daizong chao sikong Da Bianzheng Guangzhi sanzang heshang biaozi ji*, T no. 2120, 52: 3.842a15-25.
- 45 “Xie enming ling Youze fashi yu Xingshan si kaijiang biao yishou (bingda)” 謝恩命 令有則法師於興善寺開講表一首(并答) [A Memorial (with an Imperial Response) from Dharma Master Youze to Express Gratitude to the Imperial Order of Opening Lectures at Xingshan Temple], *Daizong chao sikong Da Bianzheng Guangzhi sanzang heshang biaozi ji*, T no. 2120, 52: 6.859b29-c16.
- 46 Da Tang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu, T no. 2156, 55: 2.760a18-762c7.
- 47 Dacheng liqu liu boluomiduo jing, T no. 261, 8: 1. 865b4-12. Wang Shenbo 王申伯, “Tang gu nei gongfeng fanjing yijie jiang lülun fashi Biankong heshang taming” 唐故內供奉翻經義解講律論法師晉空和上塔銘 [Stupa Epitaph for the Late Preceptor Biankong of the Tang, Who was a Palace Chaplain, a Translator, a Commentator, a Vinaya and *Sāstra* Lecturer and a Dharma Master], *Quan Tangwen* 614.6205-6206.
- 48 Da Tang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu, T no. 2156, 55: 2.764a15-c24.
- 49 Da Tang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu, T no. 2156, 55: 1.757b3-6.
- 50 Da fangguang fo huayan jing, T no. 293, 10: 40.848c14-849a8.
- 51 (Yu 2019). Lidai minghua ji 3. 53–54: “千福寺 (在安定坊, 會昌中毀寺後, 却置不改舊額) 向裏面壁上碑 (吳通微書, 僧道秀撰)”.
- 52 Jiu Tangshu 153. 4089–4090; Xin Tangshu 162. 5002; Zizhi tongjian 239.7700.
- 53 Yuanzhao, “Foshuo shili jing Da Tang Zhenyuan xinyi shidi deng jing ji” 佛說十力經大唐貞元新譯十地等經記, in *Foshuo shili jing*, T no. 780, 17: 717a21-28.
- 54 When Hida summarized the 798 Account, she also speculated that *shangying* 上應 might have been an error for *shangzuo* 上座; however, she did not elaborate on her hypothesis. See (Hida 2005, p. 83).
- 55 Tang liudian 4.125: “凡天下寺, 總五千三百五十八所 (三千二百四十五所僧, 二千一百一十三所尼). 每寺上座一人, 寺主一人, 都維那一人, 共綱統衆事”.
- 56 See Note 42 above.
- 57 Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiao mulu, T no. 2157, 55: 16.888b16-c13.
- 58 For the biography of Huaihui, see Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818), “Tang gu Zhangjing si Baiyan dashi beiming bing xu” 唐故章敬寺百巖大師碑銘并序 [The Inscription, with a Preface, for the Late Master Baiyan of Zhangjing Temple of the Tang Dynasty], *Quan Tangwen* 501.5103-5104; Song Gaoseng zhuan, T no 2061, 50: 10. 767c26-768a12.
- 59 Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiao mulu, T no. 2157, 55: 16.887c25-888a7.

- For another example of Dezong adding the two-character reigning name of “Zhenyuan” to a Buddhist edifice, see the following record in *Tang Huiyao* 48.998: “In the fourth month of thirteenth year of Zhenyuan era (797), it was decreed that it is fit to bestow on the Maitreya pavilion 彌勒閣 in the south of Qujiang 曲江 the name of ‘Zhenyuan Puji si’ 貞元普濟寺 (貞元十三年四月敕: ‘曲江南彌勒閣’宜賜名‘貞元普濟寺’).”
- On the fifth day of eleventh lunar month of nineteenth year of Zhenyuan era (Zhenyuan 19.11.5 = December 22, 803), Wei Gao reported in his “Jiazhou Lingyun si da Mile fo shixiang ji” 嘉州凌雲寺大彌勒佛石像記 [The Record of the Stone Statue of Giant Maitreya Buddha at Lingyun Temple in Jiazhou]: “During the Kaiyuan era, there was further an imperial edict of bestowing the revenues of linen and salt to defray the construction costs” (開元中, 又有詔賜麻鹽之稅, 實資修營) (Long 2004, p. 45).
- Scholars debate on the overall height of the “Leshan Colossal Buddha”, ranging from 58.2 m to 71 m. See (Hu and Hu 2015, pp. 438–39).
- For a study of the monastic lands, see (Gernet 1995, pp. 94–141).
- (Gernet 1995, pp. 43, 45) (with Wades romanizations converted into the pinyin).
- Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T no 2061, 50: 24. 864c28–865a4.
- For researches of the Commissioner of Merit and Virtue, see (Tsukamoto 1975, pp. 252–84; Tang 1985, pp. 60–65; Goble 2022, pp. 66–86).
- Da Tang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan Shijiao lu*, T no 2156, 55:2. 764a18–c16.
