

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY IN RELATION TO BUDDHISM
AND POLITICS DURING THE EARLY TANG ERA

By

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To my husband and my son

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For nearly all of my life, I have been nourished by the joy of studying and practicing Chinese calligraphy. My desire to pursue an advanced study of Chinese calligraphy became a reality the moment the School of Art and Art History at the University of Florida accepted me into their doctoral program and the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures offered me a position to teach Chinese calligraphy. I am grateful to these departments for supporting my endeavor.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FSYL	<i>Fa shu yao lu</i> 法書要錄
JTS	<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> 舊唐書
LDSF	<i>Lidai shufa lunwen xuan</i> 歷代書法論文選
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經
THY	<i>Tang hui yao</i> 唐會要
XTS	<i>Xin Tang shu</i> 新唐書

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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This dissertation traces Chinese calligraphy's relevance to Buddhism and politics, with a focus on its developments in the early Tang dynasty (618–907). Through an examination of historical and artistic evidence, this study reveals a dynamic confluence where the value of calligraphy as an art form, comprised primarily of stele rubbings and sutra copies, was circulated and validated through Buddhist strategies of propagation and the Tang court's ideological vision for national unification. In the support of calligraphic practices, the interests of the Tang court and the Buddhist monasteries often converged to the benefit of both. Meanwhile, in the service of religious and political ends, calligraphy, as a practical skill and aesthetic form, was transformed and "democratized," that is, its practice transcended class hierarchies. This understanding provides new insight into the relationship between art and society at that time, and Tang achievements in the history of Chinese calligraphy.

This study is divided into five main chapters, with the first chapter functioning as the introduction and the last chapter as the conclusion. Chapter 2 explores the development of early writing and how calligraphy emerged from dynamic relations between religion and politics to become a dominant artistic form in early and medieval

China. Chapter 3 examines the effects of early Tang imperial patronage on calligraphy, emphasizing the intrinsic role that calligraphy played in court politics. Chapter 4 displays the importance of Tang Buddhist steles. In addition to containing highly valued inscriptions penned by elite masters, these steles also attest to the felicitous confluence of Buddhism's adaptation to the Chinese cultural milieu and Tang court political and cultural agendas. Chapter 5 introduces Dunhuang manuscripts, using these Buddhist scriptures written on silk and paper to reconstruct a dynamic relationship between celebrated masters and lesser-known copyists based on stylistic connections. These manuscripts also offer the means to reconcile the value of reproductions relative to originals in the dissemination of calligraphy. Chapter 6 discusses the motivation and high productivity of sutra copyists, whose efforts democratized Chinese calligraphy but have not yet received the full attention they deserve.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines Chinese calligraphy's relevance to Buddhism and politics, focusing on its developments during the period of the first three Tang emperors who were the most influential in establishing the court policies of the Tang dynasty (618–907). At this time calligraphy was utilized by Buddhists as an instrument to legitimize and promote their religion, and served the Tang emperors as a symbol of national unification. As a consequence, calligraphic practice, reproduction, and dissemination became entwined with Buddhist propagation, as well as Tang cultural policy.

Tang calligraphy has survived mainly in two forms: inscriptions carved on stones and writings on paper or silk. As most of their content is related to Buddhism, these materials help us to better understand the reciprocal relationship between calligraphy and Buddhism, which, by the seventh century, was the primary religion promoted by the court throughout the sprawling Chinese empire. In this study, I examine selected Buddhist steles and Dunhuang manuscripts of early Tang in order to investigate how particular developments in Tang calligraphy may be linked to dynastic power and the spread of Buddhism.¹

Buddhist steles produced in the Tang dynasty were distinguished not only by their size and number, but also by the refinement of their calligraphic inscriptions. These steles emphasized the written word rather than the carved image, which was a

¹ Dunhuang 敦煌, a Buddhist community active from about the fourth to fourteenth centuries, was an oasis in the Gobi Desert along the Silk Road that linked China to Central Asia. Among the 492 caves dedicated as shrines or otherwise used by the resident Buddhist clergy, Cave 17 proved later to contain a rich trove of Buddhist manuscripts. The cave was completely closed at some point in the eleventh century, but discovered sometime between 1899 and 1900. See Chapter 5 for further discussion.

prominent feature of Indian Buddhist steles. This fact suggests that by the Tang era Buddhists fully understood the political and cultural potency associated with this form as they assimilated into Chinese society.² These written words were important both in textual content and artist form. The inscriptions on the Tang Buddhist steles, in addition to offering texts that served religious functions, featured calligraphies penned by famous hands, their surfaces functioning as a primary medium for presenting the specific styles of well-known calligraphers. Rubbings from these surfaces were disseminated and some used as models for calligraphic practice.³ As the rubbings traveled far from the original stone, a wide range of critics, scholars, and artists could appreciate the quality of the calligraphy. In effect, these steles and rubbings expanded the prestige, authority, and realm of influence of both Chinese calligraphy and Buddhism.

The dominant calligraphy script used on Tang Buddhist steles was the Tang style of standard script which was developed during the Emperor Taizong's reign (626–649) as he and his court enthusiastically promoted the style of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361). This imperially designated *kaifa* 楷法 (the rule of standard script), later known as Tang *kai* 唐楷 (the standard script of the Tang), was the product of combining two aspects of Wang's style, his rhythmic linear regularity and fluent self-expressive brush strokes. Taizong's codification of this type of calligraphic script—precise, formal, yet elegant and full of rhythm—established the classical tradition of Chinese calligraphy, thus ensuring the dominance of Wang's stylistic lineage. This great cultural accomplishment was the

² Discussion on this development, see Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 178.

³ Rubbings with inscriptions transcribed by renowned calligraphers were among findings from Dunhuang. See above, n. 1 for Dunhuang.

result of the emperor's ability to utilize his personal aesthetic preference for Wang's calligraphic style to manifest his political motivation to unify the empire.

The Tang government participated in sutra reproduction by establishing standards for the form and quality of calligraphic transcriptions. Since Dunhuang Buddhist manuscripts are the primary source of handwritten materials to have survived from the Tang and pre-Tang periods, they are extremely valuable for understanding contemporary developments in Buddhism and calligraphy. The outpouring of sutra copies was in part motivated by the desire of Buddhists to garner merit and accumulate blessings, but the unprecedented quantity and quality of sutra copying produced during the Tang dynasty was a result of strong imperial policies promoting Buddhism as well as calligraphy education, a demand to which the monasteries faithfully responded.

Many Tang sutra copyists were trained in monasteries and made extensive use of the court codified style of standard script, Tang *kai*, which emphasized formality, precision, and consistency. These characteristics best accommodated the efficient production of highly legible texts. Hence the so-called "sutra copying style" has long been associated with the style of Tang *kai*. In this study, exemplary Dunhuang manuscripts are utilized to illustrate how sutra copyists often imitated the elite masters' styles of their day. As a consequence, copied sutras contributed not only to the spread of Buddhist texts but also of elite calligraphy styles. At the same time, increasing demands for sutra reproduction and dissemination democratized the practice of calligraphy by encouraging participation from a wider range of copyists and readers. In this study, I also speculate that the systematic and widespread distribution of copies

during the early Tang era could have influenced high Tang elite masters as they developed their calligraphic styles.

In the West, scholarship on the Tang dynasty abounds, particularly in the fields of Buddhism and calligraphy, but studies that link them together are scarce. Buddhist scholars studying the pre-Tang and Tang periods have tended to focus on the reception, growth, and spread of Buddhism in China. Erik Zürcher examines cultural and social factors that influenced the growth of Buddhism in early medieval China, while Stanley Weinstein and Arthur Wright focus on the Tang court's involvement. Art historians in the field of Tang calligraphy, such as Lothar Ledderose, Eugene Wang, and Stephen Goldberg, address the establishment of the classical tradition of calligraphy through a lineage of prominent Tang masters. Amy McNair, Dorothy Wong, and Robert E. Harris, Jr. are among the few scholars who analyze Buddhist calligraphy in its social and political contexts.

Although many Chinese and Japanese scholars have linked studies of calligraphy with Buddhism, they are inclined to focus on either steles or manuscripts. One group whose interest centers upon steles includes modern Chinese scholars Shi Anchang 施安昌 and Zhu Guantian 朱關田, along with Japanese scholars Nakata Yujiro 中田勇次郎, Sugimura Kunihiro 杉村邦彦, and Shunkei Lijima 飯島春敬. Their studies offer stylistic analyses of individual Tang masters, as well as examinations of other related topics, such as the political influences and socioeconomic conditions that shaped the production and dissemination of calligraphic works. A second group of scholars, such as Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, and Mori Kyosui 森鄉水, do investigate the large number of Dunhuang manuscripts produced by anonymous or

lesser-known sutra copyists, but they limit their studies to those manuscripts. It is the goal of my research to examine and integrate calligraphy scholarship on Buddhist steles and manuscripts within the context of Tang institutional strategies.

My study is hence organized into the following chapters. Chapter 2 explores the development of early writing and how calligraphy emerged from dynamic relations between religion and politics to become a dominant artistic form in early and medieval China. Chapter 3 examines the effects of early Tang imperial patronage on calligraphy, emphasizing the role that calligraphy played in court politics. Chapter 4 displays the importance of Tang Buddhist steles. In addition to containing highly valued inscriptions penned by noted masters, these steles also attest to the felicitous confluence of Buddhism's adaption to Chinese cultural milieu and the Tang court's political and cultural agendas. Chapter 5 introduces the Dunhuang manuscripts, especially Buddhist scriptures written on silk and paper, which may be used to reconstruct stylistic connections between celebrated masters and lesser-known copyists. These manuscripts also offer a means to understand the value of reproductions relative to originals in the dissemination of calligraphy works. Chapter 6 discusses the motivations and high productivity of sutra copyists, whose efforts promoted the popularity of Chinese calligraphy but who have not yet received the full attention they deserve.

Note to Readers: Chinese names and words are transliterated according to the Pinyin system, with the exception of those that are better known and often cited by the Wade-Giles system or other transcription. The translations from Chinese texts are my own, unless otherwise noted. When the translations of others are used, I have sometimes modified them to better suit the content of my thesis.

CHAPTER 2 RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL USES OF CALLIGRAPHY FROM ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE SIX DYNASTIES

Chinese calligraphy is an art form that developed from a system of writing. The invention of writing in China, as in many ancient civilizations, was attributed to supernatural powers.¹ As the art of writing was perceived to have a divine origin, the ruling class and intellectuals often used the power of writing to legitimize and solidify their social and political status. The belief that divinity could be channeled through a writer's spirit informed the development of Chinese calligraphy or *shufa* 書法, “the way of writing” and, as a result, the Chinese came to revere calligraphy as a sublime art.² This chapter explores calligraphy's relevance to the religious and political spheres that have existed from the origin of writing.

Oracle Bone Inscription and Bronze Inscription

Oracle bone inscriptions, datable to the fourteenth through eleventh centuries BCE are the earliest extant evidence of Chinese written characters. They consist primarily of records made during divinations held at the late Shang royal court. The Shang people believed that their lives were controlled by a supreme divine power known as the “ancestor on high,” or *shangdi* 上帝, and that the Shang kings were responsible for discerning his will in all matters concerning the country. The divinatory rituals were conducted as the means to communicate with the supreme deity and other spirits.

¹ For the early writings developed in ancient civilizations, see Stephen D. Houston, ed., *The First Writing*. For the Chinese writing system, see William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*.

² The evolution of various calligraphy scripts, and the developments from a writing system to an aesthetic entity, see Qi Gong, *Gudai ziti lungao*; Ouyang Zhongshi and Wen C. Fong, *Chinese Calligraphy*, 1–65, and 415–24; Robert E. Harrist, Jr., and Wen C. Fong, *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, 2–84. The formation of a tradition of Chinese calligraphy, see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 7–44.

Communication between supernatural entities and mankind was executed by the diviners, ritual specialists who supposedly possessed special power, as the spirits descended into them and enabled them to perform the heaven-earth communication. These diviners were employed by the Shang kings, and in many cases the king himself was the head diviner or served as a diviner.³

At the moment of divination, the diviner proposed the charge (topic of the divination), which were not questions but were wishes or tentative forecasts.⁴ These were often divided into a pair of charges in the positive and negative mode. The content of charges varied, ranging from military campaigns to the weather, childbirth, and sickness. Meanwhile heat was applied to hollows drilled in the back of a tortoise plastron or ox scapula until cracks appeared on the front surface. The pattern of cracks would determine the outcome of the charge, and interpretations (crack notations) of those cracks were then delivered by the diviner.⁵ Both the inscriptions of charges and interpretations were then carved on the front of the shells or bones.⁶ For some divinations, the inscribed charge carved on bone was only an abbreviation of a more complete charge proposed orally for each crack.⁷

³ K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 45; see also David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China*, 31.

⁴ David N. Keightley, *ibid.*, 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45: "Contrary to what some scholars have supposed, the engravers did not carve the charge into the bone or shell before the cracking took place, but after... The writing recorded not what was about to be divined but what had been. Its purposes, therefore, were at least partly historical and bureaucratic—to identify the topics, forecasts, and results for which the cracks had been formed."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 33 n. 21.

The inscriptions on oracle bone are aligned linearly, but sometimes curved lines appear. With a great deal of crisscrossing those lines engendered a variety of characters. Today more than one hundred thousand oracle bone pieces with inscriptions have been unearthed, from which about five thousand Shang graphs have been differentiated and about two thousand deciphered.⁸ These inscriptions carved on shells or bones during the Shang divinations are named *jiaguwen* 甲骨文 in Chinese.

Shang oracular divination procedures were a crucial part of court and king's ritual activity. Modern scholars have tried to identify a sequence of stages for divinations, from initiating the oracular inquiry, carrying out the physical act of divining, reading the cracks, engraving the inscriptions, and finally filing the shells and bones in the royal archives.⁹ It is still unclear whether each function required a separate specialist or if one diviner was in charge of the many functions. David Keightley and other scholars have clarified that "the inscriptions were not engraved by the diviners themselves, but by special engravers."¹⁰ This conclusion is based on the fact that divinations made by the same diviner were often engraved with markedly different engraving styles.

The name of the diviner was often given in the preface along with the day and place on which the divination was performed. The identification of a diviner was essential as it served to identify the officer who was responsible for overseeing the ritual

⁸ Source from Wang Jingxian, "An Ancient Art Shines," 68; the numbers are various in different publications; as the more recent publications shows larger number, apparently more characters/graphs have been identified in later days.

⁹ K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 90. See also David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 3–56.

¹⁰ David N. Keightley, *ibid.*, 49.

that connected the human and spiritual world. Approximately one hundred and twenty diviners have been identified for a 273-year period.¹¹

Since writings display a remarkably uniform style, it is reasonable to presume that the number of engravers was smaller than the number of diviners. Also, because the diviners needed only to concern themselves with the religious act, “theoretically it is possible that the calligrapher [i.e., engraver] was the only person who had to be literate,” says K. C. Chang.¹² Matsumaru Michio’s (松丸道雄) research also supports the view that the engravers could have been few in number at any given time.¹³ This low number indicates the strong possibility that there was a low rate of literacy in Shang society. Those who could read and write became the possessors of oracular knowledge, and thus they may be the first known members of the “knowledge class.”¹⁴ Their ways of making, keeping, and interpreting written records became instrumental to the functioning of social, religious, and governmental affairs.

Most of the inscriptions were carved directly into the surface of the bone, but other methods were not excluded. One study points out characters were written with a brush but not carved, and the ink used at the time was originally red (or perhaps black) and later turned brown or black with age.¹⁵ Another study finds the traces of ink strokes

¹¹ Wang Jingxian, “An Ancient Art Shines,” 68. See also David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 31.

¹² K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 90.

¹³ Matsumaru Michio, *Kōkotsu monji* 甲骨文字, 8. (source from David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 49 n. 108)

¹⁴ K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 90.

¹⁵ Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, *Yinxu buci zongshu* 殷墟卜辭綜述, 13–14. (source from David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 46–47)

in lines subsequently carved thinly with a knife.¹⁶ “The brush strokes generally followed the same direction and sequence as those used by traditional and modern calligraphers,”¹⁷ writes Dong Zuobin 董作賓. While it is presumed that a brush was used for practicing purposes, some free-hand carvings on unprepared bones were also found.¹⁸ This suggests that the engraved oracle bone inscriptions were produced through intensive training and preparation.

The presentation and the structure of the inscriptions on shells and bones demonstrate the formal principles of symmetry and balance. The characters are made predominantly of straight lines, which either connect or cross each other with rhythm and order. Structural harmony and aesthetic awareness in textual composition are evident from a piece of rubbing made from a carved oracle bone inscription, *Bingbian* 247 (fig. 1), with the preface, charge, and verification of Lady Hao’s giving birth, datable to 1200 BCE. Even though the characters appear flat and mechanical, the complete inscription shows a neat and compact layout, rendered with proficient engraving skill. Well-proportioned characters with even spacing demonstrate a sense of balance. This kind of orderliness was maintained as a calligraphic aesthetic was developed throughout the history of Chinese calligraphy.

In the late Shang era and the following Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100–256 BCE), many dedicatory inscriptions were cast on bronze vessels. These too were used in rituals performed by the rulers. In addition to serving a religious purpose, these inscriptions also served political function. The exact process of calligraphic execution on bronze

¹⁶ David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 46.

¹⁷ Dong Zuobin, “Ten Examples of Early Tortoise-shell Inscriptions,” 127.

¹⁸ David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 47.

vessels is not entirely clear, but the purpose of the casting is often precisely indicated on the inscription. Typically they were cast as a king's prayers to his ancestors or instructions to his officials, and were often produced at the instigation of high officials who had received favors from the king. A bronze basin, *Shi Qiang pan* 史墙盘 (fig. 2), is a good example.¹⁹ The vessel, datable to the late tenth to early ninth century BCE, was cast on behalf of a high official scribe, Qiang 墙.

On the face of the *Shi Qiang pan*, there are 284 characters arranged in 18 columns. The characters are formed in vertically oblong shape with even and flowing lines. They are laid out in immaculate order, with a lucid delineation of columns and rows. The curving lines, frequently applied and skillfully rendered, lend the inscription an elegant and dignified look. The long inscription is clearly designed to serve political purposes, as it includes not only the Qiang family history but also the deeds of the first six Western Zhou kings. According to the inscription, Qiang's family lineage specialized in *zuoce* 作册 (making of bamboo books), an exclusive profession linked with knowledge of the past. It is possible that Qiang was well acquainted with oracle bone inscriptions as a practice of divination. Nevertheless, in addition to religious ritual functions, bronze vessel casting in the Western Zhou was undertaken with strong political and social inclinations.

Considering the massive number of bronze vessels produced and the increased length of inscriptions, the number of calligraphers/engravers involved with bronze carving would have to be much larger than those who produced oracle bone

¹⁹ The bronze basin was unearthed in 1976 from Fufeng County in Shaanxi Province. It is 47.3 cm in diameter and 16.2 cm in height.

inscriptions, but the later calligrapher/engravers still had to be familiar with earlier patterns of writing. Bronze inscriptions display a regularity, symmetry, and balance similar to those carved on the oracle bones. Inscriptions on bronze vessels, however, show an increasing variety of shapes and ornamental patterns. In most cases, inscriptions were written with a brush and then engraved on clay molds, which were used for casting bronze vessels.²⁰ The form of strokes, in addition to showing variation, often demonstrated vigor and firmness. It is this combination of qualities—vital, precise, organic, and compact—that makes this style of bronze inscription appear “dignified, solemn, and charming in its simplicity.”²¹ This form of writing was later used almost exclusively for seal carving, and hence it is named the “seal script” (*zhuanshu* 篆書).²²

Inscriptions on both oracle bones and bronze vessels are significant for the study of the religious and political culture of ancient China. They also offer us a tangible narrative of calligraphy’s emergence as an important art form. The stroke, structure, and layout of the characters shaped the foundations of the art of calligraphy as it developed in China.

Myths about the Invention of Writing

The writing on oracle bones and bronze vessels was too well-developed and sophisticated to have represented the earliest writing in China. Recent archaeological finds indicate that Chinese writing underwent a gradual process of development that

²⁰ Most of bronze inscriptions were engraved on the molds before casting, but in later stage some bronze vessels were inscribed after casting, see Wang Jingxian, “An Ancient Art Shines,” 70–71.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²² On seal script writing incised in bronze and stone or brushed on wood, bamboo, and silk, see Zeng Youhe, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, 21–74.

can be traced back to approximately three thousand years before the oracle bone inscriptions.²³

Myths about the origin of Chinese writing revolved around notable cultural heroes. One of the legends centers on the figure Cang Jie 倉頡,²⁴ who was a royal scribe at the court of Huangdi 黃帝, the “Yellow Emperor.” A second myth involves one of the “Three Sovereigns,” Fu Xi 伏羲,²⁵ who was primarily responsible for creating the *Bagua* 八卦 (Eight Trigrams).²⁶

The early literature recording these myths dates from the third century BCE. The *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (The Annals of Lü Buwei), *Han Fei zi* 韓非子 (The Essays of Han Fei), and *Cang Jie pian* 倉頡篇 (The Provisions from Cang Jie) explicitly name Cang Jie as the inventor of writing.²⁷ All three texts were compiled within a couple of decades of each other, towards the end of the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.E.), when the Qin State was conquering neighboring states and sought to unite the country. At that time, the texts’ authors, Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (?–235 BCE), Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280–233 BCE), and Li Si 李斯 (280–208 BCE), served either at the court of the Qin 秦 State, or later at that of the First Emperor of the Qin (r. 246–210 BCE) after conquering other

²³ Cheung Kwong-yue, “Recent Archaeological Evidence Relating to the Origin of Chinese Characters,” 323–92.

²⁴ For early legends about Cang jie, see William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 130–32, see also Jonathan Chaves, “The Legacy of Ts’ang Chieh: the written word as magic,” 200–15.

²⁵ Details on Fu Xi, see William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 134.

²⁶ The Eight Trigrams is used in Daoist cosmology to represent the fundamental principles of reality.

²⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu*: “...Cang Jie zuo shu 倉頡作書...”; *Han Fei zi*: “Cang Jie zhi zuo shu ye 倉頡之作書也”; *Cang Jie pian*: “Cang Jie zuo shu, yi jiao hou yi 倉頡作書, 以教後詣.” (quote from Tang Lan, *Zhongguo wenzixue*, 51).

states.²⁸ In the minds of these scholar-officials, the act of designating one authoritative figure as the inventor of writing was part of a strategy, initiating a course for their ruler to succeed in unifying the country by standardizing the writing system. The identification of a mythological figure in the field of writing can be seen as an ideological weapon that contributed to the Qin Emperor's political triumph.

Nevertheless, the characteristics of this legendary figure, Cang Jie, are not described substantially in Qin literary references; only his name is mentioned. It was not until the first century CE that the Han scholar Wang Chong 王充 (27–91), in his *Lun Heng* 論衡, began to describe how Cang Jie invented writing. According to Wang Chong, “Cang Jie, the royal scribe of Yellow Emperor, had four eyes ... [he] began to trace the footprints of birds ... and invented writing.”²⁹ To be endowed with four eyes meant that Cang Jie was able to observe delicate marks left by birds and other animals, an attribute which even today is understood as representing his supernatural power. As a result, he found a way to record all kinds of markings and phenomena, which eventually led to the invention of a system of writing. This narrative was further elaborated in the last chapter of Han philologist Xu Shen's 許慎 (55–149) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, the first Chinese etymological dictionary to explain symbols and analyze

²⁸ Lü Buwei (?–235 BCE), the compiler of *Lüshi chunshu*, was the chancellor of the Qin State before his dramatic death in 235 BCE. Han Fei (ca. 280–233 BCE) served the court of the King of the Qin during the late Warring States period together with Li Si (280–208 BCE), who compiled the *Cang Jie pian* and later became the minister of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (220–202 BCE).

²⁹ Wang Chong, *Lun Heng*, 3.5b: “倉頡四目為黃帝史,” 5.4: “倉頡作書,” ... “倉頡起鳥迹.” (quote from Tang Lan, *Zhongguo wenzixue*, 46).

characters. Xu Shen's descriptions of Cang Jie are clear and reaffirm an established legend.³⁰

Another mythical figure endowed with supernatural power, Bao Xi 庖犧 (i.e. Fu Xi), is also mentioned by Xu Shen in his *Shuowen*. Designating Bao Xi as the highest among all the cultural heroes of antiquity, Xu Shen explains, "Bao Xi ruled as a king over the sub-celestial realm, ... and created the Eight Trigrams of the *Yi* 易 [referring to *Yijing* 易經, the Book of Changes] as a means to transmit the phenomena of the heavens and patterns on the earth observed by him."³¹ Although Cang Jie and Bao Xi are both introduced in the conclusive chapter of Xu Shen's prominent composition, the legend about Bao Xi precedes the myth of Cang Jie. Xu Shen might have intentionally positioned Bao Xi as superior to Cang Jie, and suggested Fu Xi's Eight Trigrams as a tool used for communication prior to the writing system invented by Cang Jie.

Accounts of Fu Xi can also be found in earlier literature, such as *Xici* 繫辭, one of the appendices to the *Yijing* from the third century BCE. According to it, Fu Xi is endowed with more power, while Cang Jie's name is not mentioned at all. It states: "Fu Xi's creation of the Eight Trigrams was a means to communicate with the Co-responsive Power of the Spirits and Auras and to categorize the veritable qualities of the myriad

³⁰ Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi*, 15.1, in Zhonghua shuju ed., 314: "黄帝之史倉頡見鳥獸蹏亢之迹知分理之可相别異也初造書契"—"Huangti's scribe Cang Jie saw the traces of the footprints of birds and beasts. He recognized that these partiform structures could be distinguished and differentiated one from the other. Thus he first created writing." Translation is modified from William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 135.

³¹ *Ibid.*: "古者庖犧氏之王天下也 ... 始作易八卦以垂憲象... 黄帝之史倉頡見鳥獸蹏亢之迹知分理之可相别異也初造書契." Translation is modified from William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 135.

creatures. Having created knotted cords, he [Fu Xi] then made nets and seines for hunting and for fishing.”³²

The speculations about Fu Xi in *Xici*, however, never actually identified Fu Xi with inventing a writing system. Fu Xi’s creations, such as the Eight Trigrams, were only graphic symbols that were used as devices to communicate with Spirit and Auras, and the knotted cords were suggestive methods for recording things on earth. In other words, Fu Xi’s creations were primarily a means of communication and record-keeping in early society. It was not until later that Xu Shen, a Han scholar, made the first attempt to link the legends of Cang Jie and Fu Xi together in his *Shuowen*. This connection proved enduring, as can be seen in myths about early Chinese writing, as “from the first century on, the one always carries with it the shadow if not the substance of the other.”³³

Xu Shen’s intention to associate both Fu Xi and Cang Xie with the invention of writing seems to have reflected his religious and political leanings. Xu Shen was a partisan of the Old Text School, which advocated the usage of the *guwen* 古文 (old script, referring lesser seal script, the main script in the Qin dynasty) during the late Han era.³⁴ Embracing the systematization and standardization of the Chinese writing system that had been established since the Qin dynasty, Xu Shen aligned himself with a political tradition that named Cang Jie as the inventor of writing. On the other hand, Xu

³² *Xi ci*: “作八卦以通神明之德以類萬物之情作结绳而为罔罟以佃以渔” (quote from William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 134).

³³ William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 136.

³⁴ Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 430.

Shen's religious preference for Daoism may have inspired him to magnify the importance of Fu Xi.

Xu Shen is known to have written a commentary on the *Huai nan zi* 淮南子,³⁵ compiled during the mid-second century BCE during the early Han era, in which the pursuit of Daoist spontaneity and nature is emphasized. As Daoist writers do not share the Confucian belief that cultural advancement is the way to a better society, they often are skeptical of certain human accomplishments praised by orthodox scholars and criticize them as artificial.³⁶ To invent writing was not necessarily an asset; on the contrary, it could be a detriment. The statement, "When Cang Jie created writing, heaven rained grain/millet, and ghosts wailed in the night,"³⁷ is recorded in both *Lun Heng* and *Huai nan zi*. This unnatural and deviant phenomenon is described as follow: "While [the people's] extrinsic capabilities became all the more numerous, [their] intrinsic power became all the more attenuated."³⁸ In Daoists' eyes, the invention of writing (for teaching, learning and creating written documents) was an action against nature, just like those unnatural and deviant happenings. Since the intent of *Huai nan zi*

³⁵ *Huai nan zi* is a collection of essays, resulting from the scholarly debates that took place under the patronage and at the court of Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE) in the Han dynasty. The work encompasses a wide variety of subjects, from ancient myths to contemporary government, from history to philosophy. The overriding concern that pervades the *Huai nan zi* is the attempt to define the essential conditions for perfect socio-political order under the universal patterns along the lines of Huang [di]-Lao[zi] Daoism, Yin-Yang and the Five Phases. More details see introductory note about *Huai nan zi* from Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 189. It is known that Gao You 高誘 (fl. 205–213) wrote a *Huai nan zi zhujie* (Commentary of *Huai nan zi*), but William G. Boltz points out that Xu Shen could also have written a commentary to the *Huai nan zi* before Gao You. see William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 131 n. 4, and Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts*, 191.

³⁶ Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: growth of a religion*. 28.

³⁷ Wang Chong, *Lun Heng*, 5.4b: "倉頡作書而天雨穀鬼夜哭." *Huai nan zi*, 8.4: "倉頡作書而天雨粟鬼夜哭."

³⁸ *Huai nan zi*, 8.5: "能越多而德越薄矣." Translation is from William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Writing System*, 131.

is characterized as political utopianism intended to provoke the ruler to follow the universal patterns conceived along the lines of Daoism, Xu Shen's portrayals of Fu Xi and Cang Jie can be then understood.

In summary, the stories of Cang Jie and Fu Xi were fabricated and infused with various philosophical, religious, and political agendas. Throughout Chinese history, intellectuals who were aware of the power of writing often utilized the legendary Cang Jie or Fu Xi to legitimize their political power or religious beliefs. Thus the legends offer many clues to those searching for an understanding of the development of Chinese writing and calligraphy.

Developments during the Han Dynasty

The development of calligraphy leapt forward during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Script forms like *li* 隸 (official) and *cao* 草 (cursive) were fully evolved, and other forms such as *xing* 行 (running) and *zhen/kai* 真/楷 (standard) began to emerge. The availability of better writing tools is considered to be a contributing factor in the development of calligraphy during this period,³⁹ but the force that elevated writing from the quotidian role of communication or record keeping to an art form resulted from changes in the political and social structure of the Han dynasty. On one hand, writing was necessary for the regime to integrate a complex imperial organization, and its broad utilitarian use energized the emergence of new forms of writing. At the same time, a new class of power-holding officials believed that “brush and ink would reveal their moral characters.”⁴⁰ They endeavored to legitimize their political and social status

³⁹ Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 146, 178–93.

⁴⁰ Adriana G. Proser, “Moral Characters: Calligraphy and Bureaucracy in Han China,” abstract.

through “the way of writing,” which resulted in the transformation of writing into a literary art.⁴¹

The major forms of Han writing were *lishu* (official script) and *caoshu* (cursive script).⁴² The former was used mostly on engraved surfaces, and the latter on handwritten documents. The origins of *lishu* can be traced to the script of *xiaozhuan* 小篆 (lesser seal), which is characterized by uniform size, even spacing, and well balanced composition with tautly even lines. This extremely uniform and regulated script emerged during the reign of the First Qin Emperor, who used it to standardize the Chinese writing system. The expansion of government agencies in the Qin and early Han dynasties, however, demanded a more efficient writing script for record keeping. This resulted in the emergence of a new script, *lishu*, in which the writers were allowed to create more relaxed brush strokes. The same philosophical and critical trends that influenced the development of *lishu* led to the evolution of *caoshu*, in which the structure of the characters was loosened and brushstrokes moved rapidly without concern for rigid boundaries.

Many calligraphy works produced by Han court officials reflect the political and philosophical concerns of the period. The production of the *Stone Classics* was one of the best examples. It was a major project sponsored by the Eastern Han government to

⁴¹ Ibid., 2–3.

⁴² Traditionally, scholars identified two kinds of cursive script existing during the Han period: *zhangcao* 章草 (draft cursive, semi-cursive, or memorial cursive script) and *caoshu* 草書 or *jincao* 今草 (cursive or modern cursive script). Sometimes the category of *zhangcao* is divided in two, referring to early *zhangcao* as *caoli* 草隸, a combination of *caoshu* and *lishu*. Adriana G. Proser in her dissertation, “Moral Characters,” concludes that during the Han dynasty the term *caoshu* encompassed both semi-cursive and cursive script types and it was only later scholars made the use of the term *zhangcao* to distinguish semi-cursive from cursive. See Adriana G. Proser, “Moral Characters: Calligraphy and Bureaucracy in Han China,” 32, 34.

engrave the entire collection of the “seven classics”⁴³ on both sides of forty-six limestone slabs.⁴⁴ The project was proposed by a high official and scholar-calligrapher, Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), and approved in 175 by Emperor Ling 靈帝 (r. 168–188) due to an urgent need to collate and standardize the texts of the Confucian Classics. *Hou Han shu* records, “Since being written by the sages, the canonical works [i.e. Confucian Classics] have long been transmitted, and many errors have entered into the text. They have been wrongly interpreted by ordinary scholars, which confuses and misleads younger students.”⁴⁵ Hence recording authoritative versions of these classics on stone for study and verification was an efficient solution that prevented further alterations and mistakes.

The erection of the *Stone Classics* was the first time in Chinese history that books were carved on stone. The project took eight years (175–183) to complete. Carried out in the capital of Luoyang 洛陽, Cai Yong and many other prominent calligraphers participated in this great calligraphic enterprise.⁴⁶ The characters were brushed in cinnabar and written in the form of *lishu*. They featured beautiful sweeping horizontal strokes which were carved by craftsman directly into the stone. When they were

⁴³ “Seven classics” include *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Documents*, *The Book of Poetry*, *The Rites*, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, *The Gongyang Tradition*, and *The Analects*, see Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 80, for the particular version and number of characters selected from each classic.

⁴⁴ The exact number of stones is recorded differently in various sources; from forty, to forty-six and forty eight. Wang Guowei believes that the total number of stones was forty-six that was derived by dividing the total number of characters inscribed by the number of characters in each table for different classics (source: Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 81, and n. 41). More details on Confucian Classics on Stone inscription see Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 78–85; see also Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *The Landscape of Words*, 232–33.

⁴⁵ Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 79.

⁴⁶ Cai Yong was exiled in 178, and there were many different hands involved in transcribing the text throughout the years.

completed, the stones were set in front of the Kaiyang Gate of the National University, located to the south of Louyang. Due to wars, weather, and other effects of time, these steles deteriorated and only fragments survive now, scattered in various collections.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the establishment of the *Stone Classics* was significant, as it not only “demonstrated Emperor Ling’s commitment to the teachings that provided an ideological foundation for imperial rule,”⁴⁸ but also presented a textual and artistic account of the bureaucratic class’ effort to maintain moral and legitimate authority.

Bureaucratic evolution during the Han encouraged additional changes. An informal, cursive version of official script known as *zhangcao* 章草 (draft cursive, or semi-cursive script) emerged. The freely expressed brushstrokes of *zhangcao* facilitated writing with speed, which aligned with the utilitarian purpose of efficient record keeping. At the same time, letter writing with *caoshu* (cursive script) calligraphy was developed among the scholar-officials, who took writing beyond practical function to a medium for the expression of an aesthetic achievement.

The developments in calligraphic scripts reflect their transformations within a much larger realm of cultural changes that took place during the Eastern Han period. In her dissertation on the Han calligraphy, Adriana Proser demonstrates that writers’ aesthetic concerns in prose and calligraphy parallel many impressive developments in other literary arts practiced by the Eastern Han scholar-officials. Literature was one obvious example. In addition to the writing of prose essays, “we also see primitive forms of

⁴⁷ One large surviving fragment can be discerned at Beilin in Xi’an, see Li Yuzheng, ed., *Xi’an Beilin shufa yishu*, 34, and the other one in Shanghai Museum, see Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *The Landscape of Words*, fig. 1.28.

⁴⁸ Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *The Landscape of Words*, 233.

poetry ... grow into complex forms in the Eastern Han period. Two new forms of poetry, the *fu* 賦 (rhapsody) and the *yuefu* 樂府 (ballad) appeared... In addition, the five-character or seven-character line *shi* 詩 (verse) began to flourish.”⁴⁹ The pursuit of higher artistic achievement can be seen in the ways officials maintained power and influence through their moral and intellectual superiority. With regard to calligraphy, it drove individuals to strive for the best possible technical and aesthetic sophistication in writing, to collect and study superior calligraphy models, and ultimately to create a piece of calligraphy that revealed a divine quality. Those efforts contributed to the aesthetic development of calligraphy and formed the foundation for the growth of production and collection of calligraphy for the generations beyond.

The emergence of theoretical and critical literature also contributed to the formation of the calligraphic tradition. The earliest existing critical literature on calligraphy is *Fei Caoshu* 非草書 (The Polemic against Cursive Script) written by the Eastern Han Confucian moralist, Zhao Yi 趙一 (fl. 178–183), who states: “Rather than training one’s mind and sharpening one’s wit on a dissertation on cursive script, would it not be better to apply oneself to the Seven Classics?”⁵⁰ Zhao Yi’s statement appears to be a disparagement of cursive script and those who practice it; however, it also reveals how prevalent cursive script was at that time.

The predominance and superior quality of cursive script at the end of the Han was described in another early calligraphy treatise, *Caoshu shi* 草書勢 (The Forces of Cursive Script). Written by Suo Jing 索靖 (239–303), it states, “Cursive script can be

⁴⁹ Adriana G. Proser, “Moral Characters: Calligraphy and Bureaucracy in Han China,” 172.

⁵⁰ Zhao Yi, *Fei caoshu*, in FSYL 1.4: “第以此篇[草書]研思銳精, 豈若用之於彼七經。”

smooth as a silver hook, or light as a startled bird; with wings outspread but not yet flying, as if lifting then settling back... Like a stallion straining in fury against the bridle, or the billowing sea foaming up in breakers, Like grasses and vines linked together, with plum trees revealing their splendor, ...”⁵¹ As this passage illustrates, the description of characters in the form of cursive script is often metaphorical, using images drawn from nature. In the conclusion of his treatise, *Suo Jing* compares calligraphic practice to the archetypal emblems in the *Book of Changes*, both of which activate the cosmic forces of the universe. He states,

In doing away with the complex but preserving the subtle, [the calligrapher] does not deviate from the archetypal emblems. Aspiring to the heights, he reorders the universe. Turning to the commonplace, he equalizes discrepancies. In giving creativity free reign, rain will fall, ice will melt. Like a high-pitched voice, a sharp brush will move and spread like torrential water. Beautiful compositions will emerge one by one, shining and wonderful, luminous and bright...⁵²

This passage informs us that calligraphic practice was valued as the mediation between a subjective artist’s mind and an objective universe. *Suo Jing* was active at the dawn of the Six Dynasties (222–589), a period of prolonged political disunity after the fall of the Han dynasty. The transcendental philosophies of Daoism and Buddhism encouraged those who were talented in calligraphy to turn to nature for more inspiration. At the same time, the moral, cosmic, and political values that were so immediate to Han calligraphy would continue throughout the entire history of calligraphy that followed.

⁵¹ So Jing, *Caoshu shi*, in LDSF 19: “蓋草書之為狀也，婉若銀鈎，漂若驚鷲，舒翼未發，若舉復安。” English translation from Wen C. Fong, “Chinese Calligraphy: theory and history,” 33.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20: “去繁存微，大象未亂，上理開元，下周謹案，騁辭放手，雨行冰散，高音翰厲，溢越流漫。” English translation from Wen C. Fong, *ibid.*, 33–34.

Developments in the Six Dynasties: Daoist and Buddhist Elements in Calligraphy

Calligraphy was poised to become an important art form during the politically divided Six Dynasties (220–589). This was a time when Daoism and Buddhism flourished, while Confucianism was in the process of losing its privileged position. Perceiving the growing influence of calligraphy in Chinese culture, Daoists and Buddhists deliberately used calligraphy as an instrument to raise the status of their respective religions. As a consequence, they greatly influenced the development of Chinese calligraphy, in theory as well as in practice.

Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361, or 306–365) and his seventh son Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–386), known as the “Two Wangs,” were among the most celebrated calligraphy masters in the Six Dynasties. Wang Xizhi is considered the most prominent calligrapher in Chinese history and often referred to as “the Saint of Calligraphy.” Also known by his style name Yishao 逸少, Wang Xizhi was skillful on various scripts of calligraphy. His cursive script was modeled after Zhang Zhi 張芝 (? – ca. 192) and standard script after Zhong You 鐘繇 (fl. 210–230), while Madame Wei 衛 (272–349) was his direct teacher. The Wang family, many members known for being good at calligraphy, along with other distinguished aristocratic families from north China,⁵³ fled to the south and assisted in the founding of the Eastern Jin (317–419) when the Western Jin (265–316) disintegrated. Wang Xizhi served the Eastern Jin as General of the Right Army, *Youjun* 右軍, by which title he is generally known. In his later years he

⁵³ Besides the Wangs, other distinguished aristocratic families were Chenjun Xie (陳郡謝), Pengcheng Liu (彭城劉), Yingchuan Yu (潁川庾), Qiaoguo Huan (譙國桓), Gaoyang Xu (高陽許), Nanyang Liu (南陽劉), etc.. For more details on the political and cultural life of the period dominated by these powerful families, see Richard B. Mather, trans., *A New Account of Tales of the World*.

served as governor of Kuaiji 會稽 prefecture where, around 353, he hosted the famous poetry gathering at the *Lanting* (Orchid Pavilion) and wrote *Lantingji xu* 蘭亭集序 (Preface to the Collection of Poetry [Written] at the Orchid Pavilion), which is considered the most celebrated piece of Chinese calligraphy.⁵⁴

Many of the upper-class emigrants from the north, including the Wangs, adhered to a Daoist sect, *Tianshi dao* 天師道 (Way of the Celestial Master), also known as the *Wudoumi dao* 五斗米道 (Daoism of the Five pecks of Rice). They were rooted in the coastal area around Langye 琅邪 in Linyi 臨沂 district, where the illustrious family of Wang Xizhi then resided. This Daoist sect was established in the second half of the second century, and became one of the earliest and most important forms of organized religious Daoism.⁵⁵

There are numerous traces in evidence of Wang Xizhi's pursuit of Daoism. *Jin shu* 晉書 tells us that Wang Xizhi, together with the Daoist Xu Mai 許邁 (fl. 340-360),⁵⁶ was a fervent seeker of longevity. Xu Mai was the elder brother of Xu Mi 許謐 (303–373), who

⁵⁴ Wang Xizhi's biography is in *Jin shu*, 80.2093–101. For the celebrated *Lantingji xu*, see Donald Holzman, "On the authenticity of the 'Preface' to the Collection of Poetry Written at the Orchid Pavilion," 306–11, and Hua Rende & Bai Qianshen, eds. *Lanting lunji* (Collected Essays on the Lanting xu). Tang Emperor Taizong was an ardent admirer of Wang Xizhi. Taizong's promotion of Wang Xizhi's style resulted in the formation of classical tradition of Chinese calligraphy; see Chapter 3 for further detailed discussion. A wealth of scholarship has been produced about Wang Xizhi. For the promotion of Wang Xizhi's style by Taizong and the formation of calligraphy tradition based on the Wang style see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 7–44, and Eugene Wang, "The Taming of the Shrew: Wang Hsi-chih (303–361) and Calligraphic Gentrification in the Seventh Century." For Wang Xizhi's calligraphy and model book tradition see Nakata Yujiro, *Ō Gishi o chūshin to suru hōjō no kenkyū*.

⁵⁵ Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," 248, and Chen Yinke, "Tianshidao yu binhai diyu zhi guanxi" (Daoism and the Inhabitants in the Maritime Provinces of China, circa 126–536 AD), 449.

⁵⁶ Xu Mai's friendship with Wang Xizhi and his daoist practice can be seen in *Jin shu*, 80.2101; Xu Mai's biography in *Jin shu*, 80.2106–08.

figured prominently in the transmission of the Maoshan⁵⁷ revelations, which later made up the documents of one of the most important Daoist manuscripts, the *Zhengao* 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected).⁵⁸

The Maoshan revelations stated that calligraphy was a vehicle one could use to communicate with Heaven. The central figure of this revelation was the mystic Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–?), a contemporary of the Two Wangs. Between the years 364 and 370, Yang Xi experienced visions during which sacred texts were supposedly revealed to him. He recorded these visionary texts in a state of religious exaltation.⁵⁹

A century later, Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), who was also an accomplished calligrapher and art connoisseur, played a key role in preserving and expanding the Maoshan tradition; he collected these manuscripts and completed his critical edition, titled *Zhengao*, in 499.⁶⁰ According to the *Zhengao*, Yang Xi was visited at night by various celestials that descended from heaven, who guided his hand in copying the sacred texts with a brush. The types of scripts, mentioned by Tao Hongjing, include *jinli* 今隸 (contemporary *lishu*, an early form of *kaishu*),⁶¹ *caoshu*, *xingshu*, and *kaishu*.⁶²

⁵⁷ Maoshan is a mountainous area in south of modern Nanjing in where Xu Mi had some property and erected there a “Quiet Chamber” as his oratory. Later his son, Xu Hui, spent the last years of his life entirely as a recluse on Maoshan. Maoshan had since olden times been a sacred mountain for hermits (summary from Lothar Ledderose, “Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties,” 255).

⁵⁸ See Michel Strickmann, “The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy” for Wang and Xu’s close relationship, and *Zhengao* and the Maoshan revelation.

⁵⁹ Lothar Ledderose, “Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties,” 254.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, and n. 42.

⁶¹ *Zhengao*, 1.7: “此題本應是三元八會之書，楊君既就真字，今作隸字顯出之耳。”—The original version of these must have been written in the *sanyuan bahui* script, a script of the three origins and eight connections. Master Yang who understood the characters of the Perfected has now transcribed them into *lishu* and made them known. Translation is from Lothar Ledderose, *ibid.*, 256.

⁶² *Zhengao*, 19.240: “楊書中有草行多儷贍者 ... 有謹正好書者。”

Those copies passed to Xu Mi, and then to his brother Xu Mai, with whom Wang Xizhi was a close acquaintance. “Therefore,” says Lothar Ledderose, “it can be assumed that the Two Wangs knew of the Maoshan revelations.”⁶³ In *Zhengao*, the mystic Yang and the Two Wangs are called the “Three Masters” or “Three Lords” (*Sanjun* 三君). Tao Hongjing compared the handwriting of Yang Xi with that of the Two Wangs, and concluded that “the calligraphy of Master Yang is the most accomplished.” According to Tao, Yang’s writing bears a timeless quality, “it is neither modern nor old-fashioned—*bujin bugu* 不今不古, and at the same time displays a variety of characters large and small — *nengda nengxiao* 能大能小.”⁶⁴ The ability to write with variety in scripts and flexibility in sizes has since become the most important signifier of a proficient calligrapher; this obtains for both sacred and secular writings. One of the Jin masters’ great achievements was to finalize the formulation of the three scripts—*caoshu*, *xingshu*, and *kaishu*—which have remained in use to the present day.

To illustrate the essential difference between religious and secular writings, Lothar Ledderose compared the Maoshan tradition of religious manuscripts to the Wang tradition in its formative period.⁶⁵ In spite of some obvious similarities, one essential difference between these two bodies of writings is that the Daoist manuscripts were treasured primarily for their text, the sacred revelations, while the writings from the Two Wangs’ hands were esteemed more for the beauty of their calligraphic style.⁶⁶ The

⁶³ Lothar Ledderose, “Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties,” 255.

⁶⁴ *Zhengao*, 19.240: “又按三君手迹, 楊君書最工, 不今不古, 能大能小.”

⁶⁵ Lothar Ledderose, “Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 277–78.

denigration of linguistic meaning has long been the cornerstone of early calligraphy criticism. Art critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (fl. 720–740) in his *Wenzi lun* 文字論 distinguished between *wenzi* 文字 (written characters) and *shu* 書 (calligraphy), stating that “those who know calligraphy profoundly observe only its spiritual brilliance; they do not see the forms of the written words.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, throughout the long historical development of Chinese calligraphy, the difficulty of separating beautiful writing from its lexical meaning occur constantly. A famous eleventh century antiquarian Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) sighed as he battled against himself since he had to ignore the content of Buddhist inscriptions in order to appreciate the calligraphy carved on stone. Although quality of aesthetic form has often been emphasized over content throughout the history of Chinese calligraphy, the distinctions between them remain subtle. This dilemma has complicated the study of calligraphy ever since the Two Wangs’ tradition.

As the spiritual aspect of calligraphy became emphasized as the essential aesthetic principle, calligraphy became increasingly valuable and worthy of collection. Tao Hongjing, an enthusiastic collector and connoisseur of calligraphy who had a strong sense about artistic authenticity, owned a large corpus of calligraphy pieces, including Wang Xizhi’s works and manuscripts from the Maoshan revelations. He also exerted a strong influence on Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502–549), who later became a vigorous collector of Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy.⁶⁸ This was the beginning of imperial court

⁶⁷ Zhang Huaiguan, *Wenzi lun*, in LDSF 209: “深知書者，唯觀神彩，不見字形。”

⁶⁸ In the *Liang Wudi yu Tao Yinju lunshu jishou*; the center of discussion is the authenticity of works attributed to the early masters, particularly Zhong You and the Two Wangs.

support for collecting works of calligraphy, a tradition that continued throughout China's history.

A body of critical literature on collecting and systematic writings on how to rank individual artists also began to emerge and grow rapidly at this time. Wang Xizhi's accomplishment as a calligrapher was praised as "the greatest ever" in Yang Xin's 羊欣 (370–442) *Gulai nengshu renming* 古來能書人名 (Names of Able Calligraphers since Olden Times), one of the early preserved texts. It is the first treatise known to contain short biographical information and critical remarks on more than fifty proficient calligraphers, dating from the Qin era (third century BCE) to Yang Xin's contemporaries. He paid homage to Wang by saying, "in olden and modern times, there is not a second one like him."⁶⁹ Yang Xin was a contemporary of Wang Xianzhi,⁷⁰ son of Wang Xizhi, and studied calligraphy with him. Therefore, Yang's evaluation of the Wang's calligraphy was considered reliable and, as a result, profoundly influenced later critics. It is thought that Yang's opinion of Wang's accomplishment was influenced by his close connection to Daoism.⁷¹ By attributing divine power to the aesthetic quality of Wang's work, Yang insured that Wang's style of calligraphy became the ultimate standard for evaluation in the calligraphic tradition.

Discussions of calligraphy were enthusiastic in the following decades. Critics often used the term "divine" to identify and classify the highest achievement of calligraphers,

⁶⁹ Yang Xin, *Cai gulai nengshu renming*, in LDSF, 47: "古今莫二." English translation is from Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," 252.

⁷⁰ Yang Xin studied calligraphy with Wang Xianzhi; see Yang Xin's biography in *Song shu*, 62.1661–62, and in *Nan shi*, 36.932–33.

⁷¹ Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," 252 and n. 37.

and the word “spirit” to describe the most valued calligraphy. “He reveled in vacuity,”⁷² said authoritative seventh century critic and theorist Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (fl. 685), as he praised Wang Xizhi’s *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (The Yellow Court Classic), a Daoist scripture, and the only text in small standard script written by Wang known to us. Describing Wang’s most celebrated *Lanting ji xu*, Sun declared, “His thought roamed and his spirit soared.”⁷³ In his evaluation of the calligraphy written by Wang Xizhi’s son, Wang Xianzhi, Sun claimed that he “only pretended to rely on divine immortals.”⁷⁴ Even though this remark is somewhat critical of Wang Xianzhi’s work, it implies that “divine inspiration” is the highest aspiration for an artist. The Song connoisseur and calligrapher, Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107), however, complimented Wang Xianzhi’s style and paid special attention to his *yibishu* 一筆書 (single-stroke writing).⁷⁵ This form of writing is still utilized today and is typically known as “fire poker,” a technique commonly associated with the superstitious practice of planchette writing (*Huozhu huahui* 火箸畫灰 or *Fuji* 扶箕).⁷⁶ As Wang Xianzhi developed his cursive style in relation to planchette writing, often found in religious manuscripts of the kind that inspired the mystic Yang Xi,

⁷² Sun Guoting, *Shu pu*, in LDSF 128: “黃庭經則怡懌虛無。” Translation from *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy: Treatise on Calligraphy (Shu pu) by Sun Qianli & Sequel to the “Treatise on Calligraphy” (Xu shu pu)*, introduced, translated and annotated by Chang Ch’ung-ho and Hans H. Frankel, 10.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: “蘭亭興集思逸神超。” Translation from *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy* (Chang Ch’ung-ho and Hans H. Frankel, trans.), 10–11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 125: “乃假託神仙。”

⁷⁵ Mi Fu, *Shushi*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 1.964a.

⁷⁶ *Fuji* is a type of writing under religious inspiration. Holding a wooden stick in deep religious trance, the medium writes on sand or on ash in a fast movement, usually in big *caoshu*. On the side an aide recognizes and reads the characters aloud, and scribes hastily copies down these words. The practice of planchette writing can be traced back in literary sources to the sixth century and is still practiced today. See Lothar Ledderose, “Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties,” 258.

Mi Fu's intention was to forge a link between Wang Xianzhi's style and heavenly authenticity.

During the third to the fourth centuries, Buddhism began to spread among the émigré gentry who engaged in a wide range of literary activities and religious discussions. A so-called “gentry Buddhism” movement was formed during this period.⁷⁷ Many Buddhist monks became well-versed in the arts and secular Chinese literature written by and for literati. This knowledge was necessary in order to engage the elite in intellectual activities such as *qingtan* 清談 (literally, “pure conversation”).⁷⁸ Participation in literati gatherings enabled Buddhist monks to acquire the stature and authority of traditional Chinese scholars; thus they were called “gentlemen monks.”⁷⁹

With his extremely polished eloquence and remarkable talent for poetry and calligraphy, the monk Zhidun 支遁 (314–366), better known as Daolin 道林, was one of the most famous and representative gentleman monks. A contemporary of Wang Xizhi, Zhidun was one of Wang's regular guests at his *qingtan* gatherings.⁸⁰ The event for which Wang's circle is best remembered was an outing in the spring of 353 to the Orchid Pavilion on Wang's estate. There Wang Xizhi improvised a passage of three hundred and twenty-four characters known as the *Lanting ji xu* (Preface to the Collection [of poems composed] at the Orchid Pavilion) (fig. 3, full view and fig. 3a, detail). In the *Lanting Preface*, Wang Xizhi recorded both his pleasure in this cultivated gathering and his melancholic speculations on the transience of life. Not only did the

⁷⁷ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 1.4–6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.75.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.116–30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.119.

beauty of his prose win him tremendous fame for its literary merit, the excellent calligraphy of the essay was much acclaimed by later critics. The spirit that blossomed through Wang's graceful running script made the *Lanting Preface* the most celebrated piece of calligraphy in Chinese history.⁸¹

As a result of his mingling with Buddhists, the Daoist Wang Xizhi is believed to have transcribed a Buddhist sutra, the *Yijiaojing* 遺教經.⁸² It is also known that Sun Zhuo 孫綽 (300–380), a Buddhist, renowned calligrapher, and mentee of Wang Xizhi, composed many important epigrams for monks.⁸³ He was the author of a well-known Buddhist doctrinal treatise, *Yudao lun* 喻道論 (An Elucidation of the Way), in which the most famous and often quoted phrase is "...Buddha means one who embodies the Way" (佛也者體道者也).⁸⁴ This statement can be interpreted as saying that Buddha is everywhere and permeates everything, which includes the creation of art such as calligraphy.

Metaphoric language that uses the human body to convey the power of calligraphy permeates both Buddhist and Daoist writings. An excellent example may be found in the seventh century Buddhist text *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (Forest of Gems in the Garden

⁸¹ The most authentic versions of *Lanting ji xu* are believed the "*Shenlong* 神龍 and *Dingwu* 定武. The former one was allegedly made by Feng Chengsu, one of the most skillful and distinguished copyists in Taizong's court and carried seal of "Shenlong"—first two years of Zhongzong's 中宗 (r. 705–709) era, now in the Beijing Palace Museum. The later one was a Song rubbing, now in the collection of National Palace Museum in Taiwan. The discussion on the authenticity of the *Lanting Preface*, see Donald Holzman, "On the authenticity of the 'Preface' to the Collection of Poetry Written at the Orchid Pavilion," 306–11, and Hua Rende and Bai Qianshen, eds. *Lanting lunji* (Collected Essays on the Lanting xu).

⁸² *Yijiaojing* is recorded in Zhao Mingcheng, *Jinshi lu*, 30.9, in *Sibu congkan xubian*, 48. It is stated that *Yijiaojing* was attributed to Wang Xizhi, but in mid-Song, Ouyang Xiu denied its authenticity. Since then there is discrepancy that *Yi jiaojing* might be a forgery by a Buddhist calligrapher.

⁸³ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 1.132.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

of the Dharma), which states: “I have a hymn spoken by the Buddha. If you write this hymn and are able to use your skin as paper, your bones as the brush, your blood as the ink, then this can rightly become a method that brings you joy.”⁸⁵ Real life cases in which Buddhist monks and devotees pricked their body to draw blood and then mixed it with ink to transcribe sutras have been recorded in historical documents. Examples include the Tang monk Zengren 增忍 (812– 871) from the Longxing Monastery in Lingwu (靈武龍興寺) and the [Later] Liang monk Hongchu 鴻楚 (fl. 910) from Dayun Monastery in Wenzhou (温州大雲寺). According to their biographies, Monk Zengren “pierced his own body to get blood for transcribing sutras, and in total 283 fascicles were produced,”⁸⁶ and Monk Hongchu “transcribed the complete *Lotus Sutra* with his own blood.”⁸⁷ More discussion on the act of sacrificing one’s body to garner religious merit will follow in Chapter 6.

Some elements of Buddhist doctrine and methods for depicting Buddhist images were adopted by Chinese artists as they developed their artistic forms and theories. The distinctive schemata laid out for the strict definition of the proper position of each Buddha, Bodhisattva, and Arhat, such as *sanshier xiang* 三十二相 (thirty-two marks) and *bashi zhong hao* 八十種好 (eighty characteristics)⁸⁸ for depicting the different sizes of images, and the facial and bodily appearance of the Buddha, were applied to calligraphy. This sense of order, which informed much Buddhist thought and practice,

⁸⁵ T 53.907c: “我有佛所說一偈，汝能以皮為紙，以骨為筆，以血為墨，書寫此偈，當以與汝樂法。”

⁸⁶ Zan Ning, *Song Gaozeng zhuan*, in *Zhonghua shuju* ed., 26.667–68.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.641.

⁸⁸ Yu Xueliang “Lun Fojiao dui Zhongguo shufa de yingxiang,” 2005.7.

may have inspired many calligraphers to articulate a method for the practice of calligraphy, making it easier to teach, learn, and replicate.

When Wang Xizhi decided to teach his son Wang Xianzhi the art of calligraphy, he formulated twelve rules for how to create the best disposition of brushstrokes. His *Bi shi lun shier zhang* 筆勢論 十二章 (Discussion of the Disposition of Brushstrokes in Twelve Sections) is one of the earliest extant texts on calligraphic theories on brushwork. These rules were made compulsory, because they were believed to produce the best calligraphy, especially for the writing of *kaishu*, the standard script. Wang states, “There are twelve doctrines in creating the best piece of calligraphy. By following each doctrine, one would be able to set a standard. Once the standard is thoroughly understood without any confusion, one would be able to bring together all the essence to create marvelous calligraphy.”⁸⁹ By creating this method, Wang ensured that calligraphy became a process that could be easily taught, understood, and repeated.

The twelve doctrines begin with section one, which is how to prepare a field for writing (*chuanglin* 創臨). Section two addresses how one may open one’s mind (*qixin* 啟心). The observation of natural phenomenon (*shixing* 視行) as a way to create the proper brush strokes is the subject of section three, which culminates with the conclusion in section twelve that the actual execution of proper dots and lines—to press, pause, or drag—should always be carried out according to the rule of nature. It is

⁸⁹ Wang Xizhi, *Bi shi lun – shier zhang*, in LDSF 29: “凡斯字勢，猷有十二章，章有指歸，定其模楷，詳其舛謬，撮其要實。”

this process that creates an accomplished calligrapher (*picheng* 譬成), the subject of the last section.⁹⁰

A similar format was employed by later artists, critics, and theorists. *Guan Zhong You shufa shier yi* 觀鍾繇書法十二意 (Discerning Twelve Principles in Zhong You's Calligraphy),⁹¹ written by the Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty, was an early example. With his archaic and unadorned calligraphic style, Zhong You 鍾繇 (151–230) was revered as the leading master and prime model for calligraphers producing standard script. Later, the early Tang calligraphy master Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641) compiled the *Ba jue* 八訣 (Eight Rhymed Formula)⁹² to illustrate the principles of rendering brushstrokes, and *Sanshiliu fa* 三十六法 (Thirty-six Laws)⁹³ to define methods for shaping characters. An authoritative mid-Tang calligraphy theorist, Zhang Huaiguan, wrote *Lun yongbi shi fa* 論用筆十法 (Discussion of Ten Ways of Using Brush),⁹⁴ another example of the flourishing literature on calligraphy that accelerated its growth and contributed to its becoming a major art form.

The aesthetic principles formulated by these critics paralleled the Buddhist philosophy of “rhythm and order.” More specifically, these principles inform the rules for creating the best strokes and shaping characters particularly in writing *kaishu*, standard

⁹⁰ Besides sections 1,2,3, and 12 listed above, other sections 4–11 are: *shuodian* 說點, *chuge* 處戈, *jianzhuang* 健壯, *jiaowu* 教悟, *guanxing* 觀行, *kaiyao* 開要, *jiezhi* 節制, *chalun* 察論. For the complete treatise, see Wang Xizhi, *Bi shi lun – shier zhang*, in LDSF 29–36.

⁹¹ Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (i.e. Liang Wudi), *Quan Zhong You shufa shier yi*, in LDSF 78.

⁹² Ouyang Xun, *Ba jue*, in LDSF 98.

⁹³ Ouyang Xun, *Sanshiliu fa*, in LDSF 99.

⁹⁴ Zhang Huaiguan, *Lun yong bi shifa*, in LDSF 216.

script, which has become the most popular calligraphic script from the Tang dynasty onward. The clear, precise, and easy to read *kaishu* was the primary script used for the Buddhist stele inscriptions and sutra reproduction in the Tang dynasty. As instructions for producing calligraphy were made easy to follow, more people could participate in writing, reading, and appreciating calligraphy. Consequently, calligraphy became more attractive to Buddhist practitioners and members of Tang court alike, as an artistic form for disseminating their ideas, beliefs, and values.

CHAPTER 3 TANG COURT SPONSORSHIP ON CALLIGRAPHY

Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649), given name Li Shimin 李世民, was the second son of the Tang founder Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626).¹ Upon ascending the throne, he proclaimed his reign as “Zhenguan” 貞觀 (Correctly Inspected), during which the Tang imperial court was filled with eminent scholars and calligraphers including Ouyang Xun,² Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638),³ and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658),⁴ who were collectively known as the “Three Calligraphy Masters of the Early Tang Era.” Among them, Yu Shinan instructed Taizong in calligraphy and received the highest respect from him. Yu Shinan had studied calligraphy with Monk Zhiyong 智永 (fl. 600), a descendant of Wang Xizhi.⁵ Esteeming this student-teacher relationship, Taizong could legitimately claim to be in the direct lineage of Wang Xizhi.

¹ Li Shimin (599–649), was bestowed as the Prince Qin 秦 before he was enthroned on 626 as the second emperor of the Tang dynasty. For his life time promotion on art and literature, the posthumous Memorial title “Wen” 文 was added at his death on 649. Taizong’s official biography is in XTS 2.23–50. During his reign (627–649), China flourished economically and militarily. Taizong contrived the political harmony by tempering and adapting Buddhism along with Confucianism and Daoism. For Taizong’s ideological strategy on Buddhism, see Arthur Wright, “Tang Taizong and Buddhism,” 239–64. For the calligraphy’s development in Taizong’s court see Stephen J. Goldberg, “Court Calligraphy of the Early Tang Dynasty,” 189–237.

² Ouyang Xun’s biography is in XTS 198.5465–66.

³ Yu Shinan’s biography is in XTS 102.3969–73.

⁴ Chu Suiliang’s biography is in XTS 105.4024–29.

⁵ Zhiyong, a native of Kuaiji 會稽, born during the reign of Emperor Wudi of (Southern) Liang (502–549), was the seventh-generation descendant of Wang Xizhi, and became a monk during the Chen dynasty (557–589). Zhiyong is considered as one of the most diligent calligraphers in Chinese history. He spent thirty years writing the thousand characters in the forms of both standard and cursive scripts, known as *Zhiyong zhencao qian ziwén* 智永真草千字文 (Ziyong’s thousand-character composition in standard and cursive scripts), and eight hundred copies were made and distributed to the Buddhist monasteries of eastern China.

Emperor Taizong's Promotion of Wang Xizhi's Style

Taizong was a great admirer of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy. He wrote an influential commentary on Wang Xizhi's official biography in *Jin shu*, in which Taizong claimed that he had studied all calligraphers and their extant works since ancient time and concluded that Wang's skill was "superior to anyone before or after him."⁶ In addition, Taizong attempted to amass all the known writings by Wang Xizhi into the imperial collection and trained the best calligraphers in techniques that reproduced Wang's masterpieces.⁷ As original works gradually disappeared, the reproductions made at Taizong's command became the primary vehicles for reconstructing Wang Xizhi's style.

During Taizong's reign, three hundred years after Wang Xizhi's death, the issue of authentication arose. Taizong ordered a committee to examine the works in his imperial collection that were attributed to Wang Xizhi and to assess every single item. The committee was headed by Chu Suliang, who was said to be the only person able to tell originals from forgeries.⁸ At the orders of Taizong, Chu Suliang completed an official catalog, *Jin Youjun Wang Xizhi shumu* 晋右军王羲之書目 (List of Calligraphic Works by Wang Xizhi, General of the Right Army of the Jin dynasty).⁹ The catalog contains 269 items classified according to two types of scripts: standard and running.¹⁰ There are fourteen items, mounted as five scrolls, listed in the category of standard script. The

⁶ Li Shimin [Tang Taizong], *Wang Xizhi chuan lun*, in LDSF 121–22.

⁷ See section "Reproductions" in this chapter for further discussion on reproducing Wang Xizhi's work.

⁸ XTS 105.4024.

⁹ Chu Suliang, *Jin Youjun Wang Xizhi shumu*, in FSYL 3.88–100. See also Wei Shu, *Tangchao xushu lu*, in FSYL 4.163.

¹⁰ This number count is mine. Lothar Ledderose's count is "266," see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 28; Amy McNair's is "360 plus 14," see Amy McNair, "Fa shu yao lu," 77.

rest, mounted as fifty-eight scrolls, are in the category of running script. A title or brief note is given for each scroll, and underneath there is information on each item's number of lines and for whom it was written. The first item in the category of standard script is the *Yue Yi lun* 樂毅論 (Eulogy on General Yue Yi),¹¹ while the first running script is the *Lanting ji xu*. That arrangement was possibly an indication of the emperor's personal favorites.¹² Including *Yue Yi* and *Lanting*, about thirty items still can be identified, in various later collections of rubbings or in handwritten copies.¹³

Taizong also had a small seal cut with two characters, *Zhenguan*, to represent his reign. The seal, inscribed with Taizong's own calligraphy, was impressed at the beginning and the end of each scroll. This was probably the first time that a seal had been used to authenticate an art work. Since then it has become standard practice to place an official seal(s) on objects belonging to imperial collections, and the seals of the Tang imperial collection have been much venerated by later connoisseurs.¹⁴ Chu Suiliang had total authority in matters of authenticating Wang Xizhi's work; as a result, he played a decisive role in shaping the legacy of Wang Xizhi. A more detailed study of Chu Suiliang and his calligraphy follows later in this chapter and also in Chapter 4.

It is not surprising that Taizong himself emulated Wang Xizhi in his own handwriting. Two extant and dependable works by Taizong's hand are *Jinci ming* 晉祠銘 (The Inscription for the Ancestor Hall of Jin) dated 646 (fig. 4) and *Wenquan ming* 溫

¹¹ Yue Yi was a famous warrior of the third century BCE. *An eulogy for Yue Yi* was composed by Xiahou Xuan 夏侯玄 (209–254).

¹² Amy McNair, "Fa shu yao lu," 77.

¹³ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 28, and n. 84.

¹⁴ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 26; see also Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, 1.216.

泉銘 (The Inscription for the Hot Spring) dated 648 (fig. 5). Both were engraved on stones. The stele of *Jinci ming* was erected in the *Jin* Temple of Taiyuan city in Shanxi Province and is still well preserved.¹⁵ The stele of *Wenquan ming* was unfortunately lost. From the time of the Song onward this work had been known only from the literature written about it, but at the beginning of the twentieth century a fragment of an ink rubbing of *Wenquan ming* was discovered in a Dunhuang cave.¹⁶

The inscription on the *Jinci ming* appears mostly in standard script, but some characters are written more freely, like running script. The fragmentary ink rubbing of the *Wenchuan ming* is composed of about four hundred characters in fifty lines, each line containing seven or eight characters, and exhibits Taizong's writing in a fluid running script reflecting Wang Xizhi's luminous style. *Wenquan ming* is further discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Promoted enthusiastically by Taizong and his court, Wang Xizhi's style was designated with such authority that it became an abiding tradition throughout the Tang dynasty and beyond. Lothar Ledderose first coined the term "Classical Tradition" in reference to the Wang Xizhi tradition that has been canonized since the Tang dynasty.¹⁷ He defines it as "the powerful artistic tradition that dominated the history of calligraphy."¹⁸ The term "classical tradition" has been widely adopted by Western

¹⁵ See *Jinci zhi ming bing xu: Tang Li Shimin zhuang bing shu*.

¹⁶ It is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; the item is numbered as P.4508.

¹⁷ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 7–44. See also Eugene Y. Wang, "The Taming of the Shrew: Wang Hsi-chih (303–361) and Calligraphic Gentrification in the Seventh Century," 132–73.

¹⁸ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 7.

scholars, while the Chinese equivalent is the “Wang Xizhi Tradition” or the “Two Wangs Tradition,” which refers to Wang Xizhi and his seventh son Wang Xianzhi.

The Ideological Formation of Tang Court Culture

Taizong’s infatuation with Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy also revealed a feature of the emperor’s political ideology, in addition to his personal aesthetic preferences.¹⁹ Since Taizong’s base was in the north, his promotion of Wang Xizhi, whose work represents the highly cultured aristocracy of south China, served as a symbol of his desire to facilitate national unification.²⁰

Taizong’s act of fostering a balance of power was, in fact, a continuation of the policy begun by his father, Li Yuan 李淵, the first Tang emperor Gaozu.²¹ A northerner and native of Longxi 隴西 (in modern Shaanxi Province), Gaozu understood that the unification of the country depended on acquiring support from the south by promoting southern culture and officials. He also established an institutional and political framework “to create a sense of continuity with the past.”²² The “past” referred to by Gaozu can most immediately be interpreted as the court of the Sui 隋 dynasty (581–617), in which he had served and held the high positions of Right Guard General and Grand Counselor-in-chief. Li Yuan was bestowed with the title of Prince of Tang before he usurped the throne of the last emperor of the Sui, Yangdi 楊帝 (r. 605–617). Yangdi,

¹⁹ Taizong’s political ideology see Denis Twitchett, “The Composition of the T’ang ruling class: new evidence from Tunhuang,” 51, and Stephen J. Goldberg, “Court Calligraphy of the Early Tang Dynasty,” 233.

²⁰ Robert E. Harris, Jr., ed., *The Embodied Images*, 96.

²¹ Gaozu’s official biography is in XTS 1.1–21.

²² Stephen J. Goldberg, “Court Calligraphy of the Early Tang Dynasty,” 195.

too, was very much in favor of selecting southern scholars to serve his court and used that policy to promote the country's unification.²³

The cultural interdependence that developed between south and north China can be traced back to the Period of Division during the sixth century. Southern elite arts, which included poetry, painting, and calligraphy, were superior to those in the kingdoms of Northern China, which were ruled by so-called “barbarians” whose native tongue was not Chinese. Overtime, northern rulers increasingly admired southern culture. Some southern poets, such as Yu Xin 庾信, were kidnapped and held hostage so that they could teach northern officials how to compose writings and improve the cultural achievements of their courts. In terms of religion, however, the exposure to and understanding of diverse Buddhist texts and teachings was more advanced in the north. This owed to the overland trade routes between northern China and Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, which were traveled by foreign missionaries. In fact, the monks who founded monasteries or preached in south China were often foreigners who were initially active in the north or were monks born in north China and trained by foreign dharma masters.²⁴

Gaozu and Taizong's act of institutionalizing a process of cultural signification can be seen as a continuity of pursuit that had been undertaken by the northern rulers for the explicit purpose of unification. Gaozu's direct “past” also included the highly cultural dynasties of the Eastern Jin and [Southern] Liang. *Shu Shu fu* 述書賦 (A History of

²³ *Sui shu* 3.60–62 and 32.908.

²⁴ In respect to religion and literary culture in the sixth century, see Alan K. Chan and Yuet-keung Lo, “Representing the Uncommon: Temple Visit Lyrics from the Liang to Sui Dynasties,” 189–222.

Calligraphy in Rhapsody Form) written by Dou Ji's 竇泉 (fl. 730–750) reveals Li Yuan's artistic and cultural inclinations:

When Mighty Tang received blessings from Heaven, it unified the whole universe and illuminated the gloomy world. Having settled the matter of military achievement and practiced civic virtues, Gaozu applied the technique of 'dragon claws' [implying the calligraphic technique by Wang Xizhi] to set forth his profound purviews. His heroic writings appeared divine, and they crowned the excellent model of the Liang.²⁵

The excellent "model of the Liang" is identified by Dou Meng 竇蒙 (fl. 730–750) in his annotation on *Shu Shu fu*, "[In calligraphy] Li Yuan imitated Wang Xizhi's technique but he actually took a renowned (Southern) Liang calligrapher, Wang Bao 王褒 (ca. 513–576) as his mentor."²⁶ The biography of Wang Bao tells us that he was a native of Langye in Linyi and the direct descendant of Wang Dao 王導 (276–339), a cousin of Wang Xizhi's father.²⁷ This teacher-student relationship with Wang Bao earned Gaozu the position of being designated as a legitimate follower of Wang Xizhi.

Among the scholar-officials from Sui Yangti's court who entered Gaozu's government, the most eminent calligraphers were the three southern scholars, Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan, and Chu Liang 褚亮 (fl. 575–630).²⁸ They collaborated during their

²⁵ Dou Ji, *Shu shu fu*, in FSYL 6.199.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Zhoushu* 41.746–47; see also in *Tong liu dian*, 768.

²⁸ Chu Liang's biography is in XTS 102.3975–76, see also THY 64.1114, 1115 and 1117 for Chu Liang's work and official involvement in the College of Literary Studies (*Wenxue guan*) and the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (*Hongwen guan*). Chu Liang is the father of Chu Suiliang who is considered as the most influential calligrapher in Taizong's era.

service to Sui Yangdi and became acquainted with Li Yuan, who had served at that time as one of Sui Yandi's military commanders.²⁹

After Li Yuan (Gaozu) was enthroned as the first emperor of the Tang, Ouyang Xun was appointed Grand Secretary of the Department of the Imperial Chancellery.³⁰ He was highly influential in his time and was asked to provide the calligraphic design for the currency Gaozu began minting in the seventh month of 621.³¹ According to the official Ouyang Xun's biography, his stunning brushstrokes had no parallel among his contemporaries: "Originally Ouyang Xun modeled his writing upon Wang Xizhi's calligraphy style. Later he excelled by not being afraid to take risks; hence his calligraphy became distinctive enough to be called the 'Ouyang style' and his writings were masterpieces to be used as models by others."³²

None of Ouyang's handwritings has survived,³³ but fortunately his calligraphy can be traced from the extant stone carvings inscribed by him. The well-known *Jiuchenggong Li quan ming* 九成宮醴泉銘 (Inscription on Sweet-water Spring at Jiucheng Palace) (fig. 6) was inscribed by Ouyang in 632, when he was already seventy-five. The inscription was written to commemorate the miraculous event of the discovery of a spring by Taizong at Jiucheng Palace. The characters are carefully rendered in standard script and extremely well proportioned in structure. The brush

²⁹ The traces of their collaboration can be found from their official biographies: Ouyang Xun's is in XTS 198.5645, Yu Shinan's is in XTS 102.9369, and Chu Liang's is in XTS 102.3976; see also Stephen Goldberg, "Court Calligraphy of the Early Tang Dynasty," 193–95.

³⁰ XTS 198.5645.

³¹ THY 89.1623.

³² XTS 198.5646.

³³ One running script manuscript, the *Zhang Han si lu* 張翰思鱸 (*Zhang Han Misses Perch*), now in the collection of Beijing Palace Museum, is attributed to Ouyang Xun, but its authenticity is debatable.

strokes are maneuvered with directional force, either vertical or horizontal, to create a visual weight with perfect equilibrium and coherence. These qualities were later incorporated into the essential characteristics of the Tang style of standard script.

Another traceable work of Ouyang is the rubbing of *Huadu si bei* 化度寺碑 (Stele of Huadu Monastery). The stele was erected in 631 to commemorate the establishment of the Huadu Monastery, but lost sometime in the Song dynasty, and early rubbings had not been available for modern scholars until a twelve-page fragment was discovered at Dunhuang. The writing is in a powerfully compelling standard script, disclosing Ouyang's involvement and contribution to both the fields of calligraphy and Buddhism. As an important Dunhuang discovery, the Huadu rubbing is further discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Young Prince Qin 秦王 (later emperor Taizong) Li Shimin, like his father and even more so, vigorously promoted art and literature.³⁴ In 621, the Prince founded the College of Literary Studies (*Wenxue guan* 文學館) in the west side of palace. He formed a group of eighteen scholar-officials, including Yu Shinan and Chu Liang, to serve as his council.³⁵ The Prince commanded the distinguished Tang painter Yan Liben 閻立本 (d. 673) to paint the portraits of those eighteen scholars, and asked Chu Liang to write a set of eulogies for them entitled *Shiba xueshi* 十八學士 (Eighteen Scholars). As described in the *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Laws and Institutions of the Tang dynasty), "These scholars were called upon everyday to discuss art and literature with the

³⁴ See above in this chapter n. 1.

³⁵ THY 64.1117.

Prince.”³⁶ It is evident that Taizong’s interest in calligraphy and art existed long before his ascension to the throne. During those years of being taught by the best scholars in the country, his passion for and participation in the arts was firmly established. As his political power increased, he continued to enlist his confidants Yu Shinan, Ouyang Xun, and Chu Liang for high official positions, and he continued this strategy after his ascent to the throne in 626.

Taizong’s expansion of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (*Hongwen guan* 弘文館) was one of his greatest cultural achievements.³⁷ The Institute commanded great prestige and attracted men of outstanding learning who discussed literature and politics with the emperor. One of the institute’s major missions was to teach the art of calligraphy to the sons of high officials in the capital. The *Tang huiyao* records:

Sons of the imperial family and sons of civil and military officials of the fifth rank and above who had the desire and talent to learn calligraphy were admitted to the Institute for the Advancement of Literature to study calligraphy. During the first year of the Zhenguan era (627), twenty four students were admitted and studied standard script under the guidance of Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun.³⁸

Taizong’s effort in promoting calligraphy is well defined in this paragraph. The students admitted to the Institute were taught standard script by Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun, so that they were proficient in the imperially codified standard script. These students became the forceful assets to pass down the Tang style of standard script.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The history and function of Hongwen guan can be seen in THY 64.1114–17 (written as 宏文館), and in XTS 47.1209–10 (written as 弘文館). *Hongwen guan*, previously named *Xiuwen guan* 修文館 and founded by Gaozu in 621, subordinate to the Secretariat and the Department of State Affairs, *Menxia sheng* 門下省. The name was changed in March of 626, during the last year of Gaozu’s reign. By September of that year when Taizong ascended the throne, *Hongwen guan* was soon expanded to correspond with Taizong’s promotion on the civility.

³⁸ THY 64.1115.

The Tang court also promoted proficiency through the School of Calligraphy (*Shuguan* 書館), which opened in 628. Established under the supervision of the Directorate of Education (*Guozijian* 國子監), the School was to provide calligraphic instruction to the sons of lower ranking officials (ranked eighth and below) and commoners.³⁹ Thirteen total members were admitted during that year.⁴⁰ The students in the *Shuguan* mingled with the students in other department of *Guozijian*, studying a wide range of subjects.⁴¹ For those students, trained either from the *Hongwen guan* or *Shuguan* but failed to pass the imperial examination, would most likely hired by the the government agencies to be clerk calligraphers whose responsibilities were to copy official documents and sometimes government-sanctioned Buddhist sutras, a development which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Among other measures adopted by Taizong to promote calligraphy, he included “skill in calligraphy” as one of the four criteria for selection to government office. “Fine and vigorous handwriting in standard script” (*kaifa qiumei* 楷法適美) became one of the prerequisites, along with physique (handsome and imposing), speech (good vocabulary and diction to debate), and composition (excellent and logical writing).⁴² This was the first time in history that good handwriting became an essential requirement for service in the government. To include good handwriting as one of the determinants of character indicates a belief that a person’s calligraphic skill reflects one’s inner being. In many

³⁹ XTS 48.1267: “八品以下及庶人子為生。”

⁴⁰ THY 66.1160.

⁴¹ XTS 48.1267–68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 45.1171.

cases, calligraphy could outrank other criteria in the selection process, because any composition that was not in good handwriting could immediately be eliminated. Consequently, the Tang court was filled with scholar-officials who were also good calligraphers.

The inclusion of calligraphy in the civil service examinations had a strong impact on the cultural environment. Calligraphy, once a recondite art of the elite class, became an attainable skill that the public could pursue. Practicing and mastering the brush became an important function of people's everyday life and a compulsory prerequisite to elevate one's status. This new cultural phenomenon was celebrated in Tang and Song literature. The Tang poet Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (d. 863) anthology *You yang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, a collection of prose essays recording numerous social phenomena that appeared in the mid-Tang period, includes the story like this: "Once in the middle of Dali 大曆 era (766–779), there was a beggar with no hands who was able to write by holding a brush with his foot. He was copying sutras to make a living. ... And [the quality of] the calligraphy produced by this beggar even exceeded that of the officials."⁴³ This story suggests that calligraphy was commonly practiced throughout the country. It also reveals the developing trend that calligraphy was no longer a privilege that belonged solely to the elite-officials; instead, diligent practice could allow anyone, even a beggar, to excel at calligraphy. Furthermore, it brings to our attention that a skillful calligrapher could make a living, such as copying sutras. Whether or not this story about the beggar is true, the fact that it was written by a Tang poet suggests that the practice of calligraphy was linked to changes in how the relationship between art and society was

⁴³ Duan Chengshi, *You yang zazu*, 5.34.

conceived at that time. That a beggar could be said to write calligraphy more beautifully than a government official indicated that aesthetic skill could, to a degree, transcend class hierarchies. Serving religious, political, and social ends alike, aesthetics could somewhat democratize relationships among them. The beggar, a person who would have been socially invisible, was rendered visible through his aesthetic skill, in this case writing calligraphy.

A similar line of thinking is indicated in a comprehensive calligraphy catalog compiled in the Song dynasty, the *Xuanhe Shupu* 宣和書譜 (Xuanhe Catalog of Calligraphy), that itemized Emperor Song Huizong's 宋徽宗 (r. 1101–1125) collection. The Catalog says, "Throughout three-hundred years of Tang history, not only were scholar-officials [of the Tang] excellent at calligraphy, but even the commoners (*buyi* 布衣) or servants like runners (*caoli* 皂隸) were capable of showing their calligraphic skills."⁴⁴ This new cultural phenomenon can be attributed to the early Tang court's vigorous promotion of the practice of calligraphy.

Taizong extended his personal aesthetic preference for calligraphy to establish a new and powerful cultural tradition. He used his authority to command the Wang Xizhi's style be the model for calligraphy as part of his strategy to culturally unify the new empire. This act taken for a political ideology, however, resulted in the great cultural accomplishment.

Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang

The early Tang court's success in promoting calligraphy and establishing its orthodox tradition was the cumulative effort of emperors and numerous scholar-officials. In

⁴⁴ *Xuanhe shupu*, 18.144.

addition to Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang made the most remarkable contributions.

Yu Shinan had established himself as Taizong's confidant since Taizong's youth. It is noted in Yu Shinan's biography that the emperor praised him for possessing five virtues—high morality, upright loyalty, broad scholarship, elegant literary composition, and excellent calligraphy.⁴⁵ At Taizong's request, Yu Shinan and other scholar officials carried out many important projects. For example, an inquiry into the merits and faults of previous rulers was composed in 631.⁴⁶ The next year, Yu Shinan was appointed Vice Director of the Imperial Library, where he and others examined and sorted out the calligraphy collection in the Inner Storehouse.⁴⁷ Yu Shinan died in 638 at age of 81 and was bestowed with the posthumous title “Wenyi” 文懿 (Admirable in Refinement).⁴⁸

Yu's sole extant stele inscription is the *Kongzi miaotang bei* 孔子廟堂碑 (Stele Dedicated to the Confucius Temple) (fig. 7), which now stands at Beilin in Xi'an. Originally erected between 628 and 630, it was destroyed shortly after its completion. The current stele is a copy engraved during the early Song dynasty, with the basic features of the original work retained. Zhang Huiguan once commented Yu in his well-known *Shudian* 書斷 (Critical Reviews on Calligraphy), stating that “Yu's style had a latent firmness seasoned by flexibility, just as an honorable man would refrain from

⁴⁵ XTS 102.3972: “帝每稱其五絕：一曰德行，二曰忠直，三曰博學，四曰文詞，五曰書翰。”

⁴⁶ THY 36.651.

⁴⁷ Stephen J. Goldberg, “Court Calligraphy of the Early Tang Dynasty,” 196; see also FSYL 4.163, and XTS 57.1450.

⁴⁸ XTS 102.3973.

showing his cutting edge.”⁴⁹ This description is apt for Yu’s inscription of the *Kongzi miaotang bei* because the characters seem written with only gentle brushstrokes and no force. It is said that Yu relied primarily on meditation, rather than imitation and practice, to guide his calligraphy.⁵⁰ Zhang Huiguan also pointed out that Yu Shinan carried on the tradition of Wang Xizhi’s “broad compass” (*honggui* 宏規), which absorbed the best qualities from various sources and adeptly employed different scripts.⁵¹

Both Yu and Ouyang taught at the Institute for the Advancement of Literature during the last decade of their lives. It is reasonable to assume that their writings, rendered with careful strokes and symmetrically constructed characters, were the models used to train young officials at the institute. The styles of Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun have often been compared, as they were extremely close in age and were both considered the most revered calligraphers of their generation. “Ouyang Xun’s calligraphy is like a brave general penetrating deep into the enemy’s position with an inevitable setback occasionally, while Yu Shinan’s is like a carefully chosen protocol official seldom making a slip of the tongue,” said Zhang Huiguan, who also concluded that Yu’s calligraphy was considered superior to that of Ouyang, because the ink and stroke from Ouyang’s calligraphy exposed sinews and bones, while Yu’s was like an honorable man who always refrained from showing his cutting edge.⁵² This passage

⁴⁹ Zhang Huiguan, *Shuduan*, in FSYL 8.286: “虞則內含剛柔，... 君子藏器，以虞為優。” The translation is modified from Zhu Guantian, “An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers,” 201.

⁵⁰ Zhu Guantian, *ibid.*, 200.

⁵¹ Zhang Huiguan, *Shuduan*, in FSYL 8.285: “其書得大令之宏規，含五方之正色，姿容秀出，... 行草之際，... 不亦宜乎。”

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.286: “歐若猛將深入，時或不利，虞若行人妙選，罕有失辭，” “歐則外露筋骨，虞則內含剛柔，君子藏器，以虞為優。” Translation is from Zhu Guantian, “An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers,” 200–01.

tells us that even though the pieces are written in the same form of the standard script, calligraphy written by two different hands may appear similar at glance, they can look very different when the details are scrutinized.

It should be noted that Yu Shinan was a devoted Buddhist. Several historical texts record a story about Taizong's dream of seeing Yu Shinan after his death. The story says, "Afterwards, knowing that his old friend had been a devout Buddhist, Taizong praised him in an edict and ordered that a maigre feast for 500 monks be held and a Buddhist image made for the spiritual benefit of his old friend."⁵³ Yu Shinan's Buddhist faith can be traced back to the time when Taizong was still the Prince of Qin. Using small standard script, Yu composed and wrote "Poxie lun xu" 破邪論序 (A Preface to the Discussion on Destroying Evil),⁵⁴ to promote the Buddhist monk Falin's *Poxie lun* 破邪論 (Discussion on Destroying Evil), which opposed Gaozu's anti-Buddhist program.⁵⁵ The above instance demonstrates how Yu Shinan could use his fame as a calligrapher to influence the court's religious policy; in this case, it was to support Buddhism.

So much did Taizong trust Yu Shinan's judgement and appreciate his talent personality, but when Yu was getting older, emperor was worried that after the death of Yu Shinan there would be no one with whom to discuss calligraphy. In 636, the minister Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) recommended Chu Suiliang, son of Chu Liang, to the emperor, saying, "When Chu Suiliang puts brush to paper, his writing is vigorous. He

⁵³ Arthur F. Wright, "T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism," 252–53, and n. 43; *Fozu tongji*, T 49.364c; *Quan Tang wen* 9.2b, in Datong shuju ed., 113; JTS 72.2571.

⁵⁴ A reproduction can be seen in Tseng Yu-ho Ecker, *Chinese Calligraphy*, pl. 10g; for Yu Shinan's preface, see T 52.474c–75a.

⁵⁵ Arthur F. Wright, "Tang Taizong and Buddhism," 246.

has succeeded in achieving Wang Yishao's [Xizhi's] style."⁵⁶ Chu Suiliang gained the Emperor's confidence immediately after Wei Zheng's recommendation. Soon after, "Chu Suiliang was summoned to serve as Court Calligrapher (*Shishu* 侍書) and placed in charge of the imperial collection."⁵⁷

Of all the eminent calligraphers at Taizong's court, Chu Suiliang played the most influential role. His calligraphic skill synthesized the styles of Wang Xizhi and Yu Shinan, and thus emanated gracefulness and elegance. Zhang Huaiguan elucidates Chu's style in his *Shudian*: "When he [Chu Suiliang] was young, he was fond of examining Yu [Shinan's calligraphy]. When he became older, he inherited the art of Youjun [Wang Xizhi]. Chu's *kaisu* [standard script] greatly captured the charm of Wang's style."⁵⁸ It is understandable, conceptually and in practice, that in order to measure up to Taizong's expectation, Chu was determined to exceed Yu in carrying on the Wang legacy.

Chu's ability to capture and express a meticulous rhythm in rendering brushstrokes and character structures positioned him as a more accomplished calligraphy master than Ouyang and Yu, according to Zhang Huaiguan:

[Chu's calligraphy] looks like a luxurious tower, with its windows reflecting the carved lattices of interlocked patterns in which springtime woods are visible in the far background; also like a beautiful woman whose radiance and suppleness does not rely on the embellishment of a silk gauze dress, a quality that was allegedly missing in the works of Ouyang and Yu."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ XTS 105.4024.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Zhang Huiguan, *Shu Duan*, in FSYL 8.286.

⁵⁹ Original text from Zhang Huiguan, *Shu Duan*, in FSYL 8.286: "若瑤臺青鑲，窗映春林，美人嬋娟，不任羅綺，增華綽約，歐虞謝之。" Translation is modified from Zhu Guantian, "An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers," 202.

Chu's style was also fully appreciated by the Song artist and critic Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074–1151), who praised Chu, "the most accomplished practitioner of [Wang] Xizhi's style. In his standard script (*zhen* 真) characters, there is official script (*li* 隸) method. He achieved his own style. No one can equal him."⁶⁰

Not all critics were enthusiastic about Chu's calligraphy. Li Sizhen 李嗣真 (d. 696), a near contemporary of Chu Suiliang, commented that "Chu was good at copying Wang Xizhi's work with abundant sculpture-like strokes... [They] lack naturalness, and represent a skill simply gained from diligent and strenuous training."⁶¹ A mid-Tang critic, Dou Ji 竇泉 (fl. 740–750), made a similar evaluation of Chu Suiliang's diligence, "dedicatedly proficient, and extremely restrained and prudent."⁶² Dou Ji, however, added a scathing remark: "perhaps [in some ways] it would be very much like a ridiculed painter who, in trying to sketch a tiger, ends up drawing a dog."⁶³ A comment like this may be considered prejudiced and should not be taken as a proper and conclusive judgment of this great master's entire career.

Chu Suiliang began to practice calligraphy at a very young age as his father, Chu Liang, was a renowned calligrapher, and his style gradually matured. Although no handwritten piece done by him has survived, Chu Suiliang's calligraphy style can be discerned from four engraved steles bearing inscriptions penned by him, which reveal the distinctive characteristics of his writing. It is also important to note that among these

⁶⁰ Ma Zonghuo, *Shulin zaojian*, 8.123b–24a, in Beijing, Wenwu, 1984 ed., 84.

⁶¹ Li Sizheng, *Shupin hou* (*Hou shupin* or *Shu hou pin*), in FSYL 3.107.

⁶² Dou Ji, *Shu shu fu*, in LDSF 255 and FSYL 3.201: "河南專精，克儉克勤。"

⁶³ *Ibid.*: "恐無成於畫虎，將有類於効噉。"

four steles, two are related to Buddhism and one to Daoism. *Yique Fokan bei* 伊闕佛龕碑 (Stele for Buddhist Shrine at Mount Yique), erected in 641, and *Meng fashi bei* 孟法師碑 (Epitaph for Daoist Priestess Meng), erected in 642, exemplify the early phase of Chu's style. A pair of steles inscribed with the *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu* 大唐三藏聖教序 (Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripiṭaka⁶⁴ of the Great Tang Dynasty) and *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu ji* 大唐三藏聖教序記 (Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripiṭaka of the Great Tang Dynasty) erected in 653, represent the most refined phase of his calligraphy.

Yique Fokan bei was originally engraved on the Longmen Cliff south of Luoyang. The stone was ruined long ago. Chu's writing may only be seen from rubbings made in the Song and Ming periods.⁶⁵ The original was written in standard script, with each dot and stroke clear and crisp. The slightly compressed square characters are filled with slender and wire-like brushwork, which can be said to match Li Sizhen's description of "sculpture-like strokes" (fig. 8).

The stone of *Meng fashi bei* has long been lost, but a piece of a rubbing made from the engraved inscription was passed down by the Qing collector Li Zonghan 李宗瀚 and now resides in the Collection of Mitsui Memorial Museum, Tokyo (fig. 9). The inscriptions of *Meng fashi bei* display brushwork and character structures that are

⁶⁴ Tripiṭaka, Sanskrit for "three baskets," is the earliest collection of Buddhist scripture, which can be found in many versions, while the oldest and most complete one is called the Pali Canon. Therefore Tripiṭaka is also known as the Pali Canon with an alternate spelling: Tipiṭaka in Pali. The three Baskets of the Law in Pali includes: the Vinaya-pitaka (pitaka means "basket" in Pali) containing the rules of communal life for monks and nuns; the Sutra-pitaka, a collection of sermons of the Buddha; and the Adhidharma-pitaka, which contains interpretations of analyses of Buddhist concepts.

⁶⁵ Zheng Fengming, *Chu Suliang shuxue zhi yanjiu*, 100.

similar to the ones on *Yique Fokan bei*. The strokes seem borrowed from Ouyang Xun (like the inscription of *Jiuchenggong Liquan ming*, see fig. 6) and the character structures appear to have come from Yu Shinan (like the inscription of *Kongsi miaotang bei*, see fig. 7).⁶⁶ Written in standard script, Chu's calligraphy on both the *Meng fashi* as well as the *Yique Fokan* reveal the early stage of Chu's style, which demonstrate a great sense of propriety that is flavored with vestiges of official script.

Among the extant engraved inscriptions attributed to Chu Suiliang, *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu* (the Preface) (fig. 10a), and the *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu ji* (the Notes to the Preface) (fig. 10b) are best-known. Dated 653 and signed by Chu Suiliang, the inscriptions demonstrate the artist's shift in stylistic allegiance. His strokes are slender and smooth, as he finally transforms the fluency and elegance of Wang Xizhi's style to his own brush with firmness and flexibility. As these engraved inscriptions embrace such a high degree of clarity, expressiveness, and vivacity, they became a guide to the standard script of the Tang dynasty, and since had created a lasting influence on the subsequent use of standard script in the history of Chinese calligraphy. On that account, Chu has been praised as the "leading teacher of all Tang times."⁶⁷ This recognition was extended by a modern specialist on Tang calligraphy, Zhu Guantian 朱關田, likewise acclaimed him: "We may therefore say that of the three early Tang masters, Chu Suiliang was the only one who blazed a new trail for the

⁶⁶ Various critiques on *Meng Fashi bei* are included in Zheng Fengming, *Chu Suiliang shuxue zhi yanjiu*, 103–107; also Huang Zongxi, *Chu Suiliang kaishu fengge yanjiu*, 78–83.

⁶⁷ Liu Xizai, *Shugai*, in LTSF 702: "褚遂良書為唐之廣大教化主."

development of the standard script of the Tang period. With a handsome, refined, energetic style, he subsequently influenced all Tang calligraphers.”⁶⁸

These steles with refined calligraphic inscription were originally made to commemorate Buddhist accomplishments; hence they imply a close relationship between Buddhism and calligraphy. A detailed study of these steles is included in Chapter 4. Further discussion of Chu’s influence, particularly on Buddhist sutra transcription, will be elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6.

Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang were the leading calligraphy masters of the early Tang dynasty and their works influenced the expansion of Buddhism. Well-transcribed inscriptions on Buddhist steles testify that Buddhism was accepted by the Tang imperial court and upheld by the literati. At the same time, the rubbings taken from these steles later became models for calligraphy practice, and their disseminations furthered the growth of both Buddhism and calligraphy. Stele inscriptions penned by Chu Suiliang, considered the best model for Tang *kai*, the authorized standard script promoted by the Tang court, became widely emulated.

Tang *kai*—Standard Script of the Tang Dynasty

Although *kaishu*, the standard script, emerged as early as the third century, it did not achieve its full maturity until the Tang dynasty. The style of standard script that was developed in the Tang court was termed by modern art historians as “the standard script of the Tang dynasty.”⁶⁹ The word “*kai*” means “model or pattern,” or something

⁶⁸ Zhu Guantian, “An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers,” 205.

⁶⁹ A term is used in general referring to the calligraphic form of standard script under the trend of Wang Xizhi’s expressive style, which was promoted by Taizong and then became the standardized script in the Tang. Some Chinese and Japanese scholars use the term Tang *kai* when referring this particular type of script. The following is my discovery of how the term, Tang *kai* was developed.

held up as a standard. *The Laws and Institutions of the Tang Dynasty* records that Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun taught and demonstrated the method of writing standard script (*kaifa* 楷法) at the Institute for the Advancement of Literature.⁷⁰ The mid-Tang critic Dou Ji also commented that the particular method (*fa* 法) to achieve the best kind of calligraphy was to undertake the style of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi and follow their styles faithfully.⁷¹ Song art critic used the phrase, “embracing the method of standard script” (*you kaifa* 有楷法) or “following the pattern of standard script” (*you kaize* 有楷則) in praising the calligraphic work produced in the Tang.⁷² Later a renowned Qin scholar and critic, Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) abbreviated the term, “it has the style of the Tang standard script” (*you Tang kaifa* 有唐楷法) to “Tang *ka*” (唐楷)—“the Tang’s standard script”— when it was used to describe the calligraphic style used on several Tang stone inscriptions.⁷³

This particular form of calligraphy in the Tang dynasty involves the form of script as well as the expressive style. Amy McNair describes it as “the imperially sanctioned early Tang version of the Wang Xizhi style of standard script,” which can also be characterized as the style used by the Tang sutra copyists.⁷⁴ The characters written in this style are generally well articulated yet fluent in brushstroke, and easy to write and pleasant to read. Modern scholars specializing in Dunhuang manuscripts often use the

⁷⁰ *Tang huiyao*, 64.1115: “教示楷法.”

⁷¹ Dou Ji, *Shu shu fu*, in LDSF 254: “風承羲獻，守法不二。”

⁷² Zhu Changwen, *Xu shuduan*, in LDSF 346.

⁷³ Weng Fanggang, *Suzhai Tang bei xuan*, 2–3.

⁷⁴ Amy McNair, “Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style,” 230.

term “Tang *kai*” when referring to the style used by sutra copyists.⁷⁵ Fujieda Akira employed the term Tang *kai*, as he classified the Dunhuang Buddhist manuscripts according to the various scripts used for copying.⁷⁶ The “Tang *kai*” named by Fujieda, however, was specific to a script of not only the Tang court promoted *kai* style but whose characters were reformed by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) during the reign of Taizong. That means, more precisely, “Tang *kai*” embodies both exemplary calligraphy during the Tang as the art of calligraphy, and correct writing in respect to orthography.⁷⁷ Since good calligraphy was a required element in the civil examination, it became necessary that the Tang court established a clear standard for stylish calligraphy as well as correctly written characters. With its precision, legibility, and formality, Tang *kai* was widely used for government documents, inscriptions on epitaphs or steles, and sutra copies.

The establishment of the Tang style of the standard script coincided with the early Tang imperial sponsorship of calligraphy and promotion of Wang Xizhi’s style. Tang *kai* often reflected the aesthetic expression of Wang Xizhi’s brushstrokes, combined with an earlier form of standard script which had evolved from *lishu* (official script). In the *List of Calligraphic Works of Wang Xizhi* compiled by Chu Suiliang, the first category of Wang’s works in the imperial collection is *zhengshu* 正書, which can be literally translated as the “correct or orthodox script.” Among the forty items included in this

⁷⁵ Jiao Mingchen, *Dunhuang xiejuan shufa yanjiu*, 120; Wo Xinghua, *Dunhuang shufa yishu*, 120; Shen Leping, *Dunhuang shufa zonglun*, 60.

⁷⁶ Fujieda Akira, “Chronological Classification of Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts,” 104.

⁷⁷ In respect of Tang orthography, see Li Haixia, “Tangdai de Zhengzi yundong,” and Shi Anchang, “Tangdai zhengzi xuegao.”

category, *Yue Yi lun* is listed as the first, which was transcribed by Wang Xizhi in the year of 348 and later became the foremost example of his standard script.⁷⁸

The authenticity of *Yue Yi*, however, was questioned as early as the fourth century, in the *Lun shu qi* 論書啟 (Essay on Discussions of Calligraphy) by Liang Wudi and Tao Hongjing.⁷⁹ The *Yue Yi lun* in Taizong's collection, inherited from the Imperial Collection of the Sui dynasty, had monk Zhi Yong's colophon, in which he praised its originality. The extant copies of *Yue Yi lun* are believed to be rubbings made after the Song, and the *Yuqing zai* 餘清齋 (ca. 1598–1614) version (fig. 11) is known as the earliest one from the Imperial Collection.

Chu Suiliang wrote an individual entry on this item, in which he said, "In the year of 639, under imperial order, Wang Xizhi's original *Yue Yi lun* was removed from the Imperial Storehouse for the purpose of making copies. Six copies were made by the skillfully trained copyist Feng Chengsu 馮承素 of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, and given to six high officials."⁸⁰ At the end of that entry Chu Suiliang concluded that in all six copies, "the strength of the brushstrokes is so refined and marvelous that they are thoroughly embedded with the principles of the [model] standard script."⁸¹ Due to its prominent position, this *Yue Yi lun* may be the best and most authentic work written in standard script by Wang Xizhi.

⁷⁸ See above, n. 11 in this chapter.

⁷⁹ FSYL 2.47.

⁸⁰ *Tang Chu Henan taben Yue Yi lun* (Record on the Copies of [Wang Xizhi's] *Yue Yi [lun]* by Chu Shiliang in the Tang dynasty), in FSYL 3.131–32; Chu Suiliang lists the persons who received those copies: Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (c. 600–659), Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648), Gao Shilian 高士廉 (577–647), Hou Junji 侯君集 (d. 643), Wei Zheng 魏徵, and Yang Shidao 楊師道 (fl. c. 627–650).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 132: "筆勢精妙，備盡楷則。"

We can see *Yue Yi lun* as an example of the *zhengshu* characters, which have a clear pattern of constituent brush strokes and are integrated into a perfect visual configuration that has a distinctive spatial rhythm and symmetry. “The calligraphy in this version is concentrated and elegant, but not sleek. The strokes are precisely executed, but still shaped in an individual way. In the composition of single characters and in the flow of the lines, one senses a lively rhythm,” writes Lothar Ledderose in describing the version of the *Yue Yi lun* made from *Yuqing zhai*’s rubbing.⁸² From the early Tang onward, this type of writing—elegant, precise, and full of rhythm—has become the prime model for calligraphy. It was strenuously promoted in the capital and then as the standard script of the entire country.

The Wang style of standard script, a codified calligraphic script in the Tang, is as the combination of Wang Xizhi’s rhythmic linear regularity and his self-expressive brush strokes. Amy McNair offers a further elaboration; using Wang Xizhi’s *Yue Yi lun* as an example, she points out three distinctive traits: “character compositions that fan out to the right, sharply pointed strokes made with the exposed brushtip technique, and highly modulated, bottom-heavy final strokes.”⁸³ She also argues that regardless of the aesthetic qualities of calligraphic styles, other factors are just as important for this particular style widely used as the standard script of the Tang: “These factors include characterology and public values of orthodoxy, formality, and the authority of antique models.”⁸⁴ She utilizes the inscriptions on three Buddhist steles as examples, the *Epitaph for the Esoteric Buddhist Monk Amoghavajra (705-774)*, inscribed by the high

⁸² Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 70.

⁸³ Amy McNair, “Public Value in Calligraphy and Orthography in the Tang Dynasty,” 269.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

official Xu Hao 徐浩 (703-782),⁸⁵ the *Stele of Prabhūtaratna Pagoda*, inscribed by Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709-785),⁸⁶ as well as the famous stele of the *Preface and the Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings*. Three of these steles can be seen at the Forest (Museum) of Steles (Beilin 碑林) in modern Xi'an.⁸⁷ Their carved inscriptions have been praised for their rich and charming strokes and characters. The clear and formal precision of the characters written in the standard script of the Tang conveys authority.

The Tang standard script was also a model script for most of the manuscripts produced during the Tang time, including numerous Buddhist manuscripts discovered at Dunhuang. Called “Tang *kai*” by Fujieda Akira, and “kaishu” by Liu Tao,⁸⁸ it is the dominant type of script found in Dunhuang religious manuscripts. The Tang Buddhist sutra copying style was closely tied to the use of Tang *kai* and will be further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

⁸⁵ Also known as the *Stele in Memory of Monk Guangzhi sanzang* (*Guangzhi sanzang heshang bei* 廣智三藏和尚碑 or *Bukong heshang bei* 不空和尚碑). Erected in 781, the stele was made in memory of monk Bukong sanzang (d. 775?), who was originally from Turfan and the leading patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism during the Tang. One of his main disciples was Huiguo 惠果 (746–805) who then became the teacher of the Japanese monk Kukai (774–835). Later Kukai became the founder of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. The stele was inscribed with about 900 characters in a stone of 305x99 cm. For more details, see Li Yuzheng, ed., *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, 158–59. The calligrapher Xu Hao's biography is in XTS 160.4965.

⁸⁶ Also known as *Stele of Commemorating Duobao Pagoda* (*Duobao ta ganying bei* 多寶塔感應碑). Erected in 752, the stele was established to commemorate Chan Master Chujin 楚金 (fl. 740–760) as the founder of Duobao Pagoda; it has more than 2000 characters on a large stone in size of 285x102 cm. For more details, see Li Yuzheng, ed., *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, 138–40. The calligrapher Yan Zhenqing's biography is in XTS 192.5529–32.

⁸⁷ The Forest of Stele (Beilin) is the museum of steles, located in the center city of modern Xi'an. Established in 1090 during the Northern Song dynasty, the collection now includes steles from the Han to Ming and Qing dynasties, in total more than 2300 pieces with about 1100 pieces on display. Also known as the “Treasury of the Stele,” it is the first museum of steles in China. It contains more steles than any other stele museums. For a complete catalog of Xi'an Beilin collection, see Li Yuzheng, ed., *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*.

⁸⁸ Liu Tao, “Dunhuang Shufa,” 273–74.

The evolution of various scripts has been debated among calligraphy theoreticians throughout history. The “Wang style of standard script in the Tang” is a term used to distinguish it from the type of standard script developed many centuries earlier as a refinement of official script (*lishu*); in this style, the characters are strictly linear in form but the brush strokes are modulated. For instance, Weng Fanggang characterized Chu Suiliang’s inscription on *Yique Fokan bei* as “a work of Tang *kai* with the usage of standards of *lishu*.”⁸⁹ This judgment most likely derived from the characteristically swift and startling sweep of brushstrokes closely associated with typical official script that appeared in Chu Suiliang’s early work.

The precise time of origin of the standard script is still uncertain. Among the older texts that have studied the development of scripts, the *Shupu* 書譜 (*Treatise on Calligraphy*), completed in 687 by Sun Guoting, divides the early evolution of calligraphy into two major groups, *lishu* (official script) and *caoshu* (cursive script). Sun Guoting assigned the position of leading *lishu* calligrapher to Zhong You, *caoshu* to Zhang Zhi, and credited Wang Xizhi and his son Wang Xianzhi for later synthesizing these two styles.⁹⁰ However, there was no particular term given to this synthesized script in Sun’s treatise, and later art historians have often designated Zhong You as the leading master of the standard script tradition, as the standard script is seen as an extension developed from *lishu*.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Weng Fanggang, *Suzhai Tang bei xuan*, 3.

⁹⁰ Sun Guoting, *Shupu*, in LTSF 124.

⁹¹ A thorough study on Zhong You, see Hui-liang J. Chu, *The Zhong You (151-230) Tradition: a pivotal development in Song Calligraphy*.

The modern scholar Cornelius Chang, in his study of script evolution, characterizes the standard script as that “in which the initial and terminal accents basic to the structure of the script appear in the horizontal and vertical strokes.” Thus he designates a few characters written at the top of a tablet discovered at Niya 尼雅, Xinjiang (northwest China), together with fifty wooden strips, as examples of the early standard script. Two of the wooden strips date from 269.⁹² Furthermore, he indicates that the fully developed standard script may be found in an inscription on a fragment of a Buddhist sutra, *Chishi jing*, which was unearthed in Turfan and dated 449.⁹³ The style of writing on *Chishi jing* is described by Chang: “In this inscription the initial and terminal *kaishu* accents of the horizontal and verticals as well as the bent, upper-right strokes are unmistakably clear and are effortlessly executed.”⁹⁴ His description echoes the comments by Lothar Ledderose, in another *kaishu* example that was unearthed from Turfan.⁹⁵

Chishi jing offers a good comparison to another early handwritten Buddhist sutra, *Da zhi du lun*, signed by An Hongsong 安弘嵩 (fl. 400-430), a native of Turfan.⁹⁶ Now in the collection of the Beijing Palace Museum, this valuable piece of an early handwritten

⁹² Cornelius P. Chang, “A Re-evaluation of the Development of Hsing-su Style in the Fourth Century AD,” 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, fig. 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁵ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 9. The discovered fragment is given a date 479 and now kept in East Berlin. The *Chishijing* fragment, mentioned in Cornelius P. Chang’s “A Re-evaluation,” is now in the Shodo Museum, Tokyo.

⁹⁶ An Hongsong, was originally from Turfan and later moved to the territory of Northern Liang (397–439), a state during the Sixteen Kingdoms period.

sutra is included in Shi Anchang's *Calligraphy of the Jin, Tang and Five Dynasties*.⁹⁷

The script is designated as “official-standard” (*likai ti* 隸楷體) by Shi Anchang, who attributed this piece of non-dated work to a period as early as the late fourth and early fifth century.⁹⁸

Two sixth-century handwritten manuscripts are included in Shi Anchang's catalog. One is a copy of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, transcribed by an official sutra copyist of the Northern Wei (386–533), Cao Fashou 曹法壽, signed and dated 513 (the second year of Yanchang 延昌).⁹⁹ The second is a copy of the *Nirvana Sutra*, with a date of 573 (the second year of Jiande 建德 of the Northern Zhou dynasty, 557–581).¹⁰⁰ Both of these handwritten sutras are written in standard script.

A type of calligraphy very similar to these Buddhist sutras can also be found in stone engravings. The best examples are the well-known *Epitaph for Zhang Xuan* (*Zhang Xuan muzhi* 張玄墓誌) (fig. 12) of the Northern Wei dynasty, dated 531, and the *Epitaph for Zhu Dailin* (*Zhu Dailin muzhi* 朱岱林墓誌) (fig. 13) of the Northern Qi dynasty, dated 571. A calligrapher and art critic, He Shaoji 何紹基 (1799–1873), who once had a copy of the stone rubbing from the *Epitaph for Zhang Xuan*, commented about the style of calligraphy on the epitaph. He wrote, “By incorporating certain seal and official script elements into standard script, [the epitaph] has the merit of all three

⁹⁷ *Jin Tang Wudai shufa: the complete collection of treasures of the Palace Museum*, compiled by Shi Anchang, 144–48 (item 20).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149–51 (item 21).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 152–59 (item 22).

and seems to have expressed them to perfection.”¹⁰¹ The term “perfection” may very well imply the strength and refinement of brush strokes that constitute the most important quality in rendering a standard script. That quality of standard script is well portrayed in the inscription of the *Epitaph for Zhu Dailin*, as every stroke of each character “was executed with great force.”¹⁰²

The above examples illustrate important contributions to the development of calligraphy in the North with extensive use of standard script in handwriting and stone inscriptions. Their style of standard script, however, is one where the horizontal strokes are level and the structure of characters is expansive and sprawling. This type of calligraphic expression appears rather unlike the taste that developed in the South, where a different cultural climate created a contrasting style of calligraphy.

The educated elite of the South elevated calligraphy to an art form that was widely practiced and collected. Theoretical literature and critiques of calligraphy also began to be produced. Southern calligraphers were familiar with various types of scripts and interested in experimenting with heterogeneous theories, and strove to be inventively creative. Among the best representatives of southern calligraphy were Wang Xizhi and his followers. In their standard script, the horizontal strokes were no longer evenly level. According to Wang Xizhi, “If both horizontal and vertical [strokes] are evenly rendered, they would be as stiff as an abacus. When the presentation appears level from top to

¹⁰¹ He Shaoji, *Dongzhou caotang shu lun*, 841. The translation is from Wang Yuchi, “Striving for Perfection amid Social Upheavals: Calligraphy during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties,” 184.

¹⁰² Wang Yuchi, *ibid.*

bottom and front to back, it is not calligraphy.”¹⁰³ The solution of how to break this distasteful evenness or levelness was provided in the section seven of Wang’s *Discussion of the Disposition of Brushstrokes in Twelve Sections*.¹⁰⁴ In teaching his son how to produce the best standard script, he said: “The right side of character should be relatively less refined than the left side. [In each character] the horizontal strokes should be thin, while the verticals should be made broader.”¹⁰⁵

Following these rules, characters in the form of standard script in the Wang’s writing were not expansive and sprawling like those produced by the Northern calligraphers. Instead, they look uneven and are often slanted upward in order to make the right side look larger than the left. In order to break artificial bilateral symmetry (as in seal script), the compositional structure of Wang-style characters appears to cluster on the left side and fan out to the right; this feature was later commonly described as “left tight, right loose.”¹⁰⁶ In order to exaggerate the unevenness, calligraphers often deliberately created a sharp-tipped beginning and round finishing strokes, and sometimes highly-modulated, top-light and bottom-heavy final strokes. The characteristics of this expressive type of standard script were very evident in Tang calligraphy.

Writing in the style of the standard script of Tang became a cultural standard within and outside the Tang court. Taizong’s promotion of Tang *kai* played a crucial role.

¹⁰³ Wang Xizhi, *Ti Weifuren bizhentu hou*, in FSYL 1.8: “若平直相似, 狀如算子, 上下方整, 前後齊平, 此不是書。”

¹⁰⁴ See section “Development in the Six Dynasties,” in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁵ Wang Xizhi, *Bi shi lun – shier zhang*, in LDSF 33: “右相復宜粗于左畔, 橫貴乎縴, 豎貴乎粗。”

¹⁰⁶ Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing’s Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*, 120.

In the court, the officials were proficient with the regulated style of Tang standard script, and students of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature and the School of Calligraphy diligently practiced the imperially sanctioned early Tang version of the Wang Xizhi style of standard script. Beyond the court, people in the country also imitated the designated standard script, because “Whatever is favored by the emperor is followed by those below.”¹⁰⁷ In standardizing and establishing Tang *kai* as “exemplary and correct writing,” Taizong not only conferred a high value upon on the style and form of calligraphy that infatuated him, but also produced a long-lasting impact on the development of calligraphy as Tang *kai* was widely used in the Tang and also adopted by later generations as the most common form of writing.

Reproductions

Copies of masterpieces were used as models for teaching and practicing. Their quality undoubtedly had a strong impact in turn on the quality of students’ output. Numerous historical documents state that Taizong employed specialists in his palace to reproduce Wang Xizhi’s works. In Chu Suiliang’s *Record on the Copies of Yue Yi lun*, Feng Chengsu is mentioned as one of these specialists.¹⁰⁸ Ho Yanzhi’s 何延之 (fl. 720) *Lanting ji* 蘭亭記 (Notes on Lanting) recorded the names of several more skilled copyists worked on *Lanting* in Taizong’s court.¹⁰⁹ These copyists were called “Rubbing Maker-Calligraphers” (*Tashu shou* 榻書手) and were under the supervision of Editing

¹⁰⁷ THY 65.1124: “上之所好，下必從之。”

¹⁰⁸ *Tang Chu Henan taben Yue Yi lun* (Record on the Copies of [Wang Xizhi’s] *Yue Yi [lun]* by Chu Shiliang in the Tang dynasty), in FSYL 3.131

¹⁰⁹ In *Lanting ji* (by Ho Yanzhi) listed several copy specialists who were trained to copy Wang Xizhi’s *Lanting xu*; besides Feng Chengsu, there were Zho Mo 趙模, Han Daozheng 韓道政, and Zhuge Zhen 諸葛貞. See *Lanting ji*, in FSYL 3.130: “帝[太宗]命供奉搨書人趙模，韓道政，馮承素，諸葛真等四人，各搨數本，以賜皇太子，諸王，近臣。”

Clerks (*Jiaoshu lang* 校書郎), who were appointed by the Institute of the Advancement of Literature to be in charge of comparing texts of government documents and other materials for accuracy, revising them and supervising their reproduction.¹¹⁰

The copyists were trained in techniques designed to produce the most precise copies. One method of making such copies was through tracing. First, a thin paper sheet was placed directly on top of the original. Each brush stroke was outlined and then filled in with ink to produce a faithful copy of the original. This tracing technique of “coupling the outline and filling in with ink” was given a name of “shuang gou tianmo 雙鉤填墨.”¹¹¹ The method of tracing was also known on its own as “mo” (摹 or 模), which was often used to reproduce Wang Xizhi’s work with great accuracy.¹¹² The copies made by this method were named *moben* (摹本 or 模本), including the copies made from *Yue Yi lun* and *Lanting xu*. They often were presented to officials, nobilities, or distributed to members of the imperial family.¹¹³ One of the best means used by Taizong to promote Wang Xizhi’s works was the production of the most accurate copies. Since these traced copies could intentionally or unintentionally be mistaken for the original, however, the problem of distinguishing copies from originals has become ubiquitous in the study of Chinese calligraphy.

¹¹⁰ XTS 47.1209–10.

¹¹¹ This technique was detailed in many publications. See Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 34–35: “*Shuang gou tianmo* is to first carefully trace the contours of the strokes in thin dry lines on a paper sheet which is laid over the original, and then meticulously filled in the space between the contours with tiny brushstrokes.” See also Robert E. Harris, Jr., “Copies, All the Way Down: Notes on the Early Transmission of Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi,” 181, and Yujiro Nakata, *Chugoku shoronshu*, 111 and 254.

¹¹² Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 35.

¹¹³ See above, n.108 and n.109.

Tracing was not the only method for making copies employed in the Tang court. Another method, known as “overlooking” (*lin* 臨), was to place the original and copy sheet side by side. The copies produced by this method were called free-hand copies, or *linben* (臨本). Although writing freely, the copyist was expected to produce characters that followed the model so closely that it looked just like the original. It is known that Taizong and Chu Suiliang copied many works of Wang Xizhi through the *lin* method.¹¹⁴ It is in no doubt that in order to create a good quality of free-hand copy, one must be an accomplished calligrapher.

In the study of calligraphy, one often encounters the challenge to investigate relationships between originals and copies, including how value—cultural, political, religious and aesthetic—was assigned to and circulated through various acts of writing and its reproduction. On one level, inscriptions on steles, and the rubbing made from steles as well, allow us to trace a master’s hand. This is particularly important because the Tang masters’ original handwritings perished long ago. From this perspective, the first question that arises is: what is the relationship between an original handwritten document, an engraving of that handwriting, a rubbing made from that engraving, and a copy produced by using that rubbing as model?

One could argue that the original document is the most valuable because it is closest to the source, the master’s hand. Yet Patricia Berger, describing the Qing emperors’ pleasure in copying the *Heart Sutra*, emphasizes a relationship of interdependence between originals and copies: “If the copy depends ultimately on its

¹¹⁴ Ho Yanshi, *Lanting ji*, in FSYL 3.126: “太宗以聽政之暇 ... 臨寫右軍真草書帖”; Li Sizhen, *Shupin hou*, in FSYL 3.107: “褚氏臨寫右軍, 亦為高足。”

model for its conception, the model depends just as much on the copy for its future.”¹¹⁵

In terms of valuation, then, it is important to note that the esteemed Chinese practice of calligraphy was taken up by Buddhists as a way to elevate the status of their faith. The act of calligraphic copying became linked, in the case of sutra reproduction, to the accumulation of merit. This in turn produced a demand for even more sutra copies, which ultimately contributed to the spread of Buddhism throughout China.

At the same time, the Tang court’s standardization of calligraphic script abetted the goals of both Buddhists and Tang court by increasing the accuracy and efficiency of copying. In addition, training programs offered by Buddhist monasteries and the Tang court-supported School of Calligraphy made it possible for a new class of non-elite calligraphers to make a living as copyists, in effect, their work propagated Tang culture and at the same time cultivated Buddhist proliferation. Thus the zealous calligraphic practices promoted by the Tang court and the Buddhist monasteries generated a dynamic reform in the early Tang society that may be linked to changes of Tang people’s conception of the relationship between art the society.

“At certain historical moments a text must have not only an aesthetic [expression] but also a political or religious function in order to be perceived aesthetically,” says Juri Lotman.¹¹⁶ No longer the sole prerogative of court elites or religious devotees, yet heavily endowed with political and religious functions, calligraphic copying eventually came to be perceived as an aesthetic skill worthy of recognition for its own value, which to some degree, democratized the relationship between art, politics, and society.

¹¹⁵ Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China*, 127.

¹¹⁶ Juri Lotman, *La structure du texte artistique*, translated from the Russian by Ronald Vroon, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 69.

Moreover, to the extent that calligraphy was an art form whose perpetuation through the ages depended greatly upon strategies of reproduction, it may be argued that copies and copyists were as valuable in many ways as originals and masters—if not more so.

CHAPTER 4 BUDDHIST STELES IN THE EARLY TANG DYNASTY

Buddhist Adaption of Chinese Steles

Buddhist steles are monumental stone slabs carved with images, text, or a combination of the two. In the tradition of Indian Buddhism, stones were carved exclusively with abundant images to illustrate spiritual teachings. In China, erecting steles had been a pervasive social and religious phenomenon, and their presentational form or design advanced through several stages of development. Erected flat stones can be dated back to the first century CE or even earlier. Functioning as symbolic monuments, with or without images, these early steles mainly served ritual purposes, perceived as the cultural norm.¹ By the later Han, this symbolic role became more pronounced as Confucianism came to cultural prominence, and the stones were often inscribed with revered texts such as the *Stone Classics*.² The Chinese term *bei* 碑 was coined at this time for these tablets which were carved with text and valued as literary and calligraphic artworks.³

During the Six Dynasties, when Buddhism was flourishing broadly in China, Buddhist steles were carved extensively with Buddhist narratives using images and inscriptions. These were “an independent Chinese Buddhist artistic idiom” and “the first truly synthetic style of Chinese Buddhist art,”⁴ from which one can discern how a foreign religion was adapted, transformed, and assimilated into Chinese culture and society.

¹ For the early development of Chinese stele, see Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 15–23.

² See section “Developments during the Han Dynasty,” in Chapter 2, and *ibid.*, 25.

³ Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

Carved images of Buddhist deities became less popular, as steles with more lengthy inscriptions and depictions of donors appeared more frequently.⁵

By the Sui and early Tang dynasties, Buddhist steles bore texts almost exclusively, indicating the efforts of Buddhists to incorporate Chinese cultural preferences into the religion's expressive practices. This gesture of cultural adaptation contributed to the proliferation of Buddhism and its widespread acceptance in China. Dorothy Wong underlines the significance of this change of presentational preference, which "signaled the full integration of Buddhism with Chinese society."⁶

Shifting to an emphasis on the written word over carved image, many of the large Buddhist steles engraved during the Tang dynasty are filled with texts. The most noticeable development at this time was that the calligrapher's name and his skillful presentation became a part of the form and function of a stele. This new phenomenon signaled a significant cultural change indicating a preference for the aesthetic presentation of calligraphy. For the first time, carved stones were no longer considered only as treasures for preserving important texts (a function important in itself), but also as a means for preserving the life of calligraphy as an aesthetic form. Stone surfaces became a primary medium for presenting calligraphy and, even more so, for exhibiting a specific style of calligraphy. As a consequence, the signature of the artist on the stone could be just as enduring and significant as the text.

Earlier steles erected in public places were not signed by artists responsible for the calligraphy. The question arises, then, of why this practice began during the Tang.

⁵ Ibid., 175–78.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

Taizong's promotion of a standardized script was probably a strong factor that influenced calligraphers who wished to identify themselves as masters of the style endorsed by the court. The desire of monasteries to publicize the allegiance of famous artists could be another factor. As the erection of any large Buddhist stele would need to be approved by the court, adding to the proposal the name of a famous artist who was also a high official increased the chance that it would be granted. Finally, the artists might have wanted to indicate their personal support for or devotion to Buddhism. Given the public location of steles, and the rubbings taken from them would carry the artist's name and work far from the site of the stone. Through the broad scope of this dissemination, critics, scholars, collectors, and other artists could appreciate the merits of the work. In turn, the value that accrued to an artist's name and reputation would then circulate back to the original stele, increasing its value, which, at the same time, served the interests of the Tang court and Buddhist monasteries alike.

Many existing Tang steles reflect this new development and the circulation of valuation it created. The *Daoyin fashi bei* 道因法師碑 (Stele of Master Daoyin) is famous because the inscription was penned by a well-known calligrapher, Ouyang Tong 歐陽通 (fl. 1650), the son of the leading calligraphy master Ouyang Xun.⁷ Likewise, the *Duobao ta ganying bei* 多寶塔感應碑 (Stele of Commemorating Duobao Pagoda) is a well-known piece due to the fact that it was penned and signed by a revered calligrapher, Yan Zhenqing.⁸ Another prominent stele, the *Guangzhi sanzang heshang*

⁷ The stele is a large stone slab (312x103cm), with about 2400 characters. It was erected in 662 to honor Monk Daoyin who assisted Xuanzang in translating the Buddhist text. More information about this stele can be found in Li Yuzheng ed., *Xi'an Beilin shufa Yishu*, 134–37. The calligrapher Ouyang Tong's biography is in XTS 198.5466.

⁸ See Chapter 3, n. 86.

bei 廣智三藏和尚碑 (the Stele in Memory of Monk Guangzhi sanzang) was transcribed by the highly respected calligrapher Xu Hao.⁹

Significant to my study is the fact that a large number of prominent Tang steles are related to Buddhism. Among the many steles erected during the early Tang that reflect strong religious and aesthetic preferences, the *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu* 大唐三藏聖教序 (Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripiṭaka of the Great Tang Dynasty), and the *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu ji* 大唐三藏聖教序記 (Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripiṭaka of the Great Tang Dynasty) are the most exemplary ones.

Steles of the *Da Tang Sanzang Shengjiao Xu* and the *Da Tang Sanzang Shengjiao Xu Ji*

A series of steles that bear inscriptions of the *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu* (the Preface) and the *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu ji* (the Notes to the Preface) are significant to this study for many reasons: the texts were composed by Emperor Taizong and the Crown Prince; they were engraved with the most refined calligraphy; and a number of steles were erected with the same text and placed in various locations within a relatively short period of time. They not only illustrated the Buddhists' adaptation of Chinese cultural norms and artistic expressions but also evidenced to the court's support of Buddhism and its acceptance among the Chinese cultural elite. In the course of mutual encounters and interactions, Buddhist involvement with Chinese culture enhanced the growth of their religion, while the Chinese adoption of Buddhism

⁹ See Chapter 3 n. 85.

opened up new intellectual and artistic horizons.¹⁰ Calligraphy was instrumental to the enhancement of both Buddhist religion and Chinese culture. This chapter illustrates how calligraphy was utilized by Buddhists to legitimize and spread their religion which also positioned Buddhism as integral to the development of Chinese calligraphy.

The *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu* was written in 648 by Emperor Taizong, as a eulogy commemorating the eminent monk Xuanzang's (602–664) historic pilgrimage to India and his accomplishments as a translator of Buddhist scriptures, and was placed as the “Preface” to the translated Buddhist text *Yogācāra-bhūmi*¹¹ by Xuanzang.¹² Soon thereafter, the Crown Prince Li Zhi 李治 (628–683)—the future Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650–683)—composed an essay known as *Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu ji*, in which the prince praises the teaching of Buddhism and his father's support for Xuanzang's translation project, known as the “Notes to the Preface.”

In 653, the two texts were penned in standard script by Chu Suiliang, the most revered calligrapher at that time. They were engraved onto two steles, and standing as a pair at the southern entrance of the Da Yan ta 大雁塔 (Great Goose Pagoda) at Da

¹⁰ Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 114.

¹¹ *Yogācāra-bhūmi*, is known as *Yujia shi tilun* 瑜伽師地論 in Chinese, see T 30.279a–882a. It is one of the basic treatises of the *Yogācāra* school (Faxiang zong 法相宗).

¹² Xuanzang (602–664) was one of the most famous Chinese Buddhist monks in history. He was also a scholar, traveler and translator who brought up the interaction between China and India during the early Tang period. Upon Taizong's request, Xuanzang recorded his seventeen years journey (629–645) as *Xiyu ji* 西域記. There are two modern English translations: Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (London, 1884) and Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, 2 vols. (London, 1904–5). In 688 Xuanzang's disciple, Huiji, compiled his biography, *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, (also in T 50.220c–280a), The translated versions in English include *Life of Hsuan-tsang* (1959), and *A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty* (1995) both translated by Li Rongxi.

Ci'en si 大慈恩寺 (Great Grace and Goodwill Monastery).¹³ Later they were named by their designated location as the steles of *Yanta shengjiao xu* 雁塔聖教序 (Preface to the Holy Teachings at Yanta) and *Yanta shengjiao xu ji* 雁塔聖教序記 (Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings at Yanta) (see fig. 10a and 10b).

In 672, the monk Huairen 懷仁 (fl. 645–675) completed a project that had the same imperial texts re-carved onto one stele, with characters selected from the calligraphies of Wang Xizhi in running script. This stele now stands at Beilin in Xi'an and it is commonly referred to as the *Ji Wang shengjiao xu bing ji* 集王聖教序并記 (Preface and the Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teaching with the Collected Wang's [calligraphies]) (fig. 14).

Two more steles were made with the same texts. One was intentionally made as a copy of Chu Suiliang's inscription and erected in Tongzhou 同州,¹⁴ where Chu served

¹³ THY 48.845: Ci'en Monastery, located at the Jinchang 晉昌 residential quarter to the south of the palace in Chang'an (modern Xi'an), was built in 648 under the decree of Crown Prince in honor of his mother, the deceased Empress Wende (601–636). See also *The Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*, 207–216: In the spring of 652 Emperor Gaozong supported Xuanzang's request to build a brick pagoda in Ci'en Monastery to store the translated scriptures preventing from fire disaster. The pagoda was built after the style the Western Region (i.e. India) like *stupa*. It had five storeys, 180 feet in height, including the Wheel Sign and the Dew Basin. From 701-704, during the ruling of Empress Wu Zetian had the pagoda rebuilt to a seven-story brick pagoda in the Chinese style. By the eighth century, during the reign of Zhongzong, the Pagoda was named the *Yanta* (Goose Pagoda). Another Goose Pagoda (smaller) was built later in the 8th century also in Xi'an. The pagodas were then respectively named the Great and the Small. A massive earthquake in 1675 heavily damaged the Great Goose Pagoda. It was extensively repaired in 1964. The Pagoda currently stands at a height of 64 m (210 ft) tall, in seven stories. The information about the original pagoda and early history, see *The Biography of the Tripiṭaka Mastery*, 226, and Wang Shu, *Xuzhou tiba*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 818a. The later changes see Tadashi Sekino and Daijo Tokiwa, *Shina bukkyo Shiseki* 1.9–23.

¹⁴ In modern Dali 大荔 county, Shaanxi Province.

as a Regional Inspector (*cishi* 刺史) from 650 to 653.¹⁵ It was moved to Beilin in 1974 and is known as the stele of *Tongzhou shengjiao xu bing ji* 同州聖教序并記 (Preface and the Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings at Tonzhou) (fig. 15).¹⁶ The second stele was erected in 663 and is located at Yanshi 偃師 County, near Luoyang, in modern Henan Province. Its text was transcribed in standard script by a skillful but lesser known calligrapher, Wang Xingman 王行滿.¹⁷ This stele is titled either the *Yanshi shengjiao xu bing ji* 偃師聖教序并記 (Preface and the Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings at Yanshi), which emphasizes the location, or the *Wang Xingman shengjiao xu bing ji* 王行滿聖教序并記 (Preface and the Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings by Wang Xingman) (fig. 16), which emphasizes the artist.

The following sections introduce the political and religious forces that inspired the composition of Taizong's *Preface* and the Prince's *Notes to the Preface*. Each stele will be discussed in detail, including its appearance, inscriptions, and the calligrapher. I will also discuss the importance of the inscriptions' reproduction and dissemination, as well as the political and religious implication on the erection of each stele.

¹⁵ XTS 3.53 & 3.55. Two famous Tang poets, Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) were respectively appointed and served as the Regional Inspector of Tongzhou during Wenzong's era (r. 827–840), see XTS 17.560, 160.4212.

¹⁶ For more details see Li Yuzheng ed., *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, 130.

¹⁷ Very little is known about Wang Xingman, as no information recorded in XTS or JTS. Wang Chang mentioned about Wang Xingman penned the *Han Liang bei* 韓良碑 (Stele of Han Liang) in Fuping 富平 County, Shaanxi Province, in his *Jinshi cuibian*, 49.24b, in *Shi ke shi liao xian bian*, 2.836. The new archaeological excavation discovered a stele called *Zhou Hu bei* 周護碑 (Stele of Zhou Hu) transcribed by Wang Xingman and erected in 658, but no rubbings made yet, see Shi Zhecun, ed., *Tangbei baixuan*, 82.

Taizong's *Preface* and Gaozong's *Notes to the Preface*

The exaltation of Buddhism in the Emperor's *Preface* and the Prince's *Notes to the Preface* was more likely part of a political strategy, in addition to an affirmation of personal religious conviction, under the Tang court's "three-way" ideology to balance the power of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism throughout the entire regime,¹⁸ Claiming direct descent from Laozi 老子 (the legendary founder of Daoism),¹⁹ through their surname Li 李, members of the Tang imperial family maintained close relations with Daoist priests.²⁰ Not all Tang emperors were enthusiastic supporters of Buddhism, and in fact Emperors Gaozu and Taizong tended to view Buddhism with disdain and tried to suppress it.²¹ Nevertheless, the Tang emperors also understood the potential political value of Buddhism's rapid growth. As a result, Buddhism not only survived, but went on to formulate doctrines that successfully propagated the religion throughout China and East Asia.²²

Emperor Taizong was well known for his ability to balance religious and political power. His interest in Buddhism was originally provoked by monk Xuanzang's

¹⁸ The "three-way ideology" has been widely discussed by modern scholars; see Wright and Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T'ang*, 14–25; see also Stephen J. Goldberg, "Court Calligraphy of the Early T'ang Dynasty," 230–34, and Arthur F. Wright, "T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism," 239–63.

¹⁹ Laozi was regarded as the founder of early philosophical Daoism (the religious Daoism was developed later). The earliest reliable reference (circa 100 BCE) to Laozi is found in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) by Sima Qian (ca. 145–86 BCE), in which Laozi was said to be a contemporary of Confucius (551–479 BCE), and his surname was Li 李, with given name Er (耳) or Dan (聃), served as an official in the imperial archives in the Zhou dynasty during the 6th century BCE.

²⁰ Li Yuan was persuaded by a Daoist priest, Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知, to believe that he (Li) was the recipient of the Heavenly Mandate to claim the throne. Biography of Wang Yuanzhi is in JTS 192.5125 and XTS 204.5804.

²¹ For details see Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang*, 5–7; also *Fo zu tong ji*, T 49.362c.

²² Stanley Weinstein, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism," 268: "the doctrinal side Buddhism [i.e. three major philosophical schools: Tiantai 天台, Faxiang 法相, and Huayan 華嚴] reached its highest level of development under this dynasty."

pilgrimage to India. Whereas other members of the elite class were impressed by the enormous number of Buddhist texts the monk brought back from India, Taizong was most intrigued by Xuanzang's account of the successes and failures of Tang policies throughout the lands in which he traveled.²³

Nevertheless, the historical documents evidenced that Taizong had been a strong patronage to Xuanzang's undertaking of translating Buddhist scriptures. For instance, in March of 645, Taizong offered the financial support to Xuanzang's translation project, including installing Xuanzang in the Hongfu 弘福 Temple near the imperial palace in Chang'an, and assembling a large staff to help him. The prime minister, Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579–648) was ordered to make the necessary arrangements to assist the project, including the services of “theory-provers, literary composers, calligraphy instructors, copyists, etc.,” (証義, 綴文, 筆受, 書手 等數) and no less than twenty three monks drawn from monasteries throughout China to collaborate with Xuanzang, among them many distinguished monks, such as Daoxuan 道宣, Xuanying 玄應 and Jingmai 靖邁.²⁴

In the summer of the twenty-second year of the Zhenguan era (648), Xuanzang had just completed his translation of a 100 volume set of the Buddhist text *Yogācāra-bhūmi* when he was summoned to the Yu Hua 玉華 Palace by Emperor Taizong.²⁵

²³ For more details see Arthur F. Wright, “T'ang and T'ai-tung and Buddhism,” 255.

²⁴ see T 50.253c–254a, see also *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 131, and *Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 179–80.

²⁵ *Yuhua* Palace was built by Taizong in 647 as a distant palace, located in the mountains to the north of the capital of Chang'an. In February of 648, Taizong was ailing and residing in the Yuhua Palace; he stayed until early summer after meeting Xuanzang. For the details of Yuhua Palace see THY 30.555–56. The details of Taizong and Xuanzang's meeting in the Yuhua Palace are recorded in *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 137–38.

Although Emperor Taizong had extended imperial support to Xuanzang's translation project and several meetings had taken place between them since Xuanzang's return to China in early 645, this meeting was the first time that the Emperor inspected the texts that Xuanzang had translated.²⁶ After examining the scriptures, Taizong praised the Buddhist doctrine and proclaimed, "Compared with the Buddhist teachings, Confucianism and Daoism, including all the nine schools of thought, are merely a small pond in contrast with the great sea."²⁷ He immediately ordered the authorities to instruct the copyists of the Imperial Secretariat to make copies of the translated scripture for circulation throughout the country so that "all the people in the whole land might receive the doctrines."²⁸

Upon Xuanzang's request, Taizong soon composed the 781 character of *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu* in his own hand.²⁹ The Emperor ordered his writing to be placed at the beginning of the translated Scripture as a preface and to be read aloud in the presence of all court officials.³⁰ The *Preface* begins with Taizong's high praise of Buddhism and glorification of Xuanzang's extraordinary journey and accomplishments.

²⁶ Details on the dates and places held for those meetings see *Da Tang Da Ci'en si SanZang fashi zhuan*, 127–45.

²⁷ Taizong's statement was recorded in *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 141; translation of statement is from *Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 194.

²⁸ *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 141. Translation is from *Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 194.

²⁹ According to *Xuanzang fashi xing zhuang* 玄奘法師行狀, in T 50.218a, the date was August 4th of 648.

³⁰ The event was recorded in *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 142, and also in *Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 195–96, "The Emperor moistened his brush with ink and completed in a short time a composition...He wrote it with his own hand and ordered it to be placed at the beginning of the various scriptures. The Emperor, [who was] staying at the Qingfu 慶福 Palace, attended and guarded by different officials, asked the Master to be seated and ordered Shangguan Yi 上官儀 (ca. 608–664), a scholar of the Institute for the Expansion of Culture, to read aloud the *preface* the emperor had composed in the presence of all the officials."

It concludes, “It is my hope that the circulation and distribution of this scripture will be as everlasting as the sun and moon, and that the far-reaching expanse of the blessings therein will share with Heaven and Earth an eternal greatness.”³¹ By considering Buddha’s words as eternal and describing Buddha’s blessings commensurate with Heaven and Earth, Taizong’s acknowledgement and praise of Buddhism was highly influential. The *Preface* composed by Taizong reveals the complex religious and political perception that contextualizes my study. I have translated the *Preface* and include it as part of my dissertation, the “Appendix C.” The text of the *Preface* has been translated by other scholars without or with few notes.³² I have furnished my own translation with extensive annotations in order to provide a fuller understanding of this important religious and historical statement.

Soon after reading his father’s *Preface*, the Crown Prince, Li Zhi, who was residing at the Chun gong 春宮 (Spring Palace), composed an essay in which he praised the wisdom of Buddhism and Xuanzang’s expedition, and further extolled his father’s support for Xuanzang’s translation project and the writing of the *Preface*.³³ The Prince’s essay is known as the *Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripitaka of the Great Tang* and contains 595 characters.

The exaltation of Xuanzang’s accomplishments and the hearty endorsement of Buddhism offered by these two literary compositions delivered a powerful message to

³¹ *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 143: “方冀茲經流施，將日月而無窮；斯福遐敷，與乾坤而永大。”

³² Li Rongi, trans., *A Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty* (1995), 196–99; Anthony Yu, trans., *Journey of the West*, 4.419–22.

³³ This event and the complete text of the *Notes to the Preface* are recorded in *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 142–43.

the Buddhist community. It became obvious that the Buddhist religion was not only accepted but highly esteemed by the imperial court. This recognition aroused great joy in Buddhist societies all over the country. Śramaṇa Yancong 釋彦琮 (fl. 650–688)

describes their delight:

Since the publication of the two holy prefaces [i.e. the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface*], the princes and dukes, the vassals and religious and lay persons, as well as the common people danced with delight in praise of the Voice of Virtue. Both inside and outside the palace, the people praised the two compositions, and in less than twelve days they were widely known throughout the empire....³⁴

Right after the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface* were composed, Abbot Yuanding 圓定 of the Hongfu 宏(弘)福 Monastery and some other monks in the capital sought a permanent form to preserve those valuable documents.³⁵ They requested permission to carve the texts on metal vessels or stone slabs, and reserve them in monasteries, which the Emperor granted.³⁶ “Later, the monk Huairen and some others of the [*Hongfu*] Monastery collected characters from among the calligraphies of Wang Xizhi, General of the Right Army of the Jin dynasty, and had them engraved on slabs,” as it is recorded in monk Huili’s biography of Xuanzang.³⁷

³⁴ See *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 148; translation is from *The Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 207.

³⁵ Hongfu monastery, located at the Xiude 修德 residential quarter of the palace in Chang'an, was made as a monastery in 634 by Taizong in honor of his deceased mother, Empress Mu 穆. It was re-named as Xingfu 興福 Monastery in 707, see THY 48.845 in which the name of monastery in Chinese is given as 宏福, but in *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, it is written as 弘福. Hongfu Monastery was where monk Xuanzang was residing and working on his translation projects from 645 to 648, see *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 131–58.

³⁶ *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 148.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; see also *Biography of the Tripitaka Mastery*, 207.

It is likely that Hui ren's project began immediately after the Emperor's approval, although no document indicates the exact starting time. In 672, more than two decades after the original text had been composed by the Emperor and the Prince, the project was eventually completed and a stele was erected.

Stele of *Ji Wang Xizhi Shengjiao Xu Bing Ji*

Engraved with characters selected from the calligraphies of Wang Xizhi, the stele containing Taizong's *Preface* and Gaozong's *Notes to the Preface* can be seen today at Beilin in Xi'an. It is commonly known as the *Ji Wang Xizhi shengjiao xu bing ji* 集王羲之聖教序并記 (the Preface and the Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teaching with the Collected Wang's [calligraphies]). The top of the stele is carved with seven Buddha-heads, hence this stele is sometimes referred to as the *Qifotou shengjiaobei* 七佛頭聖教碑 (Stele of Holy Teaching with Seven Buddha Heads).³⁸ It is 350 cm in height and 100 cm in width.³⁹ The body of the stele (*beishen* 碑身) is filled with inscriptions. There are 30 columns of text, each of which contains 83 to 84 characters. Each character is about 3.5 cm in width and 4 cm in height, which is well suited for a medium size calligraphy script. The complete text can be read clearly except for a few words in the upper middle part of the stele where a crack obliquely crosses the body.⁴⁰

³⁸ Li Yuzheng, *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, 54.

³⁹ The measurements are various in different sources. 350 cm. x 100 cm in Li Yuzheng, *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, 54; 9'4" x 4'2" is recorded in Wang Chang's, *Jinshi cuibian* 49.13 in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 2.831.

⁴⁰ It was already noticed and mentioned by Liu Shengmu, *Huan yu fang bei lu jiaokan ji*, 4.4, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 27.20125.

The stele begins with the title *Da Tang Sanzang shengjiao xu*. Next to the title, two important statements—“太宗文皇帝製 (Composed by Taizong, the Literary Emperor)”⁴¹ and “弘福寺沙門懷仁集晉右將軍王羲之書 (Monk Huairen in Hongfu Monastery collected the characters from the calligraphies of Wang Xizhi, General of the Right Army of the Jin dynasty [to engrave on this slab])”—are presented in one line. This statement of calligraphic authorship⁴² is followed by five individual bodies of text: the complete text of Taizong’s *Preface* (ten lines), *Taizong’s reply to Xuanzang’s gratitude letter* (one line), Gaozong’s *Notes to the Preface* (ten lines), *Gaizong’s reply to Xuanzang’s gratitude letter* (one line), and a paragraph from the *Heart Sutra* (five lines).

At the end of the main text, five high officials are credited with giving the translation of the sutra a proper elegance and finish. They are (1) Yu Zhining, Grand Mentor of the Heir Apparent, Imperial Secretary, East Sector of Chief Administrator, and Duke of Yan State (太子太傅尚書左僕射燕國公于志寧); (2) Lai Ji, Secretariat Director, and Dynasty-founding District Baron of Nanyang (中書令南陽縣開國男來濟); (3) Xu Jingzong, Minister of Rites, and Dynasty-founding District Baron of Gaoyang (禮部尚書高陽縣開國男許敬宗); (4) Xue Yuanchao, Acting Vice Director of the Chancellery, and East Sector of the Palace Cadets (守黃門侍郎兼左庶子薛元超); (5) Li Yifu, Acting Vice Director of the Secretariat, and West Sector of Palace Cadet (守中書侍郎兼右庶子李義府).

⁴¹ The posthumous Memorial title “Wen” 文 (literary) was bestowed to Taizong at his death on 649.

⁴² I use the term calligraphic authorship to denote the person transcribed the text. This person is different from the textual author, who composed the original text.

The last line of the inscription reads, “On the eighth day of the twelfth month in the third year of [Gaozong] Xianheng era [672], erected by the Buddhist priests in the capital; calligraphies engraved on the stone by civil official Gentleman-litterateur, Zhuge Shenli, and Commandant of Militant Cavalry, Zhu Jingzang (咸亨三年十二月八日京城法侶建立; 文林郎 諸葛神力 勒石 武騎尉 朱靜藏 鐫字).”⁴³

It may be assumed that an important project like this, which involved engraving characters from the collected calligraphies of Wang Xizhi, required the best possible engraver. Surprisingly, the only trace of information about the engraver emerges out of the very recent discovery of “Revised Family History of Zhuge clan” from Danyang Tapo 丹陽大泊 in Jiangsu 江蘇, which delineates Zhuge Shenli’s family history.⁴⁴ Zhuge Shenli was a descendant of the famous Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234), the Chancellor of Shu Han 蜀漢 during the Three Kingdom period (220-280), and was considered the most accomplished strategist of his era. Zhuge Shenli’s brother was Zhuge Zhen 諸葛真 who served in Taizong’s court and was trained as a specialist to study the masterpieces in the imperial collection. Along with other highly-trained copyists such as Feng Chengsu, Zho Mo, and Han Daozheng, Zhuge Zhen was responsible for tracing the famous Wang Xizhi’s *Langti xu*.⁴⁵ Zhuge Zhen later also served in Gaozong’s court, and in partnership with Feng Chengsu copied Wang Xizhi’s *Yue Yi lun*.⁴⁶ According to the

⁴³ In Chinese “Leshi 勒石” and “Xizi 鐫字” are synonyms, meaning to engrave characters into stones.

⁴⁴ *Jin Tang fashu mingji*, 66.

⁴⁵ Ho Yanzhi, *Lanting ji*, in FSYL 3.130: “帝[太宗]命供奉搨書人趙模, 韓道政, 馮承素, 諸葛真等四人, 各搨數本, 以賜皇太子, 諸王, 近臣.”

⁴⁶ Wu Pingyi, *Xushi fashu ji*, in FSYL 3.114: “至高宗, 又勒馮承素, 諸葛真搨樂毅論....”

Zhuge Clan History, Zhuge Zhen carried the official title Gentleman-litterateur (*wen linlang*, 文林郎).⁴⁷ It is very possible that Zhuge Shenli was serving the court in a capacity similar to his brother, and that was the title signed on the stele.

Even though the process of the afore named officials' finalizing and polishing the sutra's translation took place in 656, the first year of Gaozong's Xianqing 顯慶 era,⁴⁸ preparations to create the *Ji Wang* stele were most likely launched during Taizong's era. The officials who were involved with the task of polishing the sutra's translation named their titles on the stele with the ones appointed during the Zhenguan reign of Taizong and the early years of the Yonghui reign of Gaizong.⁴⁹

The Tang court and monastery probably had never ceased to support this project since it was intended to promote Wang Xizhi's style of calligraphy. The task took an excessively long time to complete probably due to inherent technical challenges. Prior to the *Ji Wang* stele, no stone had been engraved by assembling characters from various pieces written by a single calligrapher.⁵⁰ To complete a monumental task like

⁴⁷ *Jin Tang fashu mingji*, 66,

⁴⁸ JTS 191.5109: “顯慶元年 [656],高宗又令左僕射于志寧、侍中許敬宗、中書令來濟李義府杜正倫、黃門侍郎薛元超等，共潤色玄奘所定之經...”

⁴⁹ JTS 4.69: Yu Zhining 于志寧 was appointed as Imperial Secretary, East Sector of Chief Administrator (*shangshu cuopuye* 尚書左僕射) in the second year of Yonghui (651). JTS 4.75: Yu Zhining was added the title Grand Mentor of the Heir Apparent (*taizi taifu* 太子太傅) in the first year of Xianqing (656); JTS 4.47: Lai Ji 來濟 was appointed as Secretariat Director (*zhongshu ling* 中書令) in the sixth year of Yonghui (655); JTS 4.66 and 4.77: Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 was appointed as Ministry of Rites (*libu shangshu* 禮部尚書) before the the first year of Yonghui (650). JTS 4.77: Li Yifu 李義府 was promoted from Vice Director of the Secretariat (*zhongshu shilang* 中書侍郎) to Secretariat Director (*zhongshu ling* 中書令) in second year of Xianqing (657).

⁵⁰ After Huairen attempted to compile characters from Wang Xizhi to assemble the complete inscription of *Shengjiao xu*, there were 18 different stele made in the similar fashion, such as the Stele of Xinfu si (興福寺斷碑), the Stele of Tianzun the Daoist Priest (田尊師碑), the Stele of Diamond Sutra (金剛經), etc., see Zheng Congming, *Shilun Jizi shengjiaoxu de tishi tezheng*, 11, and Shi Zhicun, *Tangbei baixuan*, 116, for more steles made in that nature.

the production of the *Ji Wang* stele required immense effort to search for and select the most suitable characters needed for the composition. Aside from the challenge of collecting the characters from various pieces written by Wang Xizhi, the most difficult and intricate aspect of completing the stele must have been creating a homogeneous effect while integrating the various sizes of characters from the original hand. Special techniques were likely employed, such as using light-cast shadows to enlarge or reduce the original characters.⁵¹ To reconstruct the characters in the texts without having access to Wang's originals was also a significant challenge. The lost characters would have to be created either by interpolating them from partial fractions of Wang's writing, or by having someone to imitate Wang's work. In this case, the monk Huairen was the commonly acknowledged contributor.

There was a great deal of speculation about the difficulty of overcoming the obstacles to complete the *Ji Wang* stele. One of the most distinguished art critics of the Ming dynasty, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), even argued that the entire inscription on the *Ji Wang* stele was penned by Huairen, and Dong changed the commonly known title *Ji Wang Xizhi shengjiao xu* to *Huairen shengjiao xu* 懷仁聖教序 (Preface to the Holy Teaching with the calligraphy of Huairen). Dong's argument was based on the fact that during the Tang dynasty the rubbings from this stele were named *Xiao Wang Shu* 小王書 (Calligraphy of Small Wang or Calligraphy of Wang Junior), which suggested to him that the inscriptions were penned by Huairen.⁵² However, the later critic Wang Su 王澐 (1668-1743) disputed Dong's arguments. He declared that

⁵¹ Zheng Congming, *Shilun Jizi shengjiaoxu de tishi tezheng*, 11.

⁵² Dong Qichang, *Huachanshi suibi*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 3.1012a.

Huiren's calligraphy was not even one stroke the same as Wang's, on the basis of examining Huairen's colophon written at the end of a *Lanting tie*—a model book made out of Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu*.⁵³ Unfortunately, the particular version of the *Lanting tie* with Huairen's colophon is no longer available and, with no other trace of Huairen's writing, the argument of whether or not the *Ji Wang* stele was penned by Huairen is moot.

Many art historians and critics have attempted to trace the provenance of Huairen's work.⁵⁴ Most of them agree that Huiren's assemblage was based on the Tang imperial collection of Wang's works. A modern art historian, Zheng Congming 鄭聰明, even compares many of the individual characters carved on the stele of *Ji Wang* with the existing calligraphy models of Wang Xizhi made in later periods, such as *Lanting tie* 蘭亭帖, *Sangluan tie* 喪亂帖, *Pingan tie* 平安帖, and *Kuaixue shiqing tie* 快雪時晴帖.⁵⁵ According to Zheng, about 94 characters are attributed to these popular models, 69 of which originated from the most popular model, *Lanting tie*. But this comparison is not necessarily reliable, since there were numerous versions of the *Lanting* model books produced and Zheng did not specify which particular version he used. The time difference between the inscriptions on the *Ji Wang* stele and the characters in these later engraved model-books, even the best books from the Song dynasty (such as *Chunhua ge tie* 淳化閣帖, *Model Letters in the Imperial Archives Made in the Chunhua*

⁵³ Wang Shu, *Xuzhou tiba*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 8.818a.

⁵⁴ *Jin Tang fashu mingji*, 66; Nakata Yujiro, *Ō Gishi o chūshin to suru hōjō no kenkyū*, 268–69; Zheng Congming, *Shilun Jizi shengjiaoxu de tishi tezheng*, 22–152.

⁵⁵ Zheng Congming, *ibid.*, 139–52.

Era, produced in 992), means that the later books are further from the original source.⁵⁶

Therefore, the engraved inscriptions on the *Ji Wang* stele, assuming based on the selected pieces from early Tang imperial collection, have a much higher degree of authenticity.

The original intent of the monks from Hongfu monastery to create a monumental stele with Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was an acutely religious pursuit. Through Monk Huairen's effort, the *Ji Wang* stele became one of the most esteemed works in the history of calligraphy. The impact of this accomplishment is undoubtedly twofold: not only could court calligraphers practice calligraphy with rubbings from the *Ji Wang*, but sutra scribes also used these rubbings as the calligraphic sources of their copies.⁵⁷

Proportional to their monumental purpose, the characters inscribed on stones are usually much larger than the ones used for ordinary handwriting. From this perspective, the size of characters on the *Ji Wang* stele became an issue, since they had to be assembled and transformed from Wang's calligraphies. In order to accommodate the original characters from Wang's hand-writing, the characters appearing on the *Ji Wang* stele are relatively small (each 3.5 x 4 cm) in size compared with standard sized stone inscriptions.⁵⁸ To fill in the large surface space of the stone, other texts were added.

⁵⁶ For the original catalogue of Wang Xizhi's work in the Tang Imperial Collection, see *Tang Chu Suiliang Youjun shumū*, in FSYL, 3.88–100. Very few of these originals remained in later engraved model-letters compendia, such as the well known *Chunhua ge tie*. Shunkei Lijima compared the importance of the stele of *Ji Wang* with the popular *Chunhua ge tie* and claimed the time difference made the former one with much higher degree of authenticity than the latter one in reflecting the original style of Wang Xizhi. See Shunkei Lijima, *Ippi itchō Chūgoku-hi hōcho seika*, 6.[39].

⁵⁷ Han Guopan, "Bu Tianshou 'LunyuZhengshizhu' xieben he Tangdai de shufa," 444.

⁵⁸ Comparing with most of Tang inscribed steles, the size of characters in the *Ji Wang* appears smaller; however, it can be considered as the good dimension for a medium-sized model book for calligraphy practice.

This was likely the reason why a section of the *Heart Sutra* and correspondence between the emperors and Xuanzang were included.

The calligraphic value of the *Ji Wang* stele has been highly acclaimed in literary references from the Song dynasty onwards. The tributes include numerous well-known epigraphists who had either paid an actual visit to the famed stele or had read and/or owned rubbings taken from it.⁵⁹ Among them, Wang Chang's 王昶 (1725–1808) *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編 (Collective Writings on Stone Engravings) contains the most comprehensive information, which includes not only the author's observations about the stele but also other pertinent literary references and calligraphic critiques. The most sweeping appraisal is probably a statement made by Zhao Han 趙嘏 (fl. 1615–1620), a renowned specialist in the field of metal and stone inscriptions, who said, "This *bei* has been the model for calligraphy for hundreds of generations, and now it is even more so."⁶⁰ Indeed, the entire work appears to be from Wang Xizhi's own hand, as the inscription was assembled from the characters of Wang Xizhi's calligraphies. Since Wang's calligraphy was extremely valuable and rather scarce even in the early Tang period, the lengthy engraving, consisting of 1,904 characters, preserved Wang Xizhi's calligraphic tradition in the most comprehensive way. It offered the greatest repertoire of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy for those who are particularly fond of Wang's style.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Zhao Han, *Shimo juanhua*, 2.5b in *Shike shiliao congshu*, Yi bian, 7.; Gu Yanwu, *Jinshi wenzi ji*, 166–67; Qian Daxin, *Qianyan tang jinshi wen bawei*, 4.22–23, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 25.18787–88; Wang Chang, *Jinshi cuibian* 49.13–23, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 2.831–36; Sun Xingyan, *Huan yu fangbei lu*, 3.6, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 26.19880; Liu Shengmu, *Huan yu fang bei lu jiaokan ji*, 4–5, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 27.20215–6. Huang Bosi, *Dong guan yu lun*, 33b–34a; Wang Su, *Xuzhou tiba* in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 8.805a; Ye Changchi, *Yu shi*, 1.9, in Shanhai shudian 1986 printed ed, 12; Liu Xizai, *Yi gai*, 153–54.

⁶⁰ Zhao Han, *Shimo juanhua*, 2.5b, in *Shike shiliao congshu*, Yi bian, 7: “此碑為百代書法模楷，今時尤重。”

⁶¹ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 14.

It is reasonable to presume that Monk Huairen, a distant descendant of Wang Xizhi, attempted to assemble Wang's various calligraphies onto one stone so that the rubbings could be made and distributed as a model to promote Wang's calligraphy style. In fact, it stands as one of the first calligraphy model (tie 帖) to be cut into stone.⁶² As the Buddhist monasteries were supporting calligraphy education as vigorously as the court during the early Tang, it is possible that both court calligraphers and sutra copyists were using rubbings from the *Ji Wang* as model to learn the style highly promoted by the court.

The installation of this stele was an extraordinary cultural phenomenon at the time. The pursuit of cultural and aesthetic excellence demanded by the leading Buddhist monks who successfully erected a Buddhist stele with characters collected from the calligraphies of Wang Xizhi's work reflected the dynamic links between Buddhism and the promotion of Wang's calligraphic tradition during the early Tang. The stele also reveals Buddhism's acceptance by the Chinese cultural elite, who played a major role in influencing the development of Chinese calligraphy.

Steles of *Yanta Shengjiao Xu Bing Ji*

Additional steles were erected with the texts of the *Preface* and *Notes to the Preface*, as the vitality of the Buddhist community grew and much Buddhists understood the potency of these steles to the spread of their religion. A pair of steles of such, erected in the Great Goose Pagoda (Da Yan ta) at Ci'en Monastery is the well-known *Yanta shengjiao xu bing ji* 雁塔聖教序并記.

⁶² Ibid.

One of the pair is engraved with the text of the *Preface*; eight characters—大唐三藏聖教之序 (The Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripitaka of the Great Tang Dynasty)—are carved across the top of the stele in two columns (four characters on each) that run from right to left in official script.⁶³ The other one of the pair is with the text of the *Notes to the Preface*; another eight characters—大唐三藏聖教序記 (The Notes to the Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripitaka of the Great Tang Dynasty)—are aligned in two columns from left to right in seal script. Both steles are about 200 cm in height, but the width for the *Preface* is 85 cm and that for the *Notes to the Preface* is 110 cm.⁶⁴ The *Preface* has 21 columns of text. Each has a maximum length of 42 characters and runs from right to left. The *Notes to the Preface* has 20 columns with 40 characters maximum in each, running from left to right, which is unconventional. This reversal of form indicates that these two steles were carefully designed to be seen as a symmetrical pair. The characters on the *Notes* appear slightly bigger than the ones in the *Preface*. The texts of the two stones were transcribed by Chu Suiliang, the most revered calligrapher at his time, and carved by Wan Wenshao 萬文韶, a reputable Tang engraver.⁶⁵

When Chu Suiliang penned the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface*, he added the post colophon on each text respectively, with the date followed by his official titles and name. On the *Preface* it reads, “erected on the fifteenth day in the tenth month of

⁶³ As it across the top of stele also as the head of stele, it is named *guishou* 圭首, *guie* 圭額, or *beishou* 碑首.

⁶⁴ The measurement is cited from Song version of rubbing in the collection of Tokyo National Museum, while the size of two steles given by Wang Chang in his *Jinshi cuibian* is slightly wider (6'3" x 3'5").

⁶⁵ Huang Xifan, *Kebei xingming lu*, 247.

the fourth year of Yuanhui era [i.e. 653]), penned by Grand Councilor (*zhongshu lin* 中書令) Chu Suiliang.” On the *Notes to the Preface* it reads, “erected on the tenth day in the twelfth month of the fourth year of Yuanhui era [i.e. 653]), penned by Vice Director of the Imperial Secretariat (*Shangshu youpuye* 尚書右僕射), Supreme Pillar of State (*Shang zhuguo* 上柱國) and Dynasty-founding Duke of Henan (Henanjun kaiguogong 河南郡開國公) Chu Suiliang.”

Chu Suiliang had a long political career. He specifically included his official title, “appointed by Taizong,” at the end of the *Preface*, and all three of his official titles, “appointed by Gaozong,” at the end of the *Notes to the Preface*.⁶⁶ The engraving of all these titles publicized his high rank official positions. The completion of the inscriptions and the erection of these two steles reveal a complex and intricate relationship among politics, religion, and art production.

This pair of steles was originally erected at the Great Goose Pagoda at the Ci'en Monastery, and can still be seen there today. The *Preface* is positioned to the east and the *Notes to the Preface* to the west of the south entrance to the Pagoda.⁶⁷ Ci'en Monastery was begun in 648 by a decree of the Crown Prince, Li Zhi, who dedicated the structure to his deceased mother, Empress Wende (文德皇后), who was a

⁶⁶ Chu Suiliang was bestowed the appointment “Grand Councilor” (*zhongshu lin* 中書令) in 648 by Taizong and that was the last one among many other honors and titles Chu received from Taizong, see XTS 105.4028. When Prince Li Zhi was succeeded Taizong and enthroned as Gaozong in 649, Chu Suiliang was bestowed the appointment of Dynasty-founding Duke of Henan (河南郡公); soon later Chu Suiliang was disparaged to Tongzhou as Regional Inspector (Tongzhou *cishi* 同州刺史). By the third year of Yonghui era of Gaozong (652), Chu was called back to the court from Tongzhou and appointed the title Mister of Personnel (*Libu shangshu* 吏部尚書) followed by another title Vice Director of the Imperial Secretariat (*Shangshu youpuye* 尚書右僕射) appointed a year later in 653, see XTS 105.4028.

⁶⁷ With location designation of either the pagoda or the monastery, *Yanta Shengjiao xu bing ji* is also known *Ci'en Shengjiao xu bing ji*.

dedicated Buddhist. That decree was made shortly after the Crown Prince wrote the *Notes to the Preface*. He also ordered the construction of a separate house, Fanjing yuan 翻經院, as a place for Xuanzang to translate Buddhist scriptures. Xuanzang was asked to be in charge of the monastery as its abbot, but he turned down the offer. Not until after Taizong's death in 649, did Xuanzang finally take up residence in Fanjing yuan in order to engage himself exclusively in his translation work.⁶⁸

Three years later, in the spring of 652, Xuanzang decided to construct a stone pagoda in the style of the Western Region (i.e. India) by the main gate of the monastery. It was intended as a place to safely store the Buddhist scriptures and images he had brought back from the western countries. The plan was thoroughly supported by Gaozong. The pagoda was constructed with bricks in the Indian *stupa* style. Five stories tall and about 180 feet in height, it was situated in the west courtyard of the monastery. Monk Huili recorded this information in his biography of Xuanzang, which states: "On the top storey was a stone chamber with two slabs on the southern side, one inscribed with the *Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripitaka* composed by the late Emperor [i.e. Taizong], and the other one with the *Postscript* written by the reigning Emperor [i.e. Gaozong]. The inscriptions were engraved in the calligraphy of the Right Premier Chu Suiliang, the Duke of Henan."⁶⁹

The completion and erection of monumental steles like *Shenjjiao xu* was undoubtedly approved by Emperor Gaozong, but who or what was the force behind it was not clearly documented. It is reasonable to presume that Xuanzang, who was

⁶⁸ *The Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 207–216, 217, and 222.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

residing in Ci'en Monastery at that time, made the request. It is also possible that he asked for the best calligrapher, Chu Suiliang, to transcribe the text. Several instances recorded in Xuanzang's biography indicate that Chu Suiliang was a supporter of Xuanzang and Buddhism. When Xuanzang was summoned to Yuhua Palace in the summer of 648, Chu Suiliang accompanied Taizong. Afterwards, Chu and several other officials presented a long report to the Emperor, which began, "Your servants have heard that the Buddha's teaching is so profound and abstruse that it is beyond the comprehension of heavenly and human beings...."⁷⁰ This passage showed Chu's strong admiration for and faith in the Buddhist teachings. At the end of 648 (on the 23rd day of the 12th month), several Buddha images, both embroidered and painted, were moved from Hongfu Monastery to Ci'en Monastery. Chu Suiliang was ordered by the Emperor to receive and place them in the main hall.⁷¹ Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the steles containing the texts that praise Xuanzang and inscriptions transcribed by Chu Suiliang were eventually made and erected in Ci'en Monastery.

The exact date of the placement for the pair of steles is still debatable. The account that describes the placement of the steles in the pagoda falls into a chapter that records events happening between 652 and 654 in Xuanzang's biography. This time frame corresponds with the actual dates carved on the steles. There are other historical sources, however, that suggest an inconsistency regarding the date of the stele's dedication. *Jiu Tangshu*, compiled in the ninth century by Liu Xu (887–946) 劉昫, states

⁷⁰ Ibid., 194.

⁷¹ Ibid., 219.

“In 656 the engraved steles were sent to the *Ci'en* Monastery.”⁷² This is two to four years later than the date recorded in Xuanzang’s biography, compiled by Huili, and different from the dates carved on the stones. Nevertheless, the year 656 matches with the date recorded in another document, *Xu gaoseng chuan* 續高僧傳 (Sequel to the Biographies of Eminent Monks), compiled by the eminent monk Dao Xuan 道宣 (596–667).⁷³ Dao Xuan was a contemporary of Xuanzang and his dates are more likely to be correct. This was probably the reason why the *Jiu Tangshu*, an official Tang history, postulated that date.

This discrepancy in dating the famous steles may reflect the political turmoil that followed Taizong’s death. In the fall of 648, Chu Suiliang was chosen by Taizong to be the Grand Councilor, a position that required him to consult regularly with the Emperor and to participate in major governmental decisions.⁷⁴ The following spring, when Taizong was severely ill, he asked Chu Suiliang to assist the new emperor after his death. In the summer of 649 Gaozong ascended to the throne, and soon after that he made drastic changes in court personnels. Chu Suiliang was demoted from being Grand Councilor to a position as a Regional Inspector in a remote place Tongzhou in the eleventh month of the first year of Gaozong Yonghui era (650).⁷⁵ During the next two years, the country underwent several natural disasters. By the first month of the third year of the Yonghui era (652), Gaozong recalled Chu Suiliang back to the court

⁷² JTS 4.75: 永徽七年 顯慶元年, 夏四月戊申, 御安福門, 觀僧玄奘迎御製贈書慈恩寺碑文, 導從以天竺法儀, 其徒甚盛。

⁷³ T 50.457b, it records the event with the date 656.

⁷⁴ XTS 2.47, 105.4028.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.53, 105.4028, and JXS 4.68.

and bestowed upon him a high official appointment as a Minister of Personnel in the Secretariat (*libu shangshu* 吏部尚書). A year later (653), Chu Suiliang was promoted to the position of Vice Director of the Imperial Secretariat. In the tenth month of the same year, Chu penned Taizong's *Preface* and two months later he penned Gaozong's *Notes to the Preface*. The inscriptions on this pair of famous stele were Chu Suiliang's last dated work. Considering how much Chu was revered as the finest calligrapher at that time, it is possible that the idea of having Chu transcribe the famous texts by the Emperor and the Prince arose shortly after the texts were composed, but the political disturbance prevented that idea from materializing. It is understandable that Xuanzang and the monks from Ci'en Monastery would grasp this opportunity when Chu returned to the court.

One of the key figures behind this political turmoil was Wu Zhao 武曩, also known as Wu Zetian 武則天 (625–705), who at the time was Taizong's concubine. After Taizong's death, however, she became Gaozong's favorite concubine, which angered many Tang officials, including Chu Suiliang.⁷⁶ Chu's opposition resulted in his demotion to Tongzhou. Two years later, in 653, after he was recalled back to the court and promoted to a higher position, Chu transcribed the two famous texts. In 655, Gaozong intended to depose his empress, Wang. This plan was vigorously opposed by Chu, and in the ninth month of that year he was again condemned and sent to a remote county. This time he was sent to Tanzhou 潭州 (in modern Changsa, Hunan Province).⁷⁷ A month later, Wu Zhao was crowned as an empress by Gaozong. Due to Wu Zhao's

⁷⁶ XTS 4.81

⁷⁷ JTS 4.74–75, see also XTS 3.56 and 105.4028.

increased political clout, it is possible that the beautifully inscribed steles were not officially dedicated until 656, when Chu was finally sent away.

It is also reasonable, however, to presume that the final dedication of the steles was, in part, due to the effort of Wu Zhao, who was a devoted Buddhist. Her dedication to Buddhism may have equaled her political ambition.⁷⁸ Her contribution to Buddhism in general and Buddhist art in particular is well-known.⁷⁹ A recent study claims that Wu Zhao invented the printing process so that she could disseminate Buddha's words in as many ways as possible, in part for garnering religious merit.⁸⁰ Curiously, some of these printed messages were discovered in Korea and Japan, but none in China, a fact that might be attributed, once again, to political reasons; her opponents might have been trying to erase her achievements after her death.⁸¹

During the time period when China was governed by Empress Wu (r. 696–705), many Buddhist translation projects were initiated and accomplished under her order.⁸² In 700 Empress Wu summoned monk Yijing 義淨 (635–713),⁸³ to the East Palace and

⁷⁸ *Fozu tongji*, T 49.369b–371a; Jan Yunhua, trans., *A Chronicle of Buddhism in China*, 44–47; R.W.L. Guisso, *Wu Tse-t'ien and the Politics of Legitimation in T'ang China*.

⁷⁹ *Fozu tongji*, *ibid.*; R.W.L. Guisso, *ibid.*; Rong Xinjiang, *Tangdai zongjiao xinyang yu shehui*, 203–249.

⁸⁰ T. H. Barrett, *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*. 131.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 131–32.

⁸² *Fozu tongji*, T 49.369b–371a; *A Chronicle of Buddhism in China*, 44–47.

⁸³ Monk Yi Jing (635–713) was one of the well-known monks in Tang. He was an admirer of Monk Xuanzang, and became a monk at age 14 when Xuanzang finished his translation of a 100 volume set of the Buddhist text *Yogācāra-bhūmi* for Taizong. In his late 20's, Yi Jing began his journey to India, and studied in Srivijaya. In year 695, he returned back to Tang China at Luoyang, and received a grand welcome back by Empress Wu. His total journey took 25 years. He brought back some 400 Buddhist translated texts. 南海寄歸內法傳 (Account of Buddhism sent from the South Seas) and 大唐西域求法高僧傳 (Buddhist Monks Pilgrimage of Tang Dynasty) are two of Yi Jing's best travel diaries, describing his adventurous journey to Srivijaya and India. He translated more than 60 sutras into Chinese. Yi Jing's biography is in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 1–4.

commanded him to translate the *Sutra of the Most Honored King*; meanwhile Empress Wu composed a preface to the translation and named it *Sanzang shengjiao xu* 三藏聖教序.⁸⁴ It bears the same title as Tangzong's famous *Preface* to Xuanzang's translation, but different text. The complete text of the Empress' preface is recorded in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Complete Literatures of the Tang Dynasty).⁸⁵ The original writing was long considered lost, but a fragment of the handwritten copy of Empress Wu's *Preface* was among Dunhuang discoveries.⁸⁶

In the early eighth century, between 701 and 704, Empress Wu had the pagoda at Ci'en Monastery rebuilt as a seven-story structure with bricks in the Chinese style. During the reign of Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (705-709), the pagoda was named the Yan ta 雁塔 (Goose Pagoda). There was another, smaller Goose Pagoda built later in the eighth century, also in Xi'an. The earlier one was named the Great Goose Pagoda and the later one the Small Goose Pagoda. The two steles were at one point moved to the ground floor where they flanked the south entrance of the pagoda.

This pair of steles is well preserved. Because there are only few cuts or broken lines, many faultless rubbings can still be obtained. These rubbings have long been considered precious and collectable items, and have been used as models for calligraphy practice. A free-hand copy of the *Yanta* inscription, presumably using the

⁸⁴ T 49.370c.

⁸⁵ *Quan Tang wen*, 97.7–8, in Datong shuju (1979) ed., 1254.

⁸⁶ It is now housed in the Dunhuang collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3831).

Yanta version as a model, was among the discovered Dunhuang manuscripts (fig. 17).⁸⁷ This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Able to identify the authentic works of Wang Xizhi and to free-hand trace Wang's works, Chu was the best and most authoritative figure Taizong could employ to collect and promote Wang Xizhi's work. Unfortunately, none of the extant free-hand manuscripts that claim to be Chu's handwriting can be verified for originality and authenticity. The sole trace of Chu's authentic work lies in the inscriptions engraved on the stones. Among the few steles transcribed by Chu Suiliang, this pair of steles, the *Yanta shengjiaoxu bing ji*, is considered the best example of his work,⁸⁸ and is most likely the basis of Chu's designation as "the leading teacher of all Tang times."⁸⁹ Imbued with Wang Xizhi's rhythmic, linear regularity, and self-expressive strokes, Chu Suiliang's calligraphy exhibits the style, which has fully integrated the firmness of standard script and flexibility of running script. "Gentleness and fluidity showing through the powerful wrist," may very well describe Chu's work.⁹⁰ His style influenced the formation of Tang *kai*, the standard script of the Tang, which came to be used as model for generations to come.

The completion and erection of the *Yanta* stele, a masterpiece of calligraphic art, also satisfied political and religious agendas. For Buddhists, the *Yanta* was a symbol of

⁸⁷ Now it is housed in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2780). See Wo Xinghua, *Dunhuang shufa yishu*, 31, figs. 2–5. Also mentioned in *Shufa tiandi*, compiled by Ouyang Zhongshi, 220.

⁸⁸ Liang Zhangju, *Tuian suocang jinshi shuhua bawei*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 9.1011: "褚公所書各碑惟此最完好。"

⁸⁹ Liu Xizai, *Shugai*, in LTSF 702: "褚遂良書為唐之廣大教化主。"

⁹⁰ Zhu Guantianm "An epoch of Eminent Calligrapher," 204

their religious success. For the Tang court, it offered a worthy model for the standardized script.

Steles of *Tongzhou Shengjiao Xu* and *Yanshi Shengjiao Xu*

The aesthetic and cultural value of the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface* grew congruently along with their strong political and religious implications. Thus, it is not surprising that, in addition to the *Ji Wang* and *Yanta*, there are more steles engraved with the famous texts of the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface*. At least two other notable steles of this situation are known to us. One is the *Tongzhou shengjiao xu* 同州聖教序 (see fig. 15), which was originally erected in Tongzhou, Shaanxi Province, but was moved to Beilin in Xi'an in 1994. The other one is *Yanshi shengjiao xu* 偃師聖教序 (see fig. 16), currently housed in the Study Hall of Yanshi (偃師學宮). The stele was made upon a request by the monks from Zhaoti Monastery (招提寺) of Yanshi county in Henan Province, and it was probably erected in that Monastery first but at some point moved to the Study Hall.

The *Tongzhou* and *Yanshi* steles, comparatively speaking, have been less studied by modern scholars, mainly because *Ji Wang* and *Yanta* were valued for the calligraphies of famous hands, while the penmanship of *Tongzhou* is less certain and that of *Yanshi* is attributed to a less famed calligrapher. In addition to these four steles, there may have been one other that was penned by Chu Suiliang in a running script. This was briefly mentioned by a Qing scholar Wang Chang in his *Collective Writings on Stone Engravings*, but without a specific reference to its location.⁹¹ The stele is dated "the third year of Xianhong," which was 672. This piece of information lodges this stele

⁹¹ Wang Chang, *Jinshi Cuibian*, 49.20, in *Shi ke shi liao xin bian*, 834.

in a disputable situation, as Chu Suiliang had been dead for more than a decade by the year 672. Another epigraphist, Liang Zhangju 梁章詎 (1775-1849), not only mentions this stele in his *Compendium* but adds a striking comment, that "the running script of Chu Suiliang's calligraphy on this stele was the original model for Song Emperor Huizong's *shoujin ti* 瘦金體 (gold slender style)."⁹² Liang, too, confirms that "it had been long gone." In fact, whether it ever existed at all is still in question.

Stele of *Tongzhou shengjiao xu*

The stele of *Tongzhou* is a large stele, 414 cm in height and 113 cm in width.⁹³ It is now located in the Second Chamber of Beilin in Xi'an, where one also finds the stele of *Ji Wang*. The top (head) of the *Tongzhou* stele is carved with eight characters: 大唐三藏聖教之序 (Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripitaka of the Great Tang Dynasty) in official script, symmetrically placed into two columns that read from right to left. The body of the stele is filled with the texts of both the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface*, totaling close to 1,600 characters, written in standard script and engraved in grids of 29 columns and 58 horizontal rows.

The last two columns of the *Tongzhou* inscription have created confusion as they were inscribed as, "erected on the 23rd day in the 6th month of the third year of Longsuo era [i.e. 663]" (龍朔三年歲次癸亥六月癸未朔二三日乙巳建) on line one, and "Chu Suiliang penned when serving in Tongzhou" (褚遂良書在同州倅廳) on line two. Since

⁹² Liang Zhangju, *Tuian suocang jinshi shuhua bawei*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 9.1011

⁹³ The measurement is cited from Li Yuzheng's *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, but in Wang Chang's *Jinshi cuibian* 49.25, the measurement is 9'1" x 4'6".

Chu Suiliang died in the year 658,⁹⁴ the date 663 immediately puts the authorship in dispute. The artist's signature without an official title also contradicts the fashion at that time.

This *Tongzhou* stele has been commonly attributed as a replica of the famous *Yanta*. The superb quality of the *Tongzhou*, however, raises interesting questions. Those who praise the *Tongzhou* version often emphasize the clearness and the strength of the brushwork, and do not believe that *Tongzhou* is only a replica. For instance, epigraphist Zhao Han 趙岫 (fl. 1615–1620) extolled the crisp, lively, and sharpened strokes on the *Tongzhou* and argued: “The *Yanta* version should be the original [due to the earlier date, but if the *Tongzhou* was a replica], I wonder how and why the *Tongzhou* shows a surpassing quality than the *Yanta*!”⁹⁵ Zhao Han's question about why the brushstrokes on the *Tongzhou* appeared fresher and sharper than those on the *Yanta* may be explained by the fact that due to the authenticity of the *Yanta* version, more ink rubbings had been requested and made from the *Yanta*, which resulted in the inevitable deterioration and impairment of its carved impressions. In comparison, the less used *Tongzhou* version looked fresh and well preserved.

The debate over whether or not the *Tongzhou* was a replica of *Yanta* was carried on by many late Ming and Qing critics and epigraphists. Wang Shu 王澐 (1668-1743) claimed that the *Tongzhou* version was simply a replica of the *Yanta* and “a slight difference on the thinness or thickness of brushstrokes was caused by the hands of

⁹⁴ XHS105.4029, also in JTS 80.2739.

⁹⁵ Zhao Han, *Shimo juanhua*, 2.6a–6b in the series *Shi ke shi liao cong shu*, Yi bian, 7; in Chinese: “同州 [本] 適逸婉媚，波拂處虬如鐵線。後署龍朔三年書，似勝 慈恩本... 大塔本 [慈恩本] 似是真跡，而同州本反勝，何也？”

engravers.”⁹⁶ Apparently Wang Shu noticed the different rendering of brushstrokes on these two steles, but he simply attributed it to a difference in engravers. On further examination, Liang Zhangju argued that the *Tongzhou* was not a direct reproduction but a free-hand copy obtained from a rubbing of the *Yanta*. The similarities and differences between the *Yanta* and *Tongzhou*, according to Liang, reveal the strong possibility that the creator of the *Tongzhou* was a skillful calligrapher who used the rubbing of *Yanta* as a model, but produced something that was superior to the original.⁹⁷ Liang’s argument suggests that the fresh beauty of the *Tongzhou* version is due to the copier’s superb calligraphic skill, which has impressed many critics and connoisseurs.

By comparing the characters and strokes from the *Yanta* and the *Tongzhou*, one can argue that the *Tongzhou* version was made to reflect the copyist’s admiration for master Chu’s refined and energetic style, but it was never meant to be a straight replica. The two versions appear similar at first glance, but a close examination reveals differences. For instance, “伽” in the *Yanta* is written as “迦” in the *Tongzhou*. The size of characters on the *Tongzhou* is quite even and well placed in fixed grids (see fig. 15), while in the *Yanta* many characters appear irregular. For example, the characters 能, 顯, 鷲 in the *Yanta* version (fig. 18) are larger than the same ones in the *Tongzhou* version, which exhibit a much more uniform size throughout the entire inscription. This evidence demonstrates that the original *Yanta* version manifests the artist’s spontaneous

⁹⁶ Wang Shu, *Xuzhou tiba*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 8.807; in Chinese: “在雁塔者乃其真迹, 同州者則後人所摹刻者。雖一肥一瘦彼此不同而細較筆法其為一書而兩刻。”

⁹⁷ Liang Zhangju, *Tuian suocang jinshi shuhua bawei*, chuan 3, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 9.1011, in Chinese: “評者謂此本質厚不佻, 轉勝雁塔本, 不知其質厚處, 即是臨摹著力之跡。”

expression, even though the *Tongzhou* version appears to be a careful and deliberate reflection of the hand of master Chu. I would argue that the *Yanta* was used as a calligraphy model by a skillful artist to create the *Tongzhou* version, while the brushstrokes from the *Tongzhou* version revealed the copyist's deliberate effort and strength.

The following observations about specific ways of handling brushstrokes from different hands lend more credence to this supposition. The beginning and ending points are rigid and forceful in most characters from the *Tongzhou* stele. Some obvious ones, such as “天,” “有,” “下,” and “陰陽,” show that the central point was produced by pressing the brush side-ways to leave a sharp angle, while the same characters in the *Yanta* were created by hiding the central point of the brush to create smooth beginning and ending points (fig. 19). Another good example is the character “wu” (無) (fig. 20). In the *Tongzhou* version, the tip of brush was used with deliberation to create a sharp and strong beginning and ending of four vertical, two horizontal strokes, and four dot-strokes. In contrast, these strokes in the *Yanta* version look smooth, rounded, and effortless. They were accomplished by hiding the central point of the brush, which leaves no trace of any sharpness or angle either on the beginning or the ending point.

The inscriptions on the *Tongzhou* offer excellent testimony to the fact that a good practitioner working with a superb model could produce remarkable results; thus one can find calligraphic merit in both the *Tongzhou* and *Yanta* versions of the steles. Art critic Sun Chengze 孫承澤 (1592-1676) made an interesting comment about these two steles: “[Brushwork in] the *Tongzhou* is full of bone, while the *Yanta* is full of harmony

and expression.”⁹⁸ It is also worth mentioning that art critics usually made comments by comparing the rubbings that were available to them, instead of paying a visit to steles. Apparently, ink rubbings taken from these steles have become precious items for collectors. Meanwhile, the collected rubbings were then, especially after the printed method was employed after the Tang, often used as original for mass production to create model books for calligraphy practitioners.

While debates over the penmanship of *Yanta* and *Tongzhou* may always exist, it has become consensus among scholars that the *Tongzhou* stele was made by the people in Tongzhou to honor the memory of their beloved calligraphy master Chu Suiliang. Thus the primary reason for the erection of the stele may not necessarily have been to praise Buddhism, despite the fact that it is Buddhist in content. Regardless, the town people’s effort to mimic and parade the best of Chu’s calligraphy resulted, even if indirectly, in the promotion of Buddhism; the value and honor conferred on the calligraphic master could be transferred to Buddhism as well.

Stele of *Yanshi shengjiao xu*

The Buddhist community continued to create steles to promote their religion. Containing the texts of the *Preface* and the *Notes to the Preface*, another extant stele is known as the *Yanshi shengjiao xu* (see fig. 16). It was named after its location, Yanshi County in Henan Province. The inscription on the stele was transcribed by a skillful but lesser-known calligrapher, Wang Xingman, hence it is sometimes identified as the stele of *Wang Xingman shengjiao xu*.

⁹⁸ Sun Chenze, *Gengzi xiaoxia lu*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 7.805; in Chinese: “同州饒骨,慈恩饒韻.”

The *Yanshi* or the *Wang Xingman* is another large stone, 302 cm in height and 154 cm in width, engraved in 28 columns with 56 characters in each column.⁹⁹ The columns and rows form a distinct pattern of grids and the characters that fill each grid are written in standard script. The statement of penmanship is indicated right after the main title, “Transcribed by Wang Xingman, Secretary in the Judicial Department” (門下錄事臣王行滿書). The last two lines on this stele explain why it was erected: “To honor Zhaoti Temple, the stele was erected on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month in the second year of the Xianqing era [i.e. year of 657].” (奉 為招提寺 顯慶二年歲次 丁巳十二月乙卯朔十五日己巳建). During the Tang dynasty, a Zhaoti Monastery was in old Houshi County (猴氏縣),¹⁰⁰ which later became part of Yanshi County in Henan Province. The stele was moved and it currently resides in the Study Hall in Yanshi County.

Little is known about Wang Xingman. Although his signature on the stele is accompanied by his official title, hardly any significant information about the artist can be found. Wang Xingman is not mentioned in the standard official histories, the *Jiu Tang shu* and the *Xin Tang shu*. Only from Wang Chang’s 王昶 (1771–1836) *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編, do we learn that Wang Xingman inscribed another stele, *Hang Liang bei* 韓良碑, at Fuping 富平 County in Shaanxi Province.¹⁰¹ Ink rubbings of *Hang Liang bei* are scarce and not easily found, but new archaeological excavations revealed a stele

⁹⁹ Measurement is from Wang Chang’s *Jinshi cunbian* 49.24, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 2.836.

¹⁰⁰ Modern Yanshi county in Henan Province covers the territory of ancient Houshi County .

¹⁰¹ See Wang Chang, *Jinshi cuibian*, 49.24b, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 2.836.

named *Zhou Hu bei* 周護碑, which was also inscribed by Wang Xingman. Rubbings from this stele are yet to be made.¹⁰²

Although information is lacking about the artist, the *Yanshi* stele was cited by many well-known epigraphists in their accounts of historically significant epigraphs.¹⁰³ Qing epigraphist Liang Zhangju proudly declared that he had obtained a *Yanshi* rubbing near suburban Beijing. He proclaimed that the beauty of *Yanshi* surpassed *Tongzhou*.¹⁰⁴ The *Yanshi* was dated only four years later than the famous *Yanta* stele inscribed by the renowned Chu Suiliang. Monks at the Zhaoti Monastery must have trusted Wang Xingman to transcribe the same text for *Yanshi*. In his well-esteemed compendium that records numerous rubbings from famous steles, Liang Zhangju describes Wang Xingman's calligraphy on the *Yanshi* as follows: "There is a vital spirit, expressed in a genial manner. The structure is profound and solid. Indeed, it can contend with Dengshan 登善 [the style name of Chu Suiliang]."¹⁰⁵ Liang's comparison of the *Yanshi* inscription with Master Chu's calligraphy raised the esteem of this *Yanshi* version, and drew much attention to this lesser known artist and his work.

From a section of rubbing (see fig. 16) taken from the *Yanshi* stele, one can discern an even but agile and fluent brush movement, and the character structures are clear and regular. The overall effect of the *Yanshi* reflects Chu's style from his early

¹⁰² Shi Zhecun, *Tangbei baixuan*, 82.

¹⁰³ See Wang Chang, *Jinshi cuibian*, 49.24b, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 2.836; Liang Zhangju, *Tuian suozang jinshishuhubawei*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 9.1011b; Sun Xingyan, *Huanyu fangbei lu*, 3.6, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 26.19880; Qian Daxin, *Qianyan tang jinshi wen bawei*, 4.15, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, 25.18784.

¹⁰⁴ Liang Zhangju, *Tuian suozang jinshi shuhua bawei*, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, 9.1011b.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

work, such as *Meng fashi bei* (see fig. 9), but Wang interprets it with maturity and fluidity. From this rubbing, one may assume that Wang Xingmang was confident enough not only to imitate Chu, but also, to some degree, to challenge the old master.

Given the fact the *Yanshi* stele was dedicated “to honor Zhaoti Monastery,” the primary intent informing its creation was to promote Buddhism. However, the choice of duplicating the form as well as the content of the well-known *Yanta* stele was most likely due to the beauty and value of its calligraphy. The monks from the Zhaoti Temple erected the *Yanshi* stele fairly quickly after the *Yanta* had been established, presumably to capitalize on some of the *Yanta*’s fame and popularity, which was based on Chu’s calligraphy. While the *Tongzhou* stele was produced primarily to bring honor to the town, the *Yanshi* stele was made to glorify the monastery. But all three steles demonstrate how calligraphic script could distribute aesthetic, religious, and political value simultaneously, albeit in different inflections.

CHAPTER 5 BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES AND DUNHUANG MANUSCRIPTS

In addition to Buddhist steles, Buddhist scriptures transcribed on paper or silk offer another format that allows us to trace how calligraphy flourished during the Tang dynasty. These scriptures contributed to the development of calligraphy perhaps even more than the dedicated steles.¹ Believing that the act of copying or commissioning the transcription of a sutra was a pious deed that garnered religious merit, Buddhists produced a colossal amount of Buddhist scriptures. These scriptures are treasured as original sources for the study of both calligraphy and Buddhism, as they not only contain the texts of sacred writings, but also feature calligraphy as the technical and aesthetic form for relaying this content. These handwritten materials from the Tang and pre-Tang periods were not available until the dawn of the twentieth century. After they were discovered in Dunhuang Cave 17, they offered a new perspective that changed the framework of calligraphy scholarship.

Dunhuang, a thriving Buddhist community, was located near an oasis on the Silk Road that linked China to Central Asia. It flourished from about the fourth to thirteenth centuries, but went into decline in the fourteenth century. Hundreds of caves, dedicated as shrines or for other uses by the resident Buddhist clergy, were completely closed at some point in the eleventh century. It was not until the early twentieth century that the caves were rediscovered.² In Cave 17 tens of thousands of manuscripts were revealed; a majority was Buddhist sacred texts produced primarily during the Tang dynasty.

¹ Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 224–39.

² 492 decorated caves remain to this day.

The vast number of manuscripts from Dunhuang illustrates the extraordinary accomplishments of sutra copyists, whose work altered the status of calligraphy, shifting it from a primarily elite practice to one in which a broader constituency of the population could participate. Although this shift in demographics was, for the most part, in history dismissed by critics and elite collectors, many of these discovered handwritten copies exhibit qualities found in the work of elite masters, a phenomenon that has fascinated and amazed modern scholars, collectors and critics of calligraphy alike.³

This chapter examines selected Dunhuang manuscripts in order to reconstruct the dynamic relationship between the style of elite masters and that of the lesser-known sutra copyists. It also discusses the translation and transcription of Buddhist scriptures from a retrospective point of view with the focus on the rapid growth of reproduction during the Sui and Tang dynasties, and interactions between the imperial court sponsorship, monastic institutions, and devoted private patrons.

Historical Development of Buddhist Scriptures

Buddhist scriptures and related texts were first introduced into China in the first century, during the late Han dynasty. After that, the proliferation and popularization of Buddhism paralleled the growth of sutra translation and copying, especially during the Six Dynasties. By the Sui and Tang dynasty, Buddhist manuscripts copies had become ubiquitous.

Early Development of Translation and the Transcription of Buddhist Scriptures

Buddhist scriptures were brought to China by the first Indian missionaries, whose names from the late fifth century onward are given as Dharmaratna 竺法蘭 (fl. mid-first

³ Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 225.

century) and Kāsyapa Mātanga 攝摩騰 (fl. 67). It was for them, according to tradition, that the Han Emperor Ming (r. 58–75) built the first monastery, Baima si 白馬寺 (White Horse Monastery) in the viscounty of Luoyang.⁴ In 67 at least five Buddhist scriptures were translated by Dharmaratna and Kāsyapa Mātanga into Chinese, but only one—*Sutra in Forty-two Sections*—has survived, and it is now commonly regarded as the first Buddhist scripture in the Chinese language.⁵

The number of translated and transcribed Buddhist scriptures greatly increased during the following centuries. In the third century, the famous court scholar Xun Xu 荀勗 (231–283) compiled the imperial catalogue of the Western Jin dynasty (256–316), which included sixteen scrolls of Buddhist works.⁶ During the politically chaotic period of the fourth to sixth centuries, the cultured public turned their attention toward Buddhism. Devoted laymen would stay in monasteries for various periods of time, some even for years, during which they assisted in the translation of scriptures or to copying of sutras.⁷ Important achievements in Buddhism were made under the Chinese śramaṇa Dao'an 道安 (312–385) and Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416), and the Kuchean Buddhist monk Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–409/413).

Dao'an and Huiyuan, known for their literary talents, collaborated with contemporary lay literati. They were part of a group of “cultured clergies” who were

⁴ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 22

⁵ *Gao seng chuan*, compiled by Hui Jiao, 3. *Sutra in Forty-two Sections* consists of approximately 2,000 characters divided into 42 independent sections. See also Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 29–30.

⁶ Daoxuan, *Guanghong ming ji*, 3.17b–18b; Xun Xu's biography is in *Jin shu*, 39.1152..

⁷ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 1.75.

heavily involved in the development of “gentry Buddhism.”⁸ Dao’an played a leading role in translation activities in the capital of Chang’an during the second half of the fourth century.⁹ Huiyuan, a zealous follower of Dao’an, established contacts in Chang’an in the north as well as Jiankang 建康 in the south. He also established “Mt. Lu (廬山) as a combination of a religious centre and a collective hide-away for Buddhist-minded literati.”¹⁰ This group of Buddhist literati included Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), a scholar also known as one of the greatest painters and calligraphers of his time, and Wang Qizhi 王齊之, a member of the Wang clan from Langye, who were prolific producers of calligraphy.¹¹ Their mutual encounters and manifold interactions demonstrate that Buddhism was cultivated by adapting to local cultural norms. During this confluence of Buddhism’s adaption to Chinese cultural milieu, Buddhists developed and linked doctrines, practices, and artistic expressions with native Chinese elements, which resulted in a wide and favorable reception of Buddhism in China. Meanwhile, as Buddhism permeated various aspects of Chinese society and culture, it enriched Chinese civilization.¹²

The growth of Buddhism in China rapidly progressed when the Mahāyāna tradition was imported. More open to cultural syncretism, Mahāyāna traditions adapted easily to Chinese traditions, which served to firmly establish Buddhism as a major presence and force in Chinese religious life. Many of the translated Mahāyāna scriptures and treaties

⁸ For the development of “gentry Buddhism,” see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 1.5–10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.202–04.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 218–19.

¹² Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 114.

use terminology culled from Chinese thought, particularly Daoism.¹³ *Vimalakīrti Sutra* is a good example, and has played an important role in promoting Buddhism among the cultured gentry, as it contains both remarkable literary qualities and highly philosophical ideas that are soothing for Chinese (further discussed on section of “Early examples” in this chapter). Between the beginning of the third and the middle of the seventh century, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* was translated into Chinese seven times.¹⁴ A popular version was translated by Kumārajīva. A Kuchean monk and scholar, Kumārajīva arrived in Chang’an in 401 and translated many important Mahāyāna scriptures and treatises, including several prominent ones such as *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, *Amitābha sutra*, *Diamond Sutra*, and *Lotus Sutra*. Due to the superb readability of his translation style, his works were extremely popular.

In the fifth century, Sengyou 僧佑 (445–518), of the Liang dynasty (502–533), compiled one of the earliest Buddhist catalogues. Completed in 374, Sengyou’s Catalogue contains 2,162 works in 4,328 scrolls,¹⁵ including Dao’an’s *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 綜理衆經目錄 (Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures).¹⁶ Sengyou was also the author of a famous compendium, *Hongming ji* 弘明集, in which he analyzed the theories of Buddhist literature that were known in China from the early Han to Liang.

The Liang scholar Ruan Xianxu 阮孝緒 (497–536) compiled a comprehensive catalogue entitled *Seven Records*, which listed as many as 2,410 Buddhist writings and

¹³ Ibid., 121–22.

¹⁴ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, I.50.

¹⁵ Yao Mingda, *Zhongguo muluxue shi*, 260.

¹⁶ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, I.30.

425 Daoist works.¹⁷ Ruan Xianxu was also known as a paleographer. His writing, *Wenzi jilue* 文字集略 (Collected Anthology on Characters), is listed with other important calligraphy treatises in the Annal of Art and Literature of *Xin Tang shu* (*Tang shu yiwen zhi* 唐書藝文志).¹⁸

The dramatic increase in Buddhist texts may also be attributed to the invention of paper in the late Han period.¹⁹ Writing on paper was easier than using bulky bamboo, costly silk or wooden slips, and it became the dominant medium for transcribing texts. The major impetus behind the rapid growth of transcribed Buddhist texts, however, was a combination of factors: strong imperial court sponsorship, ardent monastic support, and enthusiastic patronage from devotees. This phenomenon occurred during the Six Dynasties, but became more dynamic and systematic throughout the Sui and Tang dynasties.

Development during the Sui and Tang Dynasties

During the reign of Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 581–604) of the Sui dynasty, particular events furthered the establishment of Buddhism, including the restoration and preservation of Buddhist texts that had suffered during a long period of political disruption and severe persecutions of Buddhists by the Northern Emperors.²⁰ In the year 581, the first year after he took the throne, Emperor Wen issued a decree calling

¹⁷ Daoxuan, *Guanghong ming ji*, 3.17b–18b.

¹⁸ XTS 57.1448.

¹⁹ Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 145.

²⁰ Two large Buddhist persecutions occurred during the Northern Dynasties; one in 446–454 executed by Emperor Taiwu 太武帝 of the N. Wei, and another in 574–577 by Emperor Wu 武帝 of the N. Zhou. For the Buddhist activities during the period of division, see Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 130–31.

for the copying of all Buddhist scriptures. They were to be deposited in the temples of large cities and specially prepared copies were commissioned for the Imperial Library.²¹ Also under imperial sponsorship, Fei Changfang 費長房 (fl. 561–597) compiled the most comprehensive and earliest bibliography of Buddhism in 597; it lists 2,146 works in 6,235 scrolls.²² According to the seventh century Buddhist text *Fayuan zhulin*, more than 130,000 scrolls were transcribed during the reign of Emperor Wen alone.²³

Both the Sui Emperor Wen and his son, Emperor Yang 煬帝 (r. 605–617), were dedicated Buddhists and vigorously promoted the transcription of Buddhist literature. Monk Yancong 彥琮 (557–610), active during the reigns of both emperors, was an influential figure who supported the mass production of Buddhist literature during the Sui dynasty.²⁴ In 602, the second year of Renshou 仁壽 era of Emperor Wen, Yancong compiled a *Zhong jing mulu* 衆經目錄 (Catalog of Miscellaneous Scriptures), which categorized scriptures according to how they were translated, including direct translation, re-translated works, and translated but with problems.

The policy of promoting Buddhism was continued in the court of Emperor Yang. In 606, he ordered the establishment of a Bureau of Translation of Buddhist Texts (*Fanjing guan* 翻經館) at the Daxingshan Monastery (大興善寺) in Chang'an.²⁵ The figure in charge of the tasks of translation and transcription was the revered monk Yancong. At

²¹ *Sui shu*, 35.1055.

²² Yao Mingda, *Zhongguo muluxue shi*, 273.

²³ T 53.1019a–23a.

²⁴ Yancong's biography in *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50.436b–39c. Yancong is also the author of *Xiyu zhuan* 西域傳 (Record of the West Land).

²⁵ *Sui shu*, 3.75.

the time, the number of copies of Buddhist texts in private hands was growing rapidly. Copying sutras became fashionable during the Sui dynasty and, as a result, “Buddhist sutras in private hands were tens and hundred times as many as those of Confucian classics.”²⁶ Thus, the Sui dynasty may be considered “the greatest period of the production of Buddhist literature.”²⁷

The official Translation Bureau established by Emperor Yang played an important new role in the quantity as well as quality of sutra production. Yancong codified the eight criteria considered necessary in order to be a good copyist, including “read through the [ancient] text of *Cang [Jie pian]* 倉頡篇 and *[Er] Ya* 爾雅, and have calligraphic skill in *zhuan shu* (seal script) and *li shu* (official script).”²⁸ *Cang Jie Pian* (The Provisions from Cang Jie), named after the legendary inventor of writing, was edited by Li Si, who sought to standardize the small seal script during the Qin dynasty.²⁹ Containing about 3,300 characters, it is one of the earliest primers designed for students learning to write Chinese characters. *Er Ya* (Approaching Correctness), the oldest extant Chinese dictionary to explain words in context, is a pre-Qin compilation of glosses to classical texts. The fact that copyists were required to read these texts suggests that the study of calligraphy was not merely a hands-on-practice, but demanded knowledge of historical background. Yancong’s emphasis on seal script and official script, rather than on other calligraphy forms, may indicate that the writing of

²⁶ *Sui shu*, 35.1055. “天下之人，從風而靡，竟相景慕，民間佛經多于六經數十百倍。”

²⁷ Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 18.

²⁸ T 50.439a.

²⁹ See section on “Early Writing System,” in Chapter 2.

religious text demanded a great deal of accuracy and regularity, which are the main characteristics of both seal and official scripts.

After the late Han era, however, the form of official script underwent a process of evolution. By the Sui dynasty the distinctive characteristics of the original official script, which featured sweeping horizontal strokes with sharp tips, gradually disappeared and were replaced by a new way of rendering strokes with more stable construction and homogeneous tone of brush movement. This particular way of evoking more natural and fluent brushstrokes resulted in a new form that was later known as standard script. A prototype of standard script—*likai* 隸楷 or *kaili* 楷隸, a combination of official and standard scripts—was a popular script used for stele inscriptions during the Sui dynasty.

In his *Yushi* 語石 (Words from the Stones), Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 (1849–1917) calls our attention to these inscriptions on the Sui steles because they exhibit the synthesized form of calligraphic styles inherited from the preceding dynasties that was to become a forceful inspiration to the Tang and later periods.³⁰ He says, “*Xiaozhuan* 小篆 and *bafen* 八分 gradually evolved into *kaili* 楷隸, which was a result of artful skill and strength.³¹ This reform is derived from divine intelligence, yet does not deviate from the traditional trends.”³² The *Yushi* chronicles the development of stele over two thousand years,

³⁰ *Yushi* is a literary document of stele inscriptions collected from the pre-Qin to Qing periods.

³¹ *Bafen* 八分 is a term to describe a type of form (script) used in the Han dynasty, and considered as one variation of official script. Literally, it can be translated as “eight divided shares,” referring to the shares taking either most part of old seal script or most part of new official script during the Han dynasty. Throughout the history of Chinese calligraphy, this term has been interpreted in many ways by art critics. In general, it is associated with the old official script with more squarish structure and even linear brush strokes. Details see Qi Gong, *Gudai ziti lungao*, 28–32.

³² Ye Changchi, *Yushi*, 1.7 in Shanghai shudian (1986) ed., 11: “隋碑上承六代, 下啟三唐, 由小篆八分趨于楷隸, 至是而巧力兼至. 神明變化, 而不離規矩.”

recording the format and content of inscriptions, the calligraphic styles, engraving techniques, and collectors of important rubbings as well as anecdotes about many famous steles. Yan Changchi's perception indicates the important and influential role that the Sui dynasty played in the history of the development of Chinese calligraphy.

An understanding of calligraphy in both historical and theoretical terms has always been a prerequisite for those who are pursuing proficiency in the art. In the Han dynasty, both teaching and learning calligraphy was a private matter, but one highly encouraged by the government.³³ By the fourth and fifth centuries, during the time of the Jin, the government became more involved and hired teaching Erudites who were highly proficient in calligraphy.³⁴ By the time the Sui unified the country the court was the center of calligraphic activity. An official "Calligraphy School" (*shuxue* 書學) was established and a number of teaching faculty and students regulated its function and growth.³⁵ Other than transcribing records for the court, the members of the School also participated in governmental decisions regarding the transcription of Buddhist literature. Examples from fascicle four of the *Siyi jing*, dated 588, and fascicle eight of the *Zhonganhan jing*, dated 602, will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

In their pursuance of social prosperity and cultural brilliance, the early Tang court continued the ideological policy of the Sui, which included the promotion of calligraphy as well as the support of Buddhism. Tang emperors reached out to the new Buddhist

³³ Wang Guowei, *Guangtang jilin*, 4.7, in Beijing Zhonghua Shuju (1999) ed., 179: "漢時教初学之所, 名曰書館....其書用《倉頡》... 諸篇...漢人就學, 首學書法, 其業成者, 得試為吏, 此一级也."

³⁴ Biography of Xun Xu is in *Jin shu* 39.1152: "勛領秘書監, 立書學博士, 置弟子教習, 以鍾胡為法."

³⁵ *Sui shu* 28.777: "國子寺... 統國子, 太學, 四門, 書算學, 各置博士— 書算各二人, 助教... 書算各二人, 學生... 書四十人."

monasteries³⁶ and performed many public displays of Buddhist devotion and acts of piety at court.³⁷ With the court's interest and support, Buddhism reached its highest level of development during the Tang dynasty,³⁸ which created a great demand for the production of sutra transcriptions. In addition to support from the court, two other forces synchronized to facilitate the mass transcription of sutras: earnest promotion of calligraphy practice by Buddhist institutions and strong interest in creating sutra copies by laymen and patrons.

The dissemination of Buddhist scriptures depended entirely on hand-copied productions, before the invention and use of printing techniques for mass distribution of religious texts in the eighth and ninth centuries.³⁹ In fact, the demand for mass production of Buddhist literature was the motivating force that encouraged printing.⁴⁰ However, due to the perishable nature of silk and paper, handwritten Tang and pre-Tang materials became extremely rare. For modern scholars, the study of early

³⁶ It is recorded in that more than 40 Buddhist temples built in capital Chang'an in the Tang dynasty, and mostly by the early emperors, see THY 48.843–55.

³⁷ Such as sutra chanting, lectures on scripture, and masses for the dead, see Stanley Weinstein, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism," 267.

³⁸ In addition to the three early established and more philosophical schools, the *Tiantai*, the *Faxiang* and the *Huayan*, there were others, such as the *Sanjie* (Three Stages), the *Jingtu* (Pure Land), the *Ch'an*, and the *Mi* (Esteric). See Stanley Weinstein, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism," 268–306.

³⁹ The printed Buddhist text can be traced as early as in the era of Empress Wu (696–704). For more details, see T.H. Barrett, *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*, 85–128. Discussion on the earliest extant dated (868) blockprint fragment, the frontispiece to *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (Jingang jing 金剛經), see Mote and Chu, *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*, 66–67, fig. 35.

⁴⁰ Tsien Tsuen-hsuei. *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 205.

calligraphy was rather arduous until the discovery of manuscripts in the remote Dunhuang Cave at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴¹

Dunhuang Manuscripts

Dunhuang—Important Buddhist Site

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dunhuang was a Buddhist community active from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries. Throughout much of its history, Dunhuang was dominated by monastic establishments. During the Tang dynasty, trade along the Silk Road was flourishing and Dunhuang was an imperially governed prefecture. Dayun 大雲, Longxing 龍興, and Kaiyuan 開元 were large Buddhist monasteries in Dunhuang that were established under Tang imperial mandate. Buddhist monks and lay adherents travelled throughout the region, bringing scriptures from India or travelling to India in search of new texts. Original texts in Sanskrit or Prakrit were often sent by local governments to the Tang court, where translators and whole teams of copyists, proofreaders, and editors made accurate translations by court order. Copies of the newly translated Buddhist scriptures and transcriptions were then disseminated from the two capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, to Dunhuang.⁴²

The story of Dunhuang and its collection of manuscripts, including their placement in the library cave and the cave's subsequent sealing, is full of lacunae.⁴³ Cave 17, the only cave containing stored manuscripts, was probably first discovered sometime

⁴¹ The exact year and time of the rediscovery of Dunhuang treasures are still under lingering dispute; see Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 9.

⁴² Rong Xinjian, *Dunhuangxue shibajiang*, 222.

⁴³ Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 3: One legend tells that in 366 a monk came upon a low, long riverine cliff, named *Mogao* 莫高 to excavate a remote meditation cave. In the decades following the Dunhuang rulers and populace, there were more caves built, some for meditation, and more as small chapels. When caravan traffic ceased sometimes in the fourteen century, Dunhuang culture declined and some caves were completely closed.

between the year of 1899 to 1900 by a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu 王圓祿.⁴⁴ He presented several manuscripts and printings from the cave to local officials, but the majority of inscriptions remained in situ, largely undisturbed. It was not until 1907–08, when Hungarian archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (a British national at the time) and French sinologist Paul Pelliot conducted expeditions in the area, that the entire cave was opened and tens of thousands of manuscripts were removed.

Dunhuang Manuscripts Collections

The 40,000 plus manuscripts discovered from Dunhuang Cave 17 are datable to the fourth to eleventh century, with a few believed to be from as early as the third century.⁴⁵ They appear in a number of languages—Chinese, Tibetan, Uighur, Kuchean, and Sanskrit, among others, and contain various subjects, both religious and secular. Many documents reflect the colorful political situation and economic conditions of Dunhuang during this period. However, the majority of manuscripts are transcribed Buddhist sutras; there are also some Daoist manuscripts, Confucian classics, copies of masterpieces for calligraphy model-books, and stone rubbings of well-known stele

⁴⁴ Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*. 4: The cave numbers are given in the twentieth century by the Dunhuang Academy. Cave 17 was a small cave leading off the right-hand side to Cave 16 entrance corridor, a largish cave about halfway along the cliff on ground level, was used at one point by Monk Hongbian 洪辯, the head of the Buddhists in this region, who had probably been instrumental there. Cave 17 was surmised to have been built after his death as a memorial chapel. A statue of Hongbian was placed against the main wall there.

⁴⁵ A fragment of *Piyu jing* 譬喻經 (*Parable sutra*) with a signed date of the third year of Ganlu (Ganlu sannian 甘露三年), is now in the Calligraphy Museum in Tokyo, Japan. “Ganlu sanian” could be that of CaoWei (曹魏甘露三年, i.e. 256) or that of QianQin (前秦甘露三年, i.e. 359.). Another fragment, *Daode jing* 道德經 (Laozi), copied by Suo Dan 索統 (ca. 250–325), dated to the year 270, now deposited at the Art Museum of Princeton University, for more information see Robert E. Jr. Harris and Wen C. Fong. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, 90, see also Frederick W. Mote and Hung-lam Chu, *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*, 55–57; William Boltz disputes its date, see William Boltz, “Notes on Authenticity of the So Tan Manuscript of the Lao Tzu,” 508–15. The latest dated manuscript from Dunhuang cave is a copy of the *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom* dated 1002.

inscriptions. They have become the most valuable resource for studies of the region's culture, including its religions and calligraphic practices.

A few Dunhuang manuscripts were available prior to the first major expedition and excavation.⁴⁶ Mark Aurel Stein, influenced by these early writings on Dunhuang, launched his famous expedition,⁴⁷ which was later followed by Paul Pelliot.⁴⁸ It was reported that “when the entranceway was opened, a cache of tens of thousands of manuscripts, documents and paintings was discovered, stacked from floor to ceiling.”⁴⁹ Stein and Pelliot removed thousands of manuscripts, which are now amassed in the Dunhuang Collection in the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.⁵⁰

Throughout the twentieth century, the Dunhuang manuscripts have been collected and made available for study around the world. In addition to the London and Paris holdings, Dunhuang materials are collected in many other museums and libraries, including the National Library in Beijing, the Shanghai Museum, the Liaoning Provincial Museum, the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, The National Museum of India in New Delhi, the Royal Library in Copenhagen, the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, the Library of Congress in Washinton, D.C., the Gest Library at Princeton University, the

⁴⁶ The first two reports, “Three Further Collections of Ancient Manuscripts from Central Asia,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 66, 4 (Dec. 1897), 213–260, and “A Collection of Antiquities from Central Asia, Part I,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 68, 1 (1899), 1–110, and 53. Both reports were written by A.F.R. Hoernle, a respected scholar of Indo-Aryan languages. Sources from Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 5, ns. 4 and 5.

⁴⁷ Details see Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 5-8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ In the British Library, each Dunhuang manuscript (a long scroll, a leaf, or a fragment) is considered an individual entity and assigned a unique number preceded by a letter “S” (for Stein). In the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the items are treated in a similar fashion but with a letter “P” (for Pelliot) listed before the item number.

Freer Gallery of Art in Smithsonian Institution, and so on. A systematic inventory of the manuscripts did not occur when they were first discovered, and even now the total number can be only estimated at 40,000 to 50,000 pieces. Some of the pieces are fragments, but many are in complete scroll or leaf-book format. It is estimated that about 36,000 Dunhuang manuscripts were written in Chinese.⁵¹ They are precious and crucial sources for the study of medieval China. Through an international collaboration, the images of many manuscripts, paintings, and artefacts from Dunhuang are digitized and available for online search.⁵²

Dunhuang manuscripts occupy an interesting position among other discoveries, Susan Whitfield makes such a comment, “which is neither wholly akin to works of art nor to texts, but something of each.”⁵³ Early scholarship focused primarily on the study of the manuscripts as texts, but due to the fact that they are often sacred texts, researchers are sometimes inspired to touch the document “for a direct link with the hand of the creator.”⁵⁴ Perhaps it was this ineffable sense of awe that inspired scholars to study the objects themselves, including the material, the size, and ultimately the characters written on them.

Selected Examples

The following are a few selected examples of Dunhuang manuscripts arranged by chronological order. They briefly illustrate a historical trajectory of Buddhist manuscripts as they developed from as early as the fourth century to the Tang dynasty. Each

⁵¹ Jiao Mingchen, *Dunhuang xiejuan shufa yanjiu*, 2 and n. 2.

⁵² The International Dunhuang Project: the Silk Road online website: <http://idp.bl.uk/>

⁵³ Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

scripture manifests certain specific characteristics that illustrate issues of calligraphic quality and format.

Early examples

(1) *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, dated 393 (the fifth year of Linjia of the Late Liang 後涼 麟嘉五年)⁵⁵

One of the very earliest hand-copied sutras unearthed from Dunhuang is a section of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, signed by Wang Xianggao 王相高 and dated 393 (fig. 21).⁵⁶

Although the discovery is a fragment, it contains more than 6,500 legible characters.

The date on the manuscript indicates that Mr. Wang was a contemporary of Kumārajīva.

It is possible that Wang's copy may very well be the duplication of Kumārajīva's first translated version of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*.

Mr. Wang modestly wrote at the end of the colophon: “疏拙，見者莫笑之”—“[my writing is] heedless and clumsy; whoever reads this, please do not laugh at me.”

Wang's calligraphy appears a bit obtuse and naïve in its brushstrokes, and

demonstrates the transitional form structure of official script to the early standard script.

The brush lines are sometimes modulated with sweeping horizontal strokes that end in sharp tips, but the inner strength of the brushwork is evenly distributed and defines each character with balanced structure and a slightly elongated shape. This bold yet somewhat elegant style characterizes the calligraphic development during this period.

Nevertheless, given that Buddhist sutras were often lengthy, the copyist's attention was not always on perfecting each individual stroke, but rather achieving legibility and a

⁵⁵ Linjia was the year title of Taizu 太祖 (Lu Guang 呂光) of the Late Liang (386–404), one of 16 kingdoms during the Division Period. Territory of the Late Liang includes Dunhuang area. See *Jin shu*, 121.3053–64, for the biography of Lu Guang.

⁵⁶ It is now housed in the Shanghai Museum.

sense of dynamic equilibrium. This copy of *Vimalakīrti Sutra* reveals such features. Wang's plea for pardon indicates that calligraphic proficiency was probably on his mind. Even though not all sutra copyists were skillful calligraphers, their intention and effort to pursue the best quality of calligraphy was often evident.

(2) *Ten discourses of Being Initiated into Monkhood*, dated 405 (the first year of Jianchu of the Western Liang 西涼建初元年)⁵⁷

A fifth century handwritten Buddhist sutra can be discerned from another Dunhuang discovery piece, the *Ten discourses of Being Initiated into Monkhood*, which was signed by a mendicant Buddhist monk Deyou 德祐, in 405 (fig. 22).⁵⁸ The characters in the *Ten discourses* were composed with more even brushstrokes than those in Wang Xianggao's *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, and significantly reduced the sharply tipped and exaggeratedly sweeping horizontal strokes. These changes in rendering brushstrokes and structure exemplify the copyist's inclination to write in the form closer to standard script and spurn away from official script.

The colophon of the *Ten Discourse* contains a humble remark by the copyist about his handwriting: “手拙用愧，見者但念其意，莫笑其字”—“I regret my clumsy hand, and for those who are reading this sutra, please appreciate its meaning, do not laugh at the calligraphy.” This passage mirrors the remark made by Wang Xianggao, mentioned above, but these apologetic notes may not simply indicate a desire for the pardon of a copyists' unpolished skills. In addition to the possibility that it suggests a rhetorical expression common at that time, this passage may reveal the importance of quality in

⁵⁷ Jianchu was the year title of King of Wuzhao (武昭王) of the Western Liang (405–423). Prefectures around Dunhuang area endorsed Li Xuansheng 李玄盛 as King of Wuzhao in 405. *Jin shu*, 10.253; see *Jin shu*, 87.2270, for biography of Li Xuansheng.

⁵⁸ It is now housed in the British Library (S.0797).

the task of sutra copying. For the copyist and reader alike, a transcribed sutra conveys not only a religious text but beautiful calligraphy as well. The copyist's desire for vindication may very well indicate that the standard for the best calligraphy was already established, and the notion that meaning (texts) and form (calligraphy) were equally important was deeply imbedded in the mind of a copyist.

Examples from the Sui dynasty

(1) Fascicle four of the *Siyi jing* (思益經卷第四), dated 588 (the eighth year Kaihuang era of Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty 隋文帝開皇八年)

Fascicle four of the *Siyi jing* (fig. 23)⁵⁹ was written in 588, early in the reign of Wendi, the first Emperor of the Sui. At the end of the scroll a twenty word colophon reads, “Inspected by Policy Adviser in the Chancellery, Wu Xianhua, and proofread by Monk Huikuang in the Prefecture Yuanzhou of Zhengding County.”⁶⁰ Although the name of the person who actually penned this sutra is not recorded, the colophon suggests that the reproduction was the result of a cooperative effort between government and monastery. Monk Huikuang proofread the text to assure accuracy, while the quality of the transcribed calligraphy was validated by a high court official in the Chancellery, whose position was closely affiliated with the School of Calligraphy.⁶¹ It is evident that sutra reproduction began to be regulated by the government. “This [*Siyi jing*] was government sanctioned sutra copy,” claims Jiang Liangfu, a Dunhuang manuscript specialist, “as all of those sanctioned sutra copies were inspected by government

⁵⁹ It is now housed in the British Library (S.4020).

⁶⁰ The complete phrase in Chinese reads, “員外散騎常侍吳顯華監，袁州政定沙門惠曠校。”

⁶¹ School of Calligraphy was under official designation of Court for Education (*Guozhi si* 國子寺), headed by Chancellor, chosen from among its staff of Cavalier Attendants-in-ordinary (*Sanqi changshi* 散騎常侍), see Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 130 (#542), 299 (#3542), 300 (#3546).

officials.”⁶² While the duty of the monasteries was apparently to insure the accuracy of texts, the government was most likely responsible for maintaining a standard of calligraphic format and quality.

The colophon of the *Siyi jing* also states that the transcription was made at the request of Cui 崔, the wife of the Prince Qin 秦王,⁶³ in order to acquire the blessings of the Buddha for all beings on earth. It is not surprising that this particular piece was discovered in Dunhuang, since Prince Qin’s territory included the Gansu corridor. Sponsored by the imperial family, this copy exhibits extreme neatness and regularity, and the calligraphy is superb in quality. Exactly 17 characters are placed in each column, spaced as if they were written with grids but without any trace of lines. The calligraphy on this sutra, which surpasses many other Dunhuang manuscripts of its time, demonstrates the high standard of quality required by the Sui court. It was written with fluent and elegant standard script. The strokes are energetic yet graceful, expansive and sprawling in structure. This spontaneity of expression anticipates styles developed later by the early Tang calligraphy master Chu Suiliang and the high Tang master Yan Zhenqing.

(2) Fascicle eight of the *Zhongahan jing* (中阿含經卷第八), dated 602 (the second year of Renshou era of Emperor Wen of the Sui 隋文帝仁壽二年)

Fascicle eight of *Zhongahan jing* (fig. 24)⁶⁴ is another good example of sutra copy in the Sui dynasty. Its colophon includes the date and the name of the person

⁶² Jiang Liangfu, *Mo gao ku nianbiao*, 173.

⁶³ In 582 (the second year of Kaihuang era), Sui Wendi bestowed his son, Yang Jun 楊俊 with a title of Prince of Qin 秦王; see *Sui shu*, 5.13.

⁶⁴ It is now housed in the British Library (S.3548).

who penned the sutra: “On the twentieth day in the twelfth month of the second year of [Wendi] Renshou [602], written by *jingsheng* 經生 Chang Cai 張才.” The term *jingsheng* can be translated as the person who transcribes the sutras, i.e., sutra copyist. Modern scholars also use a term “sutra scribe” or “sutra transcriber.”⁶⁵ A more detailed description of sutra copyists’ roles and styles will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The colophon also tells us that this copy of *Zhonganhan jing* was proofread twice, once by a monk from the Daxingshan Temple and again by a monk from the Daji Monastery (大集寺). Since the Daxingshan Monastery housed the court Translation Bureau, the reproduction of this *Zhonganhan jing* was probably imperially sponsored.

The main body of the scroll consists of 17 characters in each column of neat grid-like rows, exactly the same page layout found in the *Siyi jing* mentioned above. The characters were written in standard script with a compact structure and horizontal strokes that slant slightly upward. The radical snap and sharply hooked strokes, later characteristic of the standard script of the Tang dynasty, distinguish this sutra.

Examples from the Tang dynasty

The vast majority of the Dunhuang manuscripts were generated during the Tang dynasty. This section highlights some of the examples that astounded the world of calligraphy: the practice copies of Wang Xizhi’s *Lanting xu*, Jiang Shanjin’s 蒋善進 *Zhiyong Zhencao Qianziwen* 智永真草千字文 (Thousand characters in the forms of standard script and cursive script), a rubbing from the stele of *Wenquan ming* inscribed

⁶⁵ Amy McNair uses the term, “sutra scribe,” in her “Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style,” and Frederick Mote, Frederick uses “sutra transcriber” in his *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*.

by Emperor Taizong,⁶⁶ and a rubbing from *Huadu si bei*, penned by an early Tang master Ouyang Xun.⁶⁷

These works are not all Buddhist texts, but their existence attests to the fact that calligraphy practice was highly regarded in Dunhuang. These discoveries also provide valuable evidence of cultural exchanges between the Tang court and rural areas such as Dunhuang. In order to emphasize the important role Buddhism played in this interaction, I include a Buddhist treatise, the *Apitan piposha lun*, which was reproduced during Gaozong's era; it represents the high quality of work that sutra copyists were capable of producing.

(1) Practice copies of Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu*

Currently the Bibliothèque Nationale de France holds four fragments of practice copies of Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu*, and the British Library holds two.⁶⁸ These copies of *Lanting*, discovered in Dunhuang, offer evidence for the wide distribution of *Lanting* copies and the success of Taizong's promotion of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy. The discoveries also correspond to some literary statements about the distribution of *Lanting* copies. He Yanzhi 何延之 (fl. 722–) and Wu Pingyi 武平一 (fl. 684–741) tell us that Wang Xizhi's *Langting xu* was greatly cherished by Taizong, who kept the original and ordered the court copyists to make more copies for distribution.⁶⁹ For more than a thousand years, art historians have questioned the authenticity of works attributed to

⁶⁶ See also the section on “Taizong” in Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ See also the section on “Formation of Tang Court Culture” in Chapter 3.

⁶⁸ Items, held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, are: P.2622v, P.3194v, P.2544, and P.4764; in the British Library are S.1601, and S.1619

⁶⁹ *Tang He Yanzhi Lanting ji* (Notes on the Orchid Pavilion), in FSYL 3.130. ; *Tang Wu Pingyi Xu shi shufa ji* (Records on Mr. Xu's [Xu Hao] Calligraphy of the Tang Dyansty), in FSYL 3.114.

Wang Xizhi, due to the fact that most of them were the Song or later copies. The Dunhuang practice pieces are valuable as they present the handwriting of Tang people. Even though they do not approximate the quality of Master Wang Xizhi's original work, they do give an immediate sense of an early Tang calligraphy practitioner's hand.

Both fragments of *Lanting*, now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, (P.3194—fig. 25a, and P.2622—fig. 25b), show three lines with about twenty characters from the very beginning of the text (original *Lanting* has 28 lines, 324 characters). These practice pieces were written on the versos of other documents. Re-using documents as practice paper might have been the result of a shortage of supplies in Dunhuang at the time.⁷⁰ For instance, at the end of the colophon on one manuscript (S.2925) read, “It was hard to obtain paper and ink.”⁷¹ The recto of one *Lanting* practice (P.2622) is *Jixiong shuyi* 吉凶書儀 (Book on Auspices and Omens), and the recto of the other (P.3194) is a section from *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 (Annotative Notes of the Analects of Confucius), on which the date was given as, “the thirteenth year of [Emperor Xuanzong] Dazhong 大中” (i.e. 859). It is assumed that this practice *Lanting* copy was completed sometime later than that date, as the character “qun” 羣 from the original was altered to the character “群” which was the pattern used in the mid to late Tang.⁷²

⁷⁰ There were periods where the materials were in short supply. In 755 China was plunged into civil war by the rebellion and the emperor recalled all troops posted in the western regions to fight the rebels. The Tibetan army had then moved into Central Asia and taken control of the major towns including Dunhuang. The Tibetans ruled there until 848. Although they were driven out by a Chinese loyalist, after this, the control and supply to Dunhuang from central China had never been sufficient, especially after the Tang dynasty fell in 907. See Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 3–4.

⁷¹ See Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 20 n. 2.

⁷² See Shen Leping, *Dunhuang shufa zonglun*, 114.

By the time this *Lanting* practice piece appeared in the mid ninth century, it had been two hundred years since Taizong ordered copies of *Lanting*. Presumably many more copies were made through different hands and distributed widely. Identifying which version of *Lanting* was used as a model for the Dunhuang copyists is difficult. Modern scholar Shen Leping 沈樂平 claims that the “Shenlong version” of *Lanting*⁷³ was used as the model for the practice (see fig. 25a) that appears on the verso of *Lunyu jijie*. He bases his opinion on the relatively late date of the work. In my eyes, this rustic practice work is far removed from the sophisticated “Shenlong” version of *Lanting*. The leisurly styled, and graceful, fluent strokes that characterize the running script of the Shenlong *Lanting* (see fig. 3) do not exist in this practice piece. What does appear clearly, however, are the less expressive, austere, and rigid strokes. The writings on these mid to later Tang practice pieces may very well reflect a trend of writing style that existed at that time.

Another practice piece of *Lanting* (fig. 26)⁷⁴ contains the complete text, but with quite a few mistakes. After copying the entire text once, the practitioner intended to repeat it but stopped after a few characters. Again, the quality of the calligraphy appears mediocre. This inferior handwriting by no means reflects any of the original qualities of Wang Xizhi’s work, but comparison with other short practice pieces listed above reveals the calligrapher’s proficiency with regard to regularity and symmetry of brushstrokes and

⁷³ It is one of the versions of Wang Xizhi’s *Lanting xu*. It was attributed to Feng Chengsu, one of the court copyists in Taizong’s court. This copy bears a half seal of Emperor Zhongzong (r. 705–709) whose first two years of reign is named *Shenlong*, therefore, this copy of *Lianting xu* is named Shenlong version.

⁷⁴ Now it is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2544).

character structure. Cheng Ruzhong 鄭汝中 attributes this piece to the hand of a *Jingsheng* (sutra copyist),⁷⁵ to whom practice calligraphy was most likely a daily routine.

Throughout the centuries, the *Lanting xu* and its reproduced versions⁷⁶ have been passed down through famous hands and imperial collections. From the prolific number of *Lanting* copies found in Dunhuang, it is reasonable to speculate that copies of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy were widely disseminated, and the calligraphy tradition based on Wang Xizhi's style was often used as a practice model by those who were preparing themselves to be good sutra copiers.

(2) *Zhiyong Zhencao Qianziwen*, copied by Jiang Shanjin

A frequently discussed and highly acclaimed calligraphy piece from Dunhuang is the *Zhiyong Zhencao Qianziwen* (fig. 27a),⁷⁷ which was signed by Jiang Shanjin, with date and a statement to annotate his work, "This is a free-hand copy of Zhiyong's thousand-character composition in standard and cursive scripts, in the seventh month of the fifteenth year of the Zhenguan era [i.e. 641]." The tone of the note and the high quality of calligraphy leads us to believe that Jiang intended to produce a copy for other calligraphy practitioners to model with. This fragment contains the last 34 lines of *Qianziwen* (thousand-character composition), where 170 characters are written in standard and cursive scripts.

The original *Qianziwen* was written by Monk Zhiyong, who was a seventh generation descendant of Wang Xizhi and was active in the sixth century. According to

⁷⁵ Zheng Ruzhong, "Dunhuang shufa guankui," 36.

⁷⁶ There are six authentic handwritten versions of *Lanting xu* and dozens of versions in the form of rubbings based directly or indirectly on one of the handwritten copies; for more details see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 22–23.

⁷⁷ Now it is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3561).

a Tang literary reference, Zhiyong spent thirty years writing the thousand characters in the forms of both standard and cursive scripts. Eight hundred copies were made and distributed to the temples around the east Chejiang prefecture, and the copies that survived into the Tang era were worth tens of thousands of *qian* (Chinese monetary unit).⁷⁸

Today, many versions of Zhiyong's *Qianziwen* can be found in various collections.⁷⁹ Modern scholar Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 made a comparison between Jiang Shanjin's free-hand copy *Qianziwen* from Dunhuang and that of a distinguished Ogawa (小川) version.⁸⁰ He commented that Jiang's brushstrokes were more direct and sharper, concluding on a complimentary note: "This early Tang hand writing with its brilliant and lustrous ink color is indeed an unrivalled gem. [I] fondled it again and again, and could hardly put it down."⁸¹ Undoubtedly Jiang's copy has been one of the most praised manuscripts of the Dunhuang cache. Another Dunhuang calligraphy specialist Jiao Mingcheng has intention to establish the canonical status of Jiang's calligraphy. That intention is conveyed in this statement: "The trace of ink and brush in this copy by Jiang Shanjin stands out beyond any work of his contemporaries. Even the Emperor of Taizong and three early Tang court calligraphy masters would be inferior to him."⁸²

⁷⁸ *Tang He Yanzhi Lanting ji*, in FSYL 3.125.

⁷⁹ For details, see *Facang Dunhuang shuyuan jinghua*, compiled by Jao Tsung I, 1.265.

⁸⁰ *Shuji mingpin congkan*, 72.

⁸¹ *Facang Dunhuang shufa congkan*, compiled by Jao Tsung I, 1.265 in Chinese: "唐初手迹，墨色晶瑩，誠曠世瓌寶，摩挲至再，不忍釋手。"

⁸² Jiao Mingchen, *Dunhuang xiejuan shufa yanjiu*, 132.

Although no historical documents trace Jiang Shanjin's life and career, he was an accomplished calligrapher residing in Dunhuang and his superb execution of calligraphy presumably became models for others. A few characters penned by later copyists appear in what was originally a blank space, as does another date, "the second year of [Gaozong] Shangyuan [675]." From this we can speculate that Jiang's celebrated free-hand copy of *Qianziwen* was used by others for practicing calligraphy (fig. 27b).

The discovery of Jiang Shanjin's *Qianzhiwen* in Dunhuang attests to the success of Emperor Taizong's promotion of Wang Xizhi's style. Jiang's copy confirms the popularity of Wang's tradition and the fact that it extended far beyond the court. Proficient calligraphy became fashionable in this Buddhist community, and competent calligraphers, like Jiang Shanjin, became the work force employed to reproduce large numbers of Buddhist sutras. A nicely transcribed sutra could then be used as a model for more copies and further distribution. This continuous circulation between models and copies in part contributed to the democratization of calligraphy during the Tang.

(3) Rubbing from the stele of *Wenquan ming*

The stele of *Wenquan ming* was erected in 648 near Mountain Li (Lishan 驪山),⁸³ where Taizong often visited. Fond of the sweet warm water spring there, Taizong wanted to monumentalize the site by establishing a stele with inscriptions of his own composition and transcription.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the original stone has long been lost and rubbings from it were even rare during the Song dynasty. The only trace of its existence

⁸³ Mountain Li is a branch of the north side of Qinling 秦嶺, about 25 kilometers east of Xi'an. It's shaped like a horse, therefore named Lishan 驪山, which is particularly famous of spewing hot spring, beautiful scenery and diverse.

⁸⁴ *Cefu yuangui: jiao ding ban*, 113.1234: "真觀二十二年正月,太宗作溫湯碑,誇示羣臣,自書刻石."

was found in the literary reference, until a fragment rubbing was discovered in Dunhuang.

When this fragment came to light, it was highly celebrated by modern scholars who were studying Taizong's *Wenquan ming*. Now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.4508), this fragment of the *Wenquan ming* rubbing (see fig. 5 full view, fig. 28 detail with date) is in the form of a hand scroll mounted on sheets of paper. It consists of the last paragraph which contains fifty lines of inscription with seven to eight characters in each line. At the end of the rubbing is a line of 14 characters written in running script, which reads: "[The rubbing was made] on the thirtieth day in the eighth month of the fourth year of [Guozong] Yonghui era [653] by Weigu fu 圍谷府 Guoyi 果毅."⁸⁵ These words state that the rubbing was made by a Tang official within five years of the stele's erection. This explains why the brushstrokes appear crisp and penetrating. The conditions in the cave also contributed to the well-preserved sharpness of the ink stone.

This Dunhuang piece is treasured for at least two of its qualities. First, it is a great addition to the extremely scarce examples of Taizong's calligraphy. Up to now the only extant stone that was traceable to Taizong's brushwork was the stele of the *Jinci ming* (Inscription of Jin Temple), located in the city of Taiyuan. The stone was deteriorated, but was the sole source of authentic Taizong calligraphy (see fig. 4), until *Wenquan ming* was exposed to the world. Second, the inscription of *Wenquan ming* represents Taizong's most mature calligraphy. It was penned by Taizong when he was fifty-one

⁸⁵ In Chinese, it reads, "永徽四年八月三十日圍谷府果毅." Weigu fu 圍谷府, a prefecture, was first established in the S. Liang and reestablished in the Sui dynasty, and later became subordinate to the Region of Bian (Bian Zhou 汴州); now is the city of Kaifeng 開封. Guoyi 果毅 was a Tang military official title—Assault-resisting Garrison. (source from *Facang Dunhuang shuyuan jinghua*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 1.260)

years old, a year later before his death. The characters, written in the form of running script, reflect much of Wang Xizhi's style in the *Lanting Xu*, but at the same time they also demonstrate Taizong's own splendid style with their fluent, polished brush strokes and peculiar oblong structure. Taizong's brushwork in the *Wenquan ming* "is like the glib wind that flows through an embracing snow with power that seems bestowed from the heaven, and impossible to reach."⁸⁶ The brushstrokes illustrate a much higher degree of expressiveness than those in Taizong's another well-known but earlier work, *Jinci ming* (646), and the character structures demonstrate greater flexibility which vividly reflects essence of Wang Xizhi's style.

Mounted as a long scroll (23x154 cm.), the *Wenquan ming* rubbing was probably acquired and treasured by a local art collector. However, it may also have been used as a model for calligraphy practice. On the blank space towards the bottom of the *Wenquan ming* rubbing one can discern a few characters written to imitate the original. For instance, the character "quan" (泉) on line 46 (see fig. 26) was deliberately copied with extremely fluent strokes and the keen structure of the original. The discovery of the *Wenquan ming* rubbing in Dunhuang and its use as a calligraphy model offer more evidence for the far-reaching influence of the Tang court in its effort to promote calligraphy, as well as the Buddhist community's response to that advocacy.

(4) Rubbing from the *Huadu si bei*

Another important finding from Dunhuang was the rubbing of the *Huadusi* stele, originally sited at the Huadu Monastery in the Zhongnan 终南 mountain ridge, about

⁸⁶ *Facang Dunhuang shuyuan jinghua*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 1.261: "行筆如流風迴雪，天縱之姿，良不可及。"

fifteen miles from Chang'an. The stele was erected in the fifth year of the Taizong Zhenquan era (631) to commemorate the establishment of Huadu Monastery, where the relics of the Chan Master Yong 鬻 were stored. The text was composed by a well-known Tang poet and historian, Li Baiyao 李百药 (565–648), who applauded the merits of Master Yong as well as Buddhist doctrines and meditations. The early Tang calligraphy master Ouyang Xun transcribed the text in the form of standard script, with a total of 35 rows with 33 characters on each row. The calligraphy in this inscription would represent the master's most mature work, as it was written when the artist was seventy-four.

The stele was reported lost sometime in the Song dynasty, and the original rubbings have not been available since then. Many replicas, however, had been made, and received high remarks. For instance, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) credited Ouyang Xun for his initial effort to transform the earlier Jin style, i.e., Wang Xizhi's style, to the Tang standard script and praised his calligraphy was compelling, "as its square structure held in a tension of opposition rendered harmonious through the smooth and round nature of the brushstrokes."⁸⁷ Despite the numerous compliments, the late date of these rubbings raised suspicions among scholars, who continue to question their authenticity. With the discovery of the Tang rubbing from the *Huadu* stele, scholars finally have access to a rubbing made very close to the time when the stele was erected. This was a gem long sought. "It shines even ten steps away from it," says Luo

⁸⁷ Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou shanren xu gao*, 166.22, in *Mingren wenji congkan*, I. 22.7627: "化度碑帖: 書法自率更[毘陽詢]而始變晉體...謂之楷, 結構精緊, 風華燁如, 體方用圓以勁..."

Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866–1940).⁸⁸ Modern scholar Shen Leping, specialized in Dunhuang manuscripts, comments on the Dunhuang *Huadu*, not only echoing Wang Shizhen’s on the compelling brush, but concluding that Ouyang’s characters represents the best form of [Tang] standard script.⁸⁹

A careful examination of the characters on this rubbing reveals a strong possibility that the stele from which the Dunhuang *Huadu* rubbing was made during the Taizong’s reign. Claims of authenticity, other than the superiority of the calligraphy, are based on the observation that certain forbidden characters during the reigns of Gaozong and Zhongzong (705–709) appear on the *Huadu* rubbing.⁹⁰ For instance, the character “世” (*shi*) was completely prohibited in Gaozong’s era out of respect for his father Taizong, whose given name was Shimin 世民. During Taizong’s era, however, “世” was allowed if it was not used along with the character “民”.⁹¹ Containing the character 世, the rubbing of the Dunhuang *Huadu* must have been made from a stone carved before Gaozong, presumably from the original transcribed during the era of Taizong. Another character, “弘” (*hong*),⁹² is also a clue for an earlier dating, as it was a forbidden character during the reign of Emperor Zhongzong (705-709) and there is no sign of it having been

⁸⁸ *Facang Dunhuang shuyuan jinghua*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 1.262.

⁸⁹ Shen Leping, *Dunhuang shufa zonglun*, 118: “<化度> 為楷法第一 ...尤精緊，深合体方筆圓之妙。”

⁹⁰ Mentioned in Shen Leping, *Dunhuang shufa zonglun*, 122.

⁹¹ When Emperor Gaozong succeeded his father Taizong, he ordered both characters *shi* 世 and *min* 民 to be absolutely prohibited even they are not used together. “Shimin” was the given name of Taizong. During Taizong’s reign, these two characters were the taboos only if there were used together.

⁹² Emperor Zhongzong’s elder brother named Li Hong 李弘. In respect to his brother, Zhongzong ordered, during his reign, prohibite the use of the character *hong* 弘. For instance “Hongwen guan” (弘文館) changed to “Zhaowen guan” (昭文館), Prefecture Hongjing 弘靜 changed to Anjing 安靜, etc.

removed or hidden in the Dunhuang rubbing. Considered the most authentic rubbing of all that remain, the *Huadu* enables scholars to study and compare it with other versions of *Huadu*, such as a Song rubbing from the Tang stone, a Song rubbing from a Song replica stone, or any other combination.

The fragment of the Dunhuang *Huadu* rubbing is composed of twelve pages. The first two pages, which contain the title of the stele, are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (fig. 29)⁹³ and the rest are in the British Library.⁹⁴ The height of each page is about 10.6 cm, containing five characters in each column and four columns on each page. The use of loose-leaf paper was not yet popular, and it only began to appear in the Tang dynasty.⁹⁵ Making rubbings on loose pages (leaves), as the *Huadu* demonstrates, became a scheme designed to produce calligraphy model books. In this case from Dunhuang, one can presume that sutra copyists could have used *Huadu* rubbing as a model to enhance their skill on writing with a style of the standard script promoted by the Tang court.

Although the content of the *Huadu* was Buddhist related, Ouyang's standard script was probably the further inspiration for a devoted sutra copyist. The standard script in the *Huadu* exhibits Ouyang's precise strokes and masterfully robust structure that characterized the later stage of his career. This kind of powerful and compelling presentation was undoubtedly a favored choice for sutra copyists, as Ouyang's standard script writing occupied an important position in the history of Chinese calligraphy.

⁹³ P.4510.

⁹⁴ S.5791.

⁹⁵ Cheng Dachang, *Yan fan lu*, 73: “今之書冊, 乃唐世葉子, 古未有是也。”

(5) Copies of inscription from the *Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripitaka of the Great Tang Dynasty*

At least two fragments from the Dunhuang discoveries are possible the copies of the famous *Yanta shengjiao xu*, and they both now are housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.⁹⁶ The brushstrokes and character structure appeared on the item of P.2780 (see fig. 17), resemble the work of Chu Suiliang. Written in typical Tang *kai*, each stroke is rendered gracefully and with care, though the brushwork in this later copy appears less swift and less powerful. In addition, the structure of characters seems more squarish than those found in the original inscription of *Yanta* transcribed by Chu Suiliang (see figs. 10a and 10b).

This copy is undated, but it can be firmly identified as a product of the period when Empress Wu, or Wu Zetian, was ruling the country in the last two decades of the seventh century. During her regime, she made an attempt to reform some traditional Chinese written characters. The altered character “囯” (on line second of fig. 17) on this copy replaces the traditional character “國” (guo), which is a clue to the proper dating. By the time this Dunhuang copy was produced, many different versions of *Shengjiao xu* had been produced; therefore, it is difficult to define which version might be the model. In fact, we cannot assume this copy was for sure modeled from a stone rubbing. After Taizong composed the text, he urged to place his writing as the preface to the translated treatise by Xuanzang and ordered many copies to be made and distributed all over the country.⁹⁷ Therefore, the possibility arises that the copyist simply transcribed the text from one of the distributed texts, which could have been transcribed by any

⁹⁶ P.2780 and P.3127.

⁹⁷ *Da Tang Da Ci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan*, 141–42; also in *Biography of the Tripitaka Master*, 195–96.

calligrapher/copyist from the Tang court. Although it is difficult to determine the original source of this Dunhuang fragment based on, the copy undoubtedly reveals the Tang court style of standard script either a hand of court copyist or master Chu Suiliang.

The other fragment (P.3127) also reflects a matured Tang *kai* style. The dexterous brushwork indicates the copyist's desire to employ the form of running script.⁹⁸ It is possible that the copyist had encountered the rubbing taken from other version of *Shengjiao xu*, the *Ji Wang*, which was inscribed with characters written mostly in the form of running script. Again, to assume the *Ji Wang* was the model of this discovered fragment is a speculation. What we can be certain is that the works done in the capital of Chang'an were widely disseminated throughout the Dunhuang area. Meanwhile, Buddhists diligently copied and disseminated the edifying texts of Buddhism. In the process, the skilled practice of calligraphy was promoted with copies containing Buddhist text, and their dissemination ultimately contributed to the spread of Buddhism.

(6) The *Apitan piposha lun*

Several fascicles from the *Apitan piposha lun* were known, among the Dunhuang discoveries, for the illustrious calligraphy. They were transcribed by Shen Hong 沈弘, an accomplished sutra copyist active in the second year of Emperor Gaozhu's Longshuo 龍朔 era (662). At present, these fascicles are scattered across various museums, libraries, and individual collections. Fascicle sixty is held in the Calligraphy Museum at

⁹⁸ Wo Xinghua, *Dunhuang shufa yishu*, 31.

Tokyo (fig. 30a), fascicle fifty-two in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (fig. 30b),⁹⁹ and fascicle fifty-one in the hands of a private collector, Liu Youyuan 劉幼雲.¹⁰⁰

Each of them is written in the format of a handscroll. Both Tokyo and Paris scrolls contain colophons stating that the copies were made to garner merit. They read, “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the second year of Emperor Gaozhu Longshuo 龍朔 era [662], a high official, the Tang Right Guard in Chief and Duke of State E 鄂, Weichi Baolin 尉遲寶琳,¹⁰¹ came to the Yunji shan Monastery (雲際山寺) and acquired copies of the *Apitan* made in order to garner the blessings from Buddha for the Emperor, Empress, seven generation of parents, and all beings on the earth.”¹⁰² Weichi Baolin’s request was not uncommon in Buddhist practice, since acquiring bliss can be multiplied when one transfers the merit of such actions to parents or other beings.

Shen Hong signed his name underneath the title, *jingsheng* (sutra copyist). He was probably trained and hired by the Monastery. The skill of his calligraphy was highly praised by modern specialists who have encountered the scrolls. Referring to the beauty of the scroll in Paris, Rao Zongyi writes, “The calligraphic style of the scroll is impeccable. The dots and the strokes, the movement and the pause, are rendered in a

⁹⁹ P.2056.

¹⁰⁰ Mentioned in *Tonko shoho soka*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 23.49.

¹⁰¹ Weichi Baolin was the Son of Weichi Jingde 尉遲敬德, a distinguished military general who served Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty, Emperors Gaozu, and Taizong of the Tang. Weichi Jingde’s biography is in XTS 89.3752–55. Baolin succeeded his father’s title as the Duke of State E, and also was appointed the chief minister of the Court of the Imperial Regalia (*Weiweiqing* 衛尉卿), see XTS 201.5733.

¹⁰² Recorded from the colophons on the scrolls.

beautiful and lively way, like pearls dancing on a jade plate. It is a work that stands out as the calligraphy model for all sutra copyists for the early Tang dynasty.”¹⁰³

Another modern art historian, Zhu Guantian, praises Shen’s *Apitan* as representing “the superb calligraphic quality of the Tang sutra copies.”¹⁰⁴ Shen Hong’s work is further celebrated by Jiao Mingchen, who describes it as, “fluent but energetic, vigorous but appealing, smooth and hearted, graceful and splendid, his style is full of pleasure, and characters are formed in proper angles but the brushstrokes are round and smooth.”¹⁰⁵

In terms of stylistic characteristics, descriptions of Shen Hong’s calligraphy reflect the style of the early Tang masters Ouyang Xun and Yu Shinan. Phrase to describe Ouyang’s work, “its square structure held in a tension of opposition rendered harmonious through the smooth and round nature of the brushstrokes,”¹⁰⁶ and that to describe Yu’s, “a latent firmness seasoned by flexibility,”¹⁰⁷ are close to descriptions of Shen Hong’s calligraphy. Representing the excellence of production from early Tang sutra copyists, Shen Hong’s accomplishments can be interpreted as a consequence of imitating the elite styles of his day. Regardless of intention, copyists’ mimicry added prestige to their own writing, hence the growth of the sutra copying style paralleled with that of elite calligraphy masters. The Dunhuang manuscripts are valuable resources

¹⁰³ *Tonko shoho soka*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 23.49.

¹⁰⁴ Zhu Guantian, *Zhongguo shufa shi* [v. 4]: *Sui Tang Wudai juan*, 212.

¹⁰⁵ Jiao Mingchen, *Dunhuang xiejuan shufa yanjiu*, 134.

¹⁰⁶ See above, n. 87.

¹⁰⁷ Zhang Huaiguan, *Shudian*, in LDSF 192: “虞[世南]則內含剛柔。”

from which we may construct a dynamic relationship between the styles of the celebrated masters and those who were lesser- known or anonymous.

CHAPTER 6 BUDDHIST SUTRA COPYISTS AND SUTRA COPYING STYLE

Buddhist monks and lay devotees, as well as the Tang court clerk calligraphers all participated in and contributed to the accomplishments of sutra transcription. Benefiting from the calligraphy education promoted by the government and supported by the monasteries during the Tang dynasty, many sutra copyists were proficient calligraphers. This chapter discusses the distinctive qualities of these sutra copyists, and categorizes them into three major groups: Buddhist monks, privately hired sutra copyists, and government employed calligraphers. Selected examples are used to illustrate the distinguishing characteristics of each of these groups.

The demand for copyists and sutra reproductions during the Tang dynasty was increasingly persistent and widespread. In the Buddhist religion, the act of transcribing sutras or hiring others to copy sutras is a religious endeavor undertaken to garner merit or acquire the blessings of the Buddha. The practice of copying the sacred texts requires carefully articulated brushstrokes to ensure legibility and beauty, but to meet the demands for quality and quantity simultaneously, a balance must be achieved. As a result, a distinctive “sutra writing/copying style” developed. This chapter investigates this particular style in terms of its historical development, particularly how it came to be influenced by the Tang court’s political agendas, which sought to regulate calligraphic practices by instituting a standardized script, the Tang *kai*.

Sutra Copyists

Among the enormous number of copied sutras, some were written anonymously, but many of them stated with dates, transcribers’ names and titles. This information tells us that sutra copying activities were engaged in by three main groups: Buddhist monks,

privately hired sutra copyists (*jingsheng*), and government employed clerk calligraphers (*kaishu [shou]* 楷書[手] or *shushou* 書手).

Buddhist Monks as Sutra Copyists

Many monks transcribing sutras is relevant to learning and pursuing their religion, but more importantly, sutra transcription was a devotional and pious act. In many occasions, at the end of a scroll the monk who transcribed the sutra often signed his name and the date. For instance, the colophon of an early Tang sutra, *Foming jin*, now in the Dunhuang Collection at the Beijing Library (萊字 83), reads: “transcribed on the seventh day of the fifth month in the year of Gengyin 庚寅 [i.e. 630 or 690] by monk Shi Baochang 石保昌.”¹ In many cases monks identified themselves with their affiliated monasteries and locations. “Monk Huizhen 惠真 wrote at Xiuduo Monastery 修多寺 in the Prefecture of Gan 甘州,” appears on the colophon of a copy of *Foshuo shanxin pusa ershisi jiejing*, now in the Beijing Library (辰字 48).²

The Tang poet Cen Shen 岑參 (715-770) wrote a poem about the Tang monks’ passionate enthusiasm for translating and transcribing Buddhist sutras,

Master Zhang rarely comes out the [Chuguo] monastery,³
And dwelling in deep seclusion;
He professes the desire to transcribe all Buddhist sutras,
That exceeds tens of thousands of scrolls.⁴

¹ Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhua*, 128.

² Ibid.

³ THY 48.845: Chuguo monastery 楚國寺 in Jinchang district 晉昌坊, was a ruined Xingdao monastery 興道寺 in the Sui dynasty. Tang Gaozu inaugurated Chuguo monastery to honor his deceased fifth son, Zhiyun 智雲, who was killed in capital when Gaozu raised his revolt in Taiyuan.

⁴ *Cen Shen Shiji biannian jianzhu*, compiled by Liu Kaiyang, 773. The poem in Chinese: “璋公不出院，羣木閉深居。誓寫一切經，欲向萬卷餘...”

Master Zhang was one of the numerous enthusiastic monks who diligently transcribed sutras. During the Tang dynasty, Buddhist monasteries performed functions which were closely aligned with the imperial state. While the Tang government worked tirelessly to promote institutional growth and cultural enrichment, the Buddhist monasteries shared the responsibility of educating laymen as well as the clergy. Promoting calligraphy education and training sutra copyists was part of the monasteries alignment with imperial policy, which advocated calligraphy as a highly valuable aesthetic and cultural activity, as discussed in above chapters.

Although the amount of texts produced by the Buddhist monks is relatively small when compared with the prodigious number of transcribed sutras, those produced are meticulously and excellently crafted. Well-trained in calligraphic skills, monks undertook the task of copying sutras with a mentality somewhat different from that of hired sutra copyists. Less pressured for time, monks focused on quality instead. This is evident in the transcribed section of the Buddhist text *Sifenlu shanbusuiji jiemuo*, now in the Beijing Library (京辰 46). The colophon of this manuscript reads: “The sutra was carefully penned by Monk Liji 利濟, during the year of Wu 午 (?), from the eighth day of the fifth month to the third day of the sixth month to commemorate a new gold lamp erected at the Jinguangming Temple 金光名寺.”⁵ Supported by the monastery, Liji could afford to spend a month transcribing one sutra, which resulted in an accurate text, excellent calligraphy, and an overall high quality of production.

⁵ Wo Xinghua, *Dunhuang shufa*, 3.

Independent Sutra Copyists

Numerous sutra copyists were laymen trained at Buddhist monasteries. As they became more proficient, they were routinely employed or commissioned by monasteries or private devotees. An individual sutra copyist was known as *xiejing sheng* 寫經生 or *jingsheng* —person who copies sutras for a living. Sutra copyists often signed their names, preceded by the title *jingsheng* on the colophon at the end of a scroll. There were many *jingsheng*, such as Shen Hong mentioned earlier (in Chapter 5), and Wang Han 王瀚, Guo De 郭德, Peng Kai 彭楷, and Wang Siqian 王思謙, whose names appeared in many copied sutras discovered at Dunhuang.⁶

Calligraphy training of the *jingsheng*

To become a proficient sutra copyist necessitated extended training. One of the best and probably the most common way of calligraphy training was to practice with good models. The highly acclaimed court's codified standard script was the best, and possible the only choice, for model selection during the early Tang era. Many Dunhuang discovered fragments are evident of this notion. As discussed in the last chapter, a free-hand copy of *Shengjiao xu* (see fig. 17) suggests that Chu Suiliang's calligraphy was probably used as a model, and Jiang Shanjin's free-hand copy of *Zhiyong Zhencao Qianziwen* was also a calligraphy model (see fig. 27a and 27b).⁷ Examples abound. A well-executed calligraphy of *Qishi jing*⁸ replicates the admirable calligraphy from *Epigraph of Zhang Han* 張翰, (later known as model-book of Zhang Han) penned by

⁶ For more details see Lin Congming, *Dunhuang wenshu xue*, 160-65.

⁷ See section on “Examples from the Tang dynasty” in Chapter 5.

⁸ Now in Shanghai Museum Dunhuang Collection.

Ouyang Xun.⁹ These examples offer us clues to trace the basis of calligraphy training at that time. Besides diligent practice, to write as well as the masters was most likely the ultimate goal for becoming a proficient copyist.

Dunhuang fragments also inform us about some of the details of calligraphy exercises. A practice piece illustrates one routine drill scheme that required 200 characters a day, and at the end of that practice the date, the student's name, and the teacher's comments were also noted.¹⁰ The piece of practice work was done on the verso of an official document, *Shi Huihu Liangsi die* 史會狐良嗣牒,¹¹ dated the eighth year of Gaozong Tianbao 天寶 era (749).¹² In general, the Tang government kept documents on files for about nine years and after that the back side of the paper could be used for calligraphy practice or sutra copying.¹³ A shortage of supplies such as paper probably contributed to the need to use both sides of the paper. During the Tianbao era the central government was, and the security in Dunhuang was constantly challenged by neighboring countries, including Tibet and the Arab Empire.¹⁴ This use of limited resources to maintain calligraphy practice may reflect a strong commitment to calligraphy practice in the Dunhuang area. Even during the economic downturn, calligraphy education was continued.

⁹ Bai Qianshen, *Yugu weitu he juanjuan fawu*, 61, and figs. 97 and 98.

¹⁰ Wo Xinghua, *Dunhuang Shufa*, 2

¹¹ Now in the British Library (S.2703).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See also Rong Xinjian, *Dunhuangxue shibajiang*, 310.

¹⁴ See Chapter 5 n. 70.

Sometimes a proficient *jingsheng* became a monk, residing in the monastery and devoting his life to sutra copying. For instance, monk Zhiming 智命 was originally a *jingsheng* named Cheng Ting 鄭頊. His name was recorded on the colophon of a Buddhist text, *Chanshu zashi xia* 禪數雜事下, dated 593.¹⁵ Later he became a distinguished monk, and his life was recorded in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667).¹⁶ Zhiming is only one example among the many individuals who converted from being a *Jingsheng* to a monk, and presumably continued copying sutra diligently.

Collaboration between monasteries and Tang court

Even well-trained copyists often labored under a heavy demand for sutra copies, a pressure which could easily compromise their performance. In order to maintain the quality of calligraphy, the early Tang court institutionalized sutra transcribing. In the capital of Chang'an, the government established and administrated the Bureau of Sutra Transcription (*Xiejingsuo* 寫經所),¹⁷ which oversaw all sutra copying activities. The high officials Yu Chang 虞昶 (fl. 660–680) and Yan Xuandao 閻玄道 (fl. 660–680) were appointed to be in charge of the bureau. Yu Chang was the son of court calligraphy masterer Yu Shinan, and Yan Xuandao was a nephew of the well-known artist Yan Liben 閻立本 (?–673) and high official Yan Lide 閻立德 (?–656).¹⁸ The names of Yu

¹⁵ Zhu Guantian, *Zhongguo shufa shi* [v. 4]: *Sui Tang Wudai juan*, 212.

¹⁶ T 2060.682c–83a.

¹⁷ Zhou Gan, *Tangdai shushou yanjiu*, 90.

¹⁸ Information on Yu Chang, son of Yu Shinan, see XTS 102.3973; Yan Xuandao was possible the nephew of Yan Lide 閻立德 whose biography is in JTS 77.2679, in which it states his son named Yan Xuansui 閻玄邃. “玄” (xuan) was a character designated to the given name of that generation in the Yan family. See *Tonko shoho soka*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 23.50.

Chang and Yan Xuandao appear on various copied sutra, with the title *Jianjiao jiang* 檢校將 (Inspecting Censor), which means they acted as special commissioners to overlook the process of sutra copying and to ensure the overall quality of sutra reproductions.

A copy of fascicle three of the *Lotus Sutra*, dated 672, lists “Yu Chang” as the commissioner, and a copy of the last section of the *Diamond Sutra*, dated 676, lists “Yan Xuandao” as the commissioner.¹⁹ Presumably these government special commissioners were regulating the form and aesthetic quality of sutra production, while the monasteries were responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the texts, as many monks were listed as editors and proofreaders on the copied sutras.

Collaboration between the government and the major monasteries responsible for sutra transcription was forged in the early Tang period. Many extant Dunhuang manuscripts attest to this process and tell us about the labor force involved in the task. An example is presented in the following section.

Jingsheng Wang Siqian and his copy of the Lotus Sutra

A copy of fascicle six of the *Lotus Sutra* (fig. 31), dated 672 is a good example of the well-organized production of sutra administered by the government and monasteries.²⁰ At the end of the scroll, a long colophon of several columns demonstrates this formulaic system. The first column includes the date and the name of the sutra copyist, *jingsheng* Wang Siqian 王思謙. The next column tells us that twenty

¹⁹ The *Lotus Sutra* now is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2644); the *Diamond Sutra* is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3278); see *Dunhuang shufa congkan*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 23.49–50.

²⁰ The copy is now housed in the Dunhuang County Museum (敦博 55).

pages of sheets were used. The third column lists the name of the mounter (*zhuanghuang shou* 装璜手), Jie Shanji 解善集. The fourth column records the name of the first proofreader, which is the sutra copyist himself. The names of the second proofreader, the monk Guizhen 歸真, and the third proofreader, the monk Sidao 思道, are stated in the fifth and sixth columns. The next four columns name four high-ranked monks from Taiyuan Monastery (太原寺), including the great worthy Shenfu (大德神符), the great worthy Jiashang (大德嘉尚), the abbot Huili (寺主慧立), and the high seat Daocheng (上座道成), who were examiners. The last two columns show the involvement of two imperial government officials: the project supervisor, Xiang Yigan 向義感, who was also the Administrative Assistant and Chamberlain for the Foundry Office (判官少府掌冶署), and the specially appointed commissioner, Yu Chang, the Superior Grand Master of the Palace (太宗大夫) and Duke of the Dynasty-founding Yongxin 永興 District.²¹

It was routine to have monks proofread the sutras transcribed by *jingsheng*, as *jingsheng* were not necessarily conversant with the doctrines of Buddhism. To maintain absolute accuracy, the transcribed sutras had to be proofread by ordinary monk(s), then examined and finally approved by higher-ranked monks. Those who examined Wang Siquian's work were all highly reputable monks: Shengfu, Jiashang, and Daocheng. They were recognized as disciples of the eminent Monk Xuanzang and were well-respected.²² Their names appeared as the examiners on at least seven Dunhuang

²¹ The honorable title, the "Duke of Dynasty-founding Yongxin District", which was granted to the father, Yu Shinan, was then succeeded by the son. See XTS 102.3973.

²² Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhua*, 132.

manuscripts now held in the British Library.²³ The court official Xiang Yigan, an officer from the Foundry, was probably in charge of the supplies for the task. Yu Chang represented the government, insuring that the work was completed according to established rules and standards.

The characters penned by Wang Siqian exhibit an elegance of style and fluency similar to the brushstrokes of Shen Hong's work.²⁴ Although very little is known about Mr. Wang, one source mentions that he was a student of Yu Shinan.²⁵ The fluent, mature strokes and precisely rendered structure of the characters are well represented in Wang Siqian's works, which have often been considered exemplary of the beauty of Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang. Examining Wang Siqian's writing, one can discern "an air of unworldly aloofness," which is often used to describe the character of Yu Shinan's calligraphy.²⁶ However, Yu's peculiar merit is his meticulous stroke and flawless construction of each character. In my opinion, this particular quality is not completely captured in Wang Siqian's works, which occasionally display some imprudent brushstrokes and recklessly composed characters. This kind of comparison, however, is not entirely fair. As Yu's original handwriting perished long ago, the only examples we have are rubbings from a stele. The transcription of Yu's calligraphy onto the stele demanded precision and accuracy, while Wang's transcription of sutra was performed under the pressures of speed and efficiency.

²³ The items including, S.1456, S.2573, S.2637, S.2956, S.3079, and S.3094; see Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhu*, 132.

²⁴ For Shen Hong's work, see *The Apitan piposha lun* in section "Examples from the Tang dynasty" in Chapter 5.

²⁵ Zhou Gan, *Tangdai shushou yanjiu*, 90. See also Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 230.

²⁶ Ouyang Zhongshi and Wen C. Fong, *Chinese Calligraphy*, 201.

Imperfections such as those found in Wang's transcription may be attributed to the incessant demand for sutra copies, which can be traced from the dates that appeared on colophons at the end of the scrolls. Fascicle six of the *Lotus Sutra* transcribed by Wang Siqian is dated the twenty-first day of the second month in the second year of Gaozong Xianheng 咸亨 era (672). Four days later, Wang Siqian transcribed fascicle two of the *Lotus Sutra*.²⁷ Ten days after that he completed the transcription of fascicle three.²⁸ It is possible that there were some other fascicles written in between these dates that have been lost.

Working under such constant demand, one can understand the need for strict and painstaking rules and regulations to enforce the quality of production. The exhaustive process of governing and approving the copied sutras became a necessity because these copies were most likely used as models to be imitated for further reproduction in the prefectures.²⁹ This effort to keep texts accurate, while retaining a high standard of legibility and aesthetic form, was beneficial for increasing the value and spurring the development of both Buddhism and calligraphy.

Jingsheng's compensation

The quickness with which the work was done indicates that sutra copyists were probably paid by the number of pieces produced. One manuscript³⁰ describes how the

²⁷ Lin Congming, *Dunhuang wenshu xue*, 161–62. The colophon states “On the twenty-fifth day of the second month in the second year of Gaozong Xianheng era written by Wang Siqian.” The scroll is now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.4556).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 161. The colophon states, “On the seventh day of the third month in the year of Gaozong Xianheng era written by Wang Siqian.” The scroll is now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P. 2644).

²⁹ Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhua*, 130. See also Amy McNair, “Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style,” 230.

³⁰ Now it is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2912).

scribes were compensated for their work: “To copy one set of *Dabanruo jing* 大般若經 is paid for three silver plates (total thirty-five ounce—*liang* 两), one hundred piculs (shi 碩) of wheat, fifty piculs of millet, four catties of flour ... Paper and ink are supplied by the copyist.”³¹ Converted to the Tang currency, this compensation equals about three hundred *wen* 文 (i.e., the smallest monetary unit at that time), which compares favorably with the one hundred forty *wen* per month salary paid to lower temporary government employees.³² The pay scale of an individual copyist was not fixed and very much depended on the reputation of the scribe. Less skilled scribes would likely be paid less, suggested by a poem written at the end of a manuscript³³: “Today by finishing the sutra, [I] will be getting five pint (*sheng* 升) of wheat. Better not get into the high interest debts, otherwise at the end [I myself] would suffer the dreadful consequence.”³⁴ Assuming that calligraphic skill was a major factor in determining a copyist’s compensation, we could speculate that the potential for increased compensation, when coupled with the demand for sutra copies, may very well have inspired copyists to hone their skills.

Court Employed Clerk Calligraphers

The government employed calligraphers to perform the task of sutra copying in addition to their other official duties, such as government record keeping. Many Tang

³¹ Zhou Gan, *Tangdai shushou yanjiu*, 73. See also Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhua*, 134: “寫大般若經一部施銀盤子叁枚(共三十五兩) 麥壹百碩 粟五十碩 粉肆斤... 寫經直紙墨筆自供足。”

³² XTS 55.1369.

³³ It is dated 919, and now housed in the collection of the British Library (S.692).

³⁴ Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhua*, 135: “今日寫書了，合有五升麥。高貸不可得，還是自身災。” Chinese measurement: 1 *sheng* = 1 liter.

Dunhuang manuscripts were signed with *kaishu*, *kaishu shou*, or *shushou*,³⁵ titles that referred to the clerk calligraphers who were sub-official functionaries under the Tang government system. Considered “non-official specialists,” these men of literary and calligraphic merit were selected by various government agents to assist in the extensive and growing tasks of record keeping and copying.³⁶ Although not officially ranked, they could be promoted after a period of meritorious service.³⁷ The official documents of the Tang dynasty, including *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*, *Tang Huiyao*, and *Tang Liudian* 唐六典 (Codes and Regulations of the Six Boards of the Tang Dynasty) listed the number of clerk calligraphers employed in each government agency, but do not clearly indicate who or how many of them actually participated in copying sutras. The dynamic activities of clerk calligraphers engaged in the work of sutra copying are found in information provided on the colophons at the end of transcribed sutras from Dunhuang. It may be presumed that many of these clerk calligraphers were trained at the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (*Hongwen guan*) or were the students of School of Calligraphy (*Shuxue*).³⁸ Adept at rendering the standard script, Tang *kai*, the clerk calligraphers played an important role in promoting the style of Tang *kai*, as the copied sutras were often disseminated to the prefectures as models for further production.³⁹

³⁵ Charles O. Hucker in his *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* defines *kaishu* and *kaishu shou* as “clerkly calligrapher,” which, in my interpretation, seems to emphasize the clerkly nature of the job. I modify that translation to “clerk calligrapher” to stress the fact that calligraphy is the essence of the work.

³⁶ XTS 45.1180.

³⁷ THY 65.1125, 64.1116.

³⁸ Amy McNair, “Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style,” 230.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, see also Wang Yuanjun, *Tangren shufa yu wenhua*, 128–32.

Government affiliations

Many Dunhuang manuscripts reveal a routine that a government employed calligrapher usually signed the date on which the transcription was completed, proceeded by his title, name, and governmental affiliation on the colophons at the end of the scrolls. The following are some examples from the British Library Dunhuang Collection.

Fascicle five of the *Lotus Sutra* (S.1456), “On the thirteenth day of the fifth month in the third year of [Gaozong] Shangyuan 上元 era (676), [it was] transcribed by a clerk calligrapher Sung Xuanxi (楷書孫玄奚) of the Imperial Library (*Bishu sheng* 秘書省).”

Fascicle seven of the *Lotus Sutra* (S.2596), “On the twenty-first day of the third month in the third year of [Gaozong] Shangyuan (676), [it was] transcribed by a clerk calligrapher Wang Zhiwan (楷書王智苑) of the Institute for the Advanced Literature (*Hongwen guan* 弘文館).”

Fascicle six of the *Lotus Sutra* (S.3348), “On the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month in the first year of [Gaozong] Shangyuan (674), [it was] transcribed by a clerk calligrapher Xiao Jing (楷書蕭敬) from the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent (*Zuochun fang* 左春坊).”

The above examples indicate that some clerk calligraphers who were hired by the Tang government were actually participating in the task of sutra transcription. The government agencies include predominant ones, such as the Imperial Library and the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, and minor or subordinate agencies, such as the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent.

The numbers of calligraphers, hired by various government agencies and their jurisdictions, range from as few as two to as large as eighty. Examining many official documents, I discover that the number and titles of calligraphers assigned to the affiliated agencies are recorded inconsistently in various historical documents. For instance, *Jiu Tang shu* notes that thirty *kaishu shou* were assigned to *Hongwen guan*

(Institute for the Advancement of Literature),⁴⁰ while the *Xin Tang shu* states twelve *kaishu* to *Hongwen guan*.⁴¹ *Jiu Tang shu* says that twenty-five *kaishu shou* were assigned to *Shiguan* 史館 (The Historiography Institute),⁴² while the *Xin Tang shu* records *Shiguan* has twelve *kaishu*, and eighteen *kaishu shou*.⁴³ *Pishu sheng* 祕書省 (Imperial Library) hired the largest number of clerk calligraphers, eighty *kaishu shou* states in *Jiu Tang shu* but only ten *kaishu* in *Xin Tang shu*.⁴⁴

Many subordinate agencies were also staffed with clerk calligraphers. The Editorial Service (*Zhuzuo ju* 著作局) under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Library had five *kaishu*.⁴⁵ The Eastern Palace (*Donggong* 東宮), residence of the Heir Apparent, had twenty-five *kaishu* in the Editorial Service (*Sijing ju* 司經局).⁴⁶ The Institute for the Veneration of Literature (*Chongwen guan* 崇文館), a subordinate to the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent (*Zuochun fang* 左春坊), had ten *kaishu*.⁴⁷ The Bureau of Astronomy (*Sitian tai* 司天臺), a subordinate to the Palace Library (*Mishu sheng* 祕書省), had five

⁴⁰ JTS 43.1848: *Hongwen guan* is subordinate agent to the Chancellery (*Menxia sheng* 門下省).

⁴¹ XTS 47.1210.

⁴² JTS 43.1853: *Shiguan* is subordinate to the Palace Secretariat (*Zhongshu sheng* 中書省).

⁴³ XTS 47.1214.

⁴⁴ JTS 43.1855; XTS 47.1214.

⁴⁵ XTS 47.1215.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.1294.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

kaishushou.⁴⁸ Even the office of Female Service (*Yeting ju* 掖庭局), a unit of the Palace Domestic Service (*Neishi sheng* 内侍省), had two *kaishu*.⁴⁹

The numbers of employed clerk calligraphers are not always referenced with a given date or time period, which means that the hiring was probably determined by need and varied at different times. It is also not clear whether *kaishu* and *kaishu shou* carried the same responsibilities but were differently titled. Nor do we know with certainty if these *kaishu* or *kaishu shou* were assigned the duty of copying sutras. What we do know from the extant Dunhuang manuscripts, however, is that the government employed calligraphers did participate in sutra copying and signed their official titles and names in the sutras they copied. These Dunhuang scrolls offer us handwritten Tang documents that also validate and rectify some historical facts. The three copies of the *Lotus Sutra* in the British Library Collection, listed above, confirm the fact that during the Emperor Gaozong's Shangyuan era the clerk calligraphers, who worked for the Imperial Library, the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, and the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent, were all engaged in sutra transcription work and carried the title *kaishu*.

Official sanction of copied sutras

The sutras transcribed by clerk calligraphers were officially sanctioned and complied with the same strict rules and well-organized system that organized works produced by the *jingsheng*. Fascicle three of the *Lotus Sutra*, transcribed by the clerk calligrapher Cheng Du (書手程度) is a good example (fig. 32).⁵⁰ Comprised of sixteen

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.1216.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 47.1222.

⁵⁰ It is now in the British Library Collection (S.5319).

columns, this sutra begins with the date: the second year of [Gaozong's] Xianheng 咸亨 era (i.e. 671), followed by the copyist's name and title: *shushou* Cheng Du. The next two columns tell us that nineteen sheets of paper were used, and also gives the name of the mounter: Wang Gong 王恭. The next six columns record the names of monks as the examiners, and the following two columns provide the names of the inspectors: the abbot Huili and high seat Daocheng of Taiyuan Monastery. The next columns list the proofreaders, including two monks from Dazongchi Monastery (大摠持寺), and Cheng Du himself. The sutra ends by naming the Tang court officially appointed supervisor, Xiang Yigan, with the official title of Administrative Assistant from the Foundry Office, and the special commissioner, Yu Chang, with the official title of Superior Grand Master of the Palace.

The close collaboration between monasteries and the government can be traced from this sutra copied by Cheng Du and others, such as the *Lotus Sutra* copied by Wang Siqian (discussed earlier in the section of *jingsheng*). Two inspectors from the monastery, Huili and Daocheng, the governmental supervisor Xiang Yigan, and the commissioner Yu Chang are all listed on the colophon at the end of both Cheng Du's and Wang Siqian's works. The reappearance of these names on copied sutras that were completed by copyists hired either privately by the monasteries or by the government further confirms the close working relationship monasteries and government. More interesting is the fact that on the same sutra Cheng Du signed his title *shushou* right after the date to identify himself as the person who transcribed the sutra, but under the column for those who proofread the stura, he endorsed it with the title *jingsheng*. It is possible that Cheng Du was trained and worked in the monastery as

a *jingsheng* and then was employed by the government as a *shushou*. This situation would probably have been the case for other copyists besides Cheng Du, and sometimes blurred the definition between *shushou* and *jingsheng*. Often the quality of production from *shushou* or *jingsheng* would be consistent as long as it subscribed to government standards.

Despite this painstaking and exhaustive system, the number of copied sutra produced under government sanction is considerable. Emperor Gaozong's era was particularly productive. Using the *Lotus Sutra* in the British Library Collection as the sole example, within a three year range (672–674) one can identify the following:

Fascicle three (S.4209) ...transcribed on the fifteenth day of the fourth month in the third year of Xianhong (672) by a *Qunshushou* 群書手 Zhao Wenshen 趙文審 from the Chancellery...

Fascicle four (S.4551) ...transcribed on the twenty-ninth day of the eighth month in the third year of Xianhong (672) by a *qunshushou* 群書手 Liu Daci 刘大慈 from the Chancellery ...

Fascicle two (S.2573) ... transcribed on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the fourth year of Xianhong (673) by a *qunshushou* 群書手 Feng Anchang 封安昌 from the Chancellery ...

Fascicle four (S.0312) ... transcribed on the twenty-first day of the ninth month in the fourth year of Xianhong (673) by a *qunshushou* 群書手 Feng Anchang 封安昌 from the Chancellery...

Fascicle three (S.0456) ... transcribed on the second day of the eighth month in the fifth year of Xianhong (674) by a *kaishu* 楷書 Xiao Jing 蕭敬 from Secretariat of the Heir Apparent ...

Each scroll above identically lists the government appointed officials Xiang Yigan and Yu Chang as the supervisor of the production. As a director of the Bureau of Sutra Transcription, Yu Chang must have been authorized to look after all the copies produced by the clerk calligraphers from various government agencies. From the above

examples, one can also see that the Chancellery during the Xianhong era hired many clerk calligraphers and named them *qunshushou* 群書手, which can be literally translated as “the flock of clerk calligraphers.” That term, however, does not recorded in the Tang official histories, such as *Xin Tang shu* and *Jiu Tang shu*. We can say that Dunhuang manuscripts are providing us with information that was missed from the historical records compiled later.

The Standard Format of Copied Sutras

The layout for transcribed sutras was standardized during the Tang. Each sheet of paper, with hidden or visible grids, consisted of twenty-eight columns with seventeen characters in each column. Each character occupied a size of 1.5 cm. or 1.8 cm in each column. Following this standard, one can easily figure out the exact number of characters required to fill in each page and how many pages of paper were needed to complete a fascicle of any given sutra.⁵¹ The sheets then were collected and mounted as a hand scroll. This standard format imbues the entire composition with a sense of alignment and regularity.

The rigid format of seventeen characters in each column was adopted before the Tang time and is traceable to the transcribed sutras of the Southern Dynasties. By the Sui dynasty almost all transcribed sutras were executed under the rule of seventeen characters per column. Examples can be found in the scroll of fascicle eighteen of the *Daji jing*, dated the third year of the Emperor Wendi’s Kaihuang 開皇 era (583) (fig. 33), and the scroll of fascicle four of the *Siyi jing* dated 588.⁵² In these and most other

⁵¹ Rong Xinjian, *Dunhuangxue shibajiang*, 303; see also Zhou Gan, *Tangdai shushou yanjiu*, 90.

⁵² Both of them are now housed in the British Library: *Daji jing* is coded S.3935, and *Siyi jing* is S.4020.

transcribed sutras from the Tang era, the characters are tightly spaced from top to bottom in each column, with more space left between columns. This arrangement of having more space in between columns is probably more comforting for the eyes of readers. At the same time, the characters that occupied the same column, with the space in between tightened, were written in a more squarish manner that diverged from the normal configuration of standard script, which was vertically elongated.

A similar format of seventeen characters in each column, with hidden or visible grids, is commonly used in Japanese sutra scrolls. The famous *Lotus Sutra* at Itsukushima Shrine (1164),⁵³ for example, is laid out strictly with seventeen characters in each column throughout the entire twelve scrolls. This suggests that the Tang's influence on Japanese culture was penetrating even on subtle matters like this.

Tang Court's Sponsorship of Sutra Production and Distribution

From the early to the late seventh century, during the years from Taizong's Zhengguan to Gaozong's Xianhong eras, handwritten scriptures in China reached the pinnacle of their development. Government agencies, including the Imperial Library, the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, the Historiography Institute, etc., were, in spite of their routine governmental responsibilities, all involved in the tasks of copying sutra, supplying materials, making scrolls, and distributing sutras.

In addition to retaining copyists, government agencies also hired paper makers (*shuzhi jiang* 熟纸匠) and scroll mounting installers (*zhanghuang jiang* 装潢匠). Some

⁵³ The *Lotus Sutra* at Itsukushima is a religious text and scrolls were offered by the Taira family as an act of piety and devotion. It represents the highlight of art and culture of Fujiwara Period (897–1185).

agencies would simply hire *shuzhi zhanghuang jiang* 熟纸装潢匠, artisans who were good at both paper making and scroll mounting.⁵⁴

Due to the demand for paper, the techniques and materials for paper making rapidly improved in the Sui and Tang dynasties. The paper used during the Sui shifted from the hemp cloth of earlier periods to hemp bark. The creation of finer and thinner paper was mainly due to improvements on the design of paper-making screens. No longer made from reeds but rather slender bamboo strips, this improved model increased screen density; also thereby improving the paper quality. In the eighth century, a new type of paper was produced using fine hemp fibers that constructed a thicker paper with refined quality. This improvement in quality resulted from another new type of screen made with a sheet of fine silk cloth, which smoothed the surface of the paper. This kind of surface allowed for an easier movement of brushstrokes, better ink absorption, and ultimately clearer writing. The best preserved sutras were written in the form of Tang *kai* on the paper made of hemp fiber and yellow die (*huangma zhi* 黄麻纸).⁵⁵ The colophon often indicates how many sheets (*zhang* 張 or *mei* 枚) were used. The numbers vary, but typically range from twelve or eighteen to twenty-plus pages.⁵⁶

The scroll mounting installers were responsible for mounting the collected sheets into a well-formed scroll. Highly skilled, the installers were considered to be just as

⁵⁴ In XTS 47.1214, it states, “six paper makers in the Historiography Institute (*Shiguan*).” In XTS 47.1214, “ten paper makers and ten mounting installers in the Imperial Library (*Mishu sheng*).” In XTS 49.1294, “one paper maker and one mounting installer in the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent (*Zuochun fang*).” In XTS 47.1210, “eight paper maker/mounting installers in the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (*Hongwen guan*).”

⁵⁵ More details on paper making in Dunhuang, see Rong Xinjian, *Dunhuangxue shibajiang*, 302–7; Lin Congming, *Dunhuang wenshu xue*, 89–97; Fujieda Akira, “Chronological Classification of Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts,” in Susan Whitfield, ed., *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 103–12; Jean/Pierre Drege, “Dunhuang papers: preliminary morphological analysis of dated Chinese manuscripts,” 116.

⁵⁶ See Lin Congming, *Dunhuang wenshu xue*, 97–103 for the actual examples.

important as the copyists. The sutras completed under the monasteries and government sanctioned system usually carried a column reserved for the mounting installers (*zhanghuang shou*), which preceded the names of the copyists. Jie Shanji 解善集 was one of the distinguished installers active in Gaozong's time. More than twenty discovered Dunhuang scrolls dated to the years of Gaozong's Xianhong (670-673) and Shangyuan (674-675) eras bear his name.⁵⁷

The distribution of copies was dictated in the *Codes and Regulations of the Six Boards of the Tang Dynasty*, which states: "The literary work of the *Four Series* (*Sibu* 四部)⁵⁸ must have three copies; the first one is the original, the second one is the duplicate copy, and the third one is the depository copy."⁵⁹ The duplicate copy can be bestowed (or distributed) via imperial order. After it is given away, more copies can be made. It is not clear whether the copying and distribution of Buddhist texts followed the same mandate. But it is reasonable to presume that all officially sanctioned sutras probably had at least three copies, one for the temple, one to be stored in the court, and one to be distributed to the prefectures. More copies could be made as needed. Many transcribed sutras discovered in the Dunhuang caves were possibly imperially ordered

⁵⁷ Most scrolls are in the British Library, including S.36, S.513, S.84, S.312, S.456, S.1084, S.1456, S.2637, S.2181, S.3094, S.3348, S.3361, S.4168, S.4353, S.3079, S.2573, S.4209, S.4551. Some in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, including P.3278, P.2195, P.2644, P.4556. One scroll in Shanghai Museum: fascicle three of the *Lotus Sutra*, and one in Shanghai Library: fascicle one of the *Lotus Sutra*. Detail see Lin Congming, *Dunhuang wenshu xue*, 107–12.

⁵⁸ The Four Series is traditionally categorized into Classics (*jing* 經), History (*shi* 史), Philosophy (*zi* 子), and Literary Collections (*ji* 集). Details on Tang court's governing the Four Series see *Tang liu dian*, 10.298–300.

⁵⁹ Zhou Gan, *Tangdai shushou yanjiu*, 19.

copies. There were probably many more copies made and disseminated across the country to be used as models for the production of provincial copies.⁶⁰

The quality of provincial copies could lag behind the high standards required of government distributed models. Yet sometimes a provincial copy demonstrated an extremely high quality. Fascicle 329 of the *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom*,⁶¹ (dated 674) in the Elliott Collection at Princeton, is a good example (fig. 34). It is assumed to be a provincial copy, because the scroll is signed with only one collator's name and not the complete roster of copyists, mounting installers, proofreaders, supervisors, and commissioner that is typically a feature of standard governmental-sanctioned sutras.⁶² The scroll was signed with a name Li Yihai, who was probably a collator responsible for checking the accuracy against the original.⁶³ Although the sutra was copied by an anonymous scribe, it is reasonable to believe that the copyist was required to faithfully reproduce the same style of calligraphy as that which appeared on the government-sponsored manuscript produced in the capital. In the mid-seventh century, Chu Suiliang's elegant Tang *kai* script was the most popular and imitated style, and it is not difficult to recognize that the Princeton scroll was executed by imitating his graceful style. It is evident that this calligraphy style originated in central metropolitan areas, and

⁶⁰ Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 230.

⁶¹ In Chinese it is translated as "*The Great Sutra of the Wisdom That Reaches the Other Shore*," which in complete contains 600 fascicles. The Sutra was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Xuanzang in the year of 663. See Harrist, and Fong, ed., *The Embodied Image*, 100, noted by Amy McNair, "The *Great Sutra* is a collection of shorter scriptures, including the well-known *Heart Sutra* and *Diamond Sutra*, which contain the Buddha's teachings on *prajñā* or 'wisdom'."

⁶² Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 230.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

was later adapted by provincial artists as the result of the government's systematic sponsorship of sutra copying and distribution.

Sutra Copying Style

General Attribution, Variations, and Special Characteristics

“Sutra copying style” (*xiejing ti* 寫經體) is a term in calligraphy that generally refers to a form used to transcribe religious texts. It is a fluid style, constantly reflecting the prevailing taste of calligraphic form at any given time. Since most existing sutras and the majority of Dunhuang manuscripts are dated from the sixth to the ninth centuries and are written in the form of standard script that was predominant at that time, standard script has been often associated with the sutra writing style. In his discussion of the development of sutra writing style, Frederick Mote emphasizes the idea of “one particular genre” that “has its own logic, stressing smooth uniformity, varying in artistic quality but recognizably of one genre.”⁶⁴ This notion is supported by Amy McNair, who affirms that standard script was most suitable for religious texts due to its remarkable consistency. She concludes, “The history of standard script is closely bound to the transcription of religious texts.”⁶⁵

The discovered Dunhuang Buddhist manuscripts, however, illustrate the fact that various calligraphy scripts were employed over different time periods and that distribution corresponds with the historical evolution of scripts in general. In his essay “Chronological Classification of Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts,” Dunhuang specialist Fujieda Akira classified the discovered manuscripts by their dates and scripts.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Frederick W. Mote and Hung-lam Chu, *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*, 52.

⁶⁵ Amy McNair, “Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style,” 225–38.

⁶⁶ Akira Fujieda, “Chronological Classification of Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts,” 103–14.

According to Fujieda, around 400 CE a writing style similar to official script (*lishu*), written on bamboo and wooden slips, was used by sutra copyists. Around 500 CE, manuscripts were written in the form of mixed official and standard script (*lishu* and *kaishu*). By the end of the sixth century, the script written in the Sui, demonstrated a homogeneous use of the standard script (*kaishu*), while the Tang dynasty the script was transcribed in a new standard form known as Tang *kai*. As noted by Fujieda, sutras transcribed in Tang *kai* displayed not only a new calligraphic style in terms of strokes and form, but also a correct form for characters that were codified by an orthographic movement (*zhengzi* 正字, “correct writing”).⁶⁷

As Fujieda argues, the long development of sutra writing styles in China reflects all subsequent stages of calligraphic script evolution. The emphasis on the merit and efficacy of a standard script was further developed in the Tang dynasty. The qualities that characterize the style at that time are formality, precision, consistency, and legibility, qualities essential to the transcription of religious texts.

The changes in brush types and improvement in paper quality that made noticeable differences in calligraphic styles are also discussed in Fujieda’s report.⁶⁸ A softer kind of brush made from goat hair, which had been widely used since the Sui dynasty, allowed a writer to move the brush faster and be more productive. As

⁶⁷ Ibid., 104: “During the reign of Taizong (627–649), the Director of the Imperial Library, Yan Shigu 顏師古, criticized *kai* characters as not conforming to the *li* style which appeared in *Shuowen jiezi*, Several hundred characters were ‘corrected’ and between 671–677 the court produced ‘correct’ versions of two sutra (one being the Diamond Sutra) which were distributed nationwide. There were over 30 copies extant in Dunhuang which exhibit the new forms of characters. It is possible to distinguish therefore between old and new *kai* styles. The new style is called Tang *kai*.” For more details on orthography in the Tang dynasty see Amy McNail, “Public Values in Calligraphy and Orthography in the Tang Dynasty,” Li Haixia, “Tangdai de zhengzi yundong,” and Shi Anchang, “Tangdai zhengzi xuegao.”

⁶⁸ Akira Fujieda, “Chronological Classification of Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts,” 107–11.

evidenced in many characters, sutra copyists sometimes displayed a tendency to replace standard strokes with trifling strokes. This meant that their calligraphic presentation diverged from the aesthetic quality approved by the mainstream tradition, and sometimes led critics to discredit work produced by sutra copyists.

Critical assessments of Buddhist sutra writings, when combined with the reticence of Chinese scholars to value the importance of religious texts, has led to a tendency for scholars to question, often with contempt, the importance of Buddhist texts in the Chinese tradition of calligraphy. As a consequence, Buddhist sutras written with high quality calligraphy could be ignored simply because they were religious in content. Modern scholars, however, have begun to establish the aesthetic value of handwritten sutras beyond their primary value as religious texts containing sacred revelations. Lothar Ledderose's study of Wang Xizhi shifts the emphasis from studying the religious importance of these texts to a focus on their aesthetic quality.⁶⁹ Susan Whitfield describes her opinion of the handwritten sutras as being "neither wholly akin to works of art nor to texts, but something of each."⁷⁰ More specifically, Whitfield's statement can be interpreted as suggesting that the art of writing and the spiritual nature embodied in the religious text are dynamically intertwined.

Among the vast number of transcribed Buddhist texts, some were executed with extraordinary calligraphic skill and were highly praised by later critics. Yang Ting 楊庭 (fl. 690–700), an independent sutra copyist (*jingsheng*), transcribed *Wuyun lu* 五蘊論

⁶⁹ Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties."

⁷⁰ Susan Whitfield, *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, 12.

(Treatise on the Five Refinements), which was collected by Song Emperor Huizong and recorded in the *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalog* as follows:

The characters produced by [Yang Ting] exemplified the excellence of standard script, and were highly praised among his peer calligraphers during the Changshou 長壽 era (692–693). The sutra copyists during the Tang time established their own distinctive style. Outstanding among them were such works as [Yang] Ting’s calligraphy, which was considered truly marvelous.⁷¹

The work by Yang Ting vanished long ago, but commentary found in the prestigious *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalog* draws attention to the value of Yang Ting’s aesthetic presentation. The term “distinctive style” that was used to praise Yang’s calligraphy in the *Catalog* has been repeated by art historians to describe a quality *jingsheng* copy.

There are other sutra scribes whose works were also appreciated and glorified in *Xuanhe shupu*, such as that of the monk Tan Lin 曇林 (?- 593):

Tan Lin was skilled at writing small script. His strokes were full of strength without even a single trace of casualness. Their regularity and evenness represents the high quality of work that sutra copyists were capable producing. He transcribed a section of *Jingang shangwei tuoluoni* 金剛上味陀羅尼 from the *Diamond Sutra*, which is now in the Imperial Collection [of the Song]. It contains several thousand characters, but its consistency in scale makes it easy to read, and read fast. Although the calligraphy might appear constrained and lacking a certain loftiness of expression, the visual coherence between the naturalness of the brushstrokes and his spirit truly deserve to be applauded.⁷²

This long phrase, which sings the praises of Tan Lin, illustrates the general criteria for reckoning excellence in sutra copying: skillfully created small script that is full of strength, tidy and consistent. Above all, the script should be consistent to make it easy

⁷¹ *Xuanhe shupu*, 5.38: “楊庭，為時經生，作字得楷法之妙，長壽間，一時為輩流推許... 唐書法至經生自成一律，其間固有超絕者，便為名書，如庭書，是亦可觀者。”

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.41: “釋曇林。作小楷，下筆有力，一點畫不妄作，然修整自持，正類經生之品格高者，... 累數千字，終始一律，不失行次，便於疾讀，但恨拘窘法度，無飄然自得之態，其意與筆正特見嚴謹，亦可嘉也。”

to read, as the most valuable and ineffable quality is brushwork suffused with an artist's spirit.

Stylistic Comparison: Copyists in Debt to the Elite Masters

The extraordinary works by the *jingsheng* Yang Ting and the monk Tan Lin are no longer available to us, but remarks about their accomplishments in the *Xuanhe Shupu* have become classic references for the study of sutra copying style. Modern observations on some extraordinary Dunhuang manuscripts echo the *Xuanhe's* praises on the works by the *jingsheng* Yang Ting and the monk Tan Lin. *Jingsheng* Shen Hong's *Apitan piposha lun* is an example, which was written in small script with extreme accuracy and consistency (see figs. 28a and 28b), and was praised by modern scholars. Complementing Shen Hong's copy, Rao Zongyi says, "It stands out as the calligraphy model for all the sutra scribes for the early Tang dynasty."⁷³ Jiao Mingchen 焦明辰 also praises Shen Hong's calligraphy with words like fluent, energetic, vigorous, appealing, smooth, hearted, graceful and splendid; he concludes it in the following passage, "His style is full of pleasure, structure is square but brush strokes are curvilinear. His work undoubtedly represents the excellence of the early Tang's production from sutra scribes."⁷⁴ With all the acclaim for Shen Hong's calligraphy, it becomes imperative to examine his works further.

By studying the rendering of strokes and the composition of Shen Hong's characters, one can discern his debt to the famous early Tang master Chu Suiliang and calligraphy sage Wang Xizhi. The overall presentation of Shen Hong's brushstrokes

⁷³ *Tonko shoho soka*, compiled by Jao Tsung-i, 23.49.

⁷⁴ Jiao Mingchen, *Dunhuang xiejuan shufa yanjiu*, 134.

exhibit a flexible pause, extreme rhythm and rich vibrancy, and are comparable to Chu's inscription on the stele of *Preface to the Holy Teachings* and Wang Xizhi's *Lanting Xu*. When individual strokes and characters are examined, the resemblances are even more obvious and often striking. The character *xian* 咸 (fig. 35a) in Sheng Hong's *Apitan* bears an uncanny resemblance in both structure and stroke presentation to the same character in Wang Xizhi's *Lanting* (fig. 35b) and the characters *gan* 感 (fig. 35c) and *huo* 惑 (fig. 35d) in Chu Suiliang's *Yanta Shengjiao xu*. The left side of the character is feathered with relaxed strokes, while the right side is constructed with an intense and vigorously exaggerated long stroke slanting to the right, finished with a distinguishing hook. The effect is accomplished by twisting the brush straight up. This presentation yields a very different result than what one might expect: an elongated stroke ending with an easy incline to the right. An expressive style like this is consistently presented throughout Sheng Hong's *Apitan*. One can easily notice that pattern from characters such as *yi* 義, *wo* 我, and *zhi* 紙 (fig. 36a). The same characteristic was evident in Chu Suiliang's *Yanta Shengjiao xu*, particularly in characters such as *zang* 藏, *yi* 儀, and *zai* 載 (fig. 36b), and Wang Xizhi's *sui* 歲, *mao* 茂, and *sheng* 盛 (fig. 36c) in *Lanting xu*.

Note also that all their long vertical strokes begin with the brush tip inclined horizontally in the opposite direction before moving vigorously downward. The inclination was brief and yet strong enough to display a well-controlled brush tip. Although the exposition was small, by forming a contrasting angle with the long vertical stroke this presentation actually creates an effect of balance and expansive quality, with a handsome hook at the end. Shen Hong's *Apitan* was dated to 662, less than ten years after Chu Suiliang inscribed the famous *Preface*. Chu's style was still prominent at this

time, so it is not surprising that the novel shape and active strokes of Chu Suiliang's calligraphy were vividly modeled.

A similar stroke structure was adopted by the productive *jingsheng* Wang Siqian, a contemporary of Shen Hong. Many fascicles of the *Lotus Sutra* transcribed by Wang Siqian were among the Dunhuang discoveries mentioned earlier in this chapter. The characters *xian* 咸, *zhi* 紙, and *gan* 感, written on the colophon of fascicle three of the *Lotus Sutra* (see fig. 29), also incorporate a long, slender, and exaggerated downward stroke complete with a small horizontal stroke at the beginning, which ends with a straight upward hook stroke. Wang Siqian's *Lotus Sutra* is dated to 672, when Chu Suiliang's style was most favored in court and country as well. Such close similarity may be the result of sutra copyists' faithfulness in representing the dominant calligraphy style promoted by the court.

Chu Suiliang's undulating lines and his distinctively long and graceful "throw" (*pie* 撇) stroke can be recognized in many copied sutras. The *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom* in Princeton is a good example, even though it was only a provincial copy, in which the "throw" stroke in the characters like *ruo* 若, *mo* 摩, and *xu* 虛 (fig. 37) closely resemble that in the characters *yi* 儀, *jin* 金, *se* 色, *rong* 容, *jing* 鏡, and *li* 麗 (fig. 38) in the inscription of the famous *Preface*. The provincial sutra copyists also adopted Chu Suiliang's fully angled "hook" (*gou* 鉤) stroke, which can be seen throughout the copyist's *Great Sutra* (see fig. 37). In this provincial copy, the copyist is purposely showing the brush tip at the beginning point of every horizontal or vertical stroke (see also fig. 37).

Although all the significant features of Chu Suiliang's calligraphy have been deliberately emphasized and well executed by this anonymous copyist transcribing the *Great Sutra*, there are still defects that can be seen in the provisional copy. Amy McNair compares the character *bian* 變 in the *Great Sutra* and *zheng* 徵 in Chu's *Yanta* (fig. 39).⁷