- See Note 105.
- <https://www.zdic.net/hans/元戎>; <https://www.zdic.net/hans/方伯> Visited on 24 August 2021. *Shijing* 詩經, “Liuyue” 六月, in Taiwan Kaiming Shuju (ed.) 1991: 45: “元戎十乘, 以先啓行.” *Sangguo zhi* 30.591: “且今州牧郡守, 古之方伯諸侯, 皆跨有千里之土, 兼軍武之任.”
- For the complete inscription of this lampstand, see (Cheng 1983, p. 28).
- According to Liu Shufen’s research, *hui* 會 or *yihui* 邑會 were new names that appeared in the Tang Dynasty, whose characteristics were similar to *she* 社 or *yi* 邑. The example she cited is “Baijia yan si yiji” 百家巖寺邑記 [The Records of Association at Baijia Peak Temple] dated to the fifth year of Xiantong 咸通 era (864), which recorded that this Buddhist organization was constituted by a Commander, Administrative Assistant, and so on. See (Liu 2007, pp. 274–75). The identities of the members who constituted the association mentioned by Liu were similar to those of the members who set up the lampstand at Longxing Temple in Qionglai.
- Jiu Tangshu* 11.271.
- Xin Tangshu* 222.6317.
- In regard to Wei Gao’s support for Buddhism, see (He 2012, pp. 154–59).
- As noted above, Wei Gao’s “Jiazhou lingyun si da Mile fo shixiang ji” was dated December 22, 803. See (Long 2004, p. 45). As per the record of Wei Gao himself, Wei Gao started to renew the Giant Maitreya buddha at Lingyun Temple once after he took office in Jiannan Xichuan in 785, and did this by selecting craftsmen and raising money (貞元初, 聖天子命我守茲坤隅, 乃謀匠石, 籌厥庸, 從蓮花座上, 乃至於膝, 功未就者, 幾乎百尺). Then, in the fifth year of the Zhenyuan era (789), Emperor Dezong issued an edict to amend old temples and rebuild abandoned temples (貞元五年有詔, 郡國伽藍, 修舊起廢). It was against this historical backdrop that Wei Gao offered 500,000 cashes to make the “Leshan Giant Buddha” more magnificent by adding color and gold to it (遂命工徒, 以俸錢五十萬佐費, 或丹彩以章之, 或金寶以嚴之). The Chinese texts here are from (Long 2004, p. 45), but punctuations are mine.
- Wei Gao wrote “Baoyuan si chuanshou pini xinshu ji” 寶園寺傳授毗尼新疏記 [The Record of New Commentary on the *Vinaya* Instructed at Baoyuan Temple] on the first day of the eleventh month of the eighteenth year of Zhenyuan era (Zhenyuan 18.11.1 = November 29, 802). See (Long 2004, pp. 43–44).
- Wei Gao also wrote “Baoli si ji” 寶曆寺記 [An Account of Baoli Temple]; see (Long 2004, pp. 47–48). On the basis of Wei Gao’s official position, Li Dongmei and Long Xianzhao deduced that “Baoli si ji” was written during the seventeenth year to twentieth year of the Zhenyuan era (801–804). In addition, Ōshima Sachiyo, inferred that Baoli Temple was built in the twentieth year of the Zhenyuan era (804). See (Ōshima 2007, pp. 246–68).
- Da fangguang fo huayan jing*, T no. 293, 10: 40.848c14–849a16: 大唐貞元十四年, 歲在戊寅, 四月辛亥朔, 翻經沙門圓照, 用恩賜物, 奉為皇帝聖化無窮, 太子諸王福延萬葉, 文武百官恒居祿位. 伏願先師考妣上品往生, 法界有情同霑斯益. 手自書寫此新譯經, 填續西明寺菩提院東閣一切經闕. 本願千佛出世, 隨侍下生, 同出苦源, 齊登正覺; 又願三寶增明, 法輪恒轉, 長留鎮寺, 永冀傳燈, 有情界窮, 茲願無盡.
- For more information of the drought disaster in Chang’an in 798, see *Xin Tangshu* 35.917, *Jiu Tangshu* 129.3603–3604. Lü Wen also composed a poem titled “Zhenyuan shisi nian hanshen jian quanmen yi shaoyao hua” 貞元十四年旱甚, 見權門移芍藥花 [When there was a drought in the 14th year of the Zhenyuan era, I saw Peony Blossoms Moving in Mansions], *Quan Tang shi* 371.4188: 綠年青壘漸成塵, 汲井開園日日新. 四月帶花移芍藥, 不知憂國是何人.
- For more information on the Buddhist statue tablets from the Southern dynasties in Chengdu which represent a jar in the central bottom, see (Sichuan bowuyuan et al. 2013, pp. 102–10, 160–67, 180–82, 205–8; Dong and Yan 2021, pp. 188–213).
- Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), *Shunzong shilu*, juan 2, in (Zhou 2000, bu 3, vol. 2: 6440).
- Cui Yan 崔郾 (768–836), “Li Yi muzhi” 李益墓志 [The Epitaph of Li Yi], in (Zhao and Zhao 2012, p. 931).

- 83 *Xin Tangshu* 58.1484.
- 84 *Tang huiyao* 36.771; *Cefu yuangui* 556.6379.
- 85 “Mishu shaojian shiguan xiuzhuan majun muzhi”, *Quan Tangwen* 639.6452.
- 86 Yin and Han eds. 2013. *Liu Zongyuan ji jiaozhu* 16.1144–1146. See (Yin and Han 2013).
- 87 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “虽”; Hida’s 2007 text: “雖”. 雖 doesn’t seem making sense.
- 88 Huang’s 1987 text, Huang’s 1990 text, and Hida’s 2007 text: “无”. Seems not right.
- 89 Huang’s 1987 text: “永”; Huang’s 1990 text & Hida’s 2007 text: “承”.
- 90 Huang’s 1987 text: “𠂔”; Huang’s 1990 text: no word recognized; Hida’s 2007 text: 𠂔. Neither Huang nor Hida recognized the standard character of this word. I appreciate Ji Yun’s 紀贊 help in deciphering this character.
- 91 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “象”; Hida’s 2007 text: 衆.
- 92 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “驰”; Hida’s text: “馳”. When I conducted field survey at Huazhi Temple in 2013, this character did not exist. Referring to Huang’s and Hida’s texts, “shengchi shangguo” 聲馳上國 is in line with the context. So, I have adopted Huang’s and Hida’s reading and accepted this character as *chi* 馳.
- 93 In Classical Chinese, *wangji* 罔極 indicates boundless parental love and kindness towards their children and also one’s endless grief for the passing of one’s parent(s). In the seventh month of Dali 3 (August 17–September 15, 768), Daizong, honoring his deceased mother, decreed that *ullambana* bowls be sent to Zhangjing Temple, which was then newly completed (七月, 特賜章敬寺盂蘭盆. 時寺宇新成, 帝增罔極之思, 敕百官詣寺行香). See *Cefu yuangui* 52:547 and Chen 2010, p. 197. In addition, Xingtang Temple 興唐寺 in Chang’an was originally named Wangji Temple 罔極寺. It was built by Princess Taiping 太平 (?–713) for the posthumous well-being of her mother Empress Wu, in accordance with a decree Zhongzong issued on April 9, 705 (Chen 2010, p. 188). Given that Zhangjing Temple was named after Daizong’s mother, I suspect that *riji* 日極, which makes no sense in the context, is probably an error for *wangji* 罔極. It was likely that the character *wang* 罔 was somewhat mistakenly carved as *ri* 日 when this stone tablet was re-engraved after the Tang dynasty. As mentioned before, the characters of *shangzuo* 上座 were likely mis-carved as *shangying* 上應.
- 94 Huang’s 1987 text: “报”; Huang’s 1990 text: “极”; Hida’s 2007 text: “極”.
- 95 Huang’s 1987 text: “无”; Huang’s text 1990: “天”; Hida’s 2007 text: “天”.
- 96 Huang’s 1987 text: “报”; Huang’s text 1990: “极”; Hida’s 2007 text: “报”.
- 97 Huang’s 1987 text: “愜”; Huang’s text 1990 & Hida’s 2007 text: no word recognized.
- 98 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “插”; Hida’s 2007 text: no word recognized.
- 99 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: no word recognized; Hida’s 2007 text: “将”.
- 100 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “何”; Hida’s 2007 text: no word recognized.
- 101 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “字”; Hida’s 2007 text: no word recognized.
- 102 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “宝”; Hida’s 2007 text: “寶”. On the pictures of stone tablets, indeed this character is shown as *bao* 寶 nowadays. But according to the context, I agree with Hida’s recognition of this character as *dou* 寶. It was very likely possible that *dou* 寶 was the original character in the Tang Dynasty and it was mistakenly carved as *bao* 寶 in the later dynasties.
- 103 Huang’s 1987 text: “诏”; Huang’s 1990 text: “诰”; Hida’s 2007 text: “誥”.
- 104 Huang’s 1987 text & Huang’s 1990 text: “象”; Hida’s 2007 text: “衆”.
- 105 Huang’s 1987 text: “戎”; Huang’s 1990 text: “戏”; Hida’s 2007 text: “戒”. Huang first presented this character as *rong* 戎, but later changed it to *xi* 戏, showing that Huang did not know that *yuanrong* 元戎 is a fixed term. So, both Huang and Hida failed to read the character *rong* 戎 and further to capture the meaning of *yuanrong* 元戎.
- 106 Huang’s 1987 text, Huang’s 1990 text and Hida’s 2007 text: no word recognized.
- 107 Huang’s 1987 text: “无”; Huang’s 1990 text & Hida’s 2007 text: “天”.
- 108 Huang’s 1987 text: “火”; Huang’s 1990 text: “灭”; Hida’s 2007 text: “火”.

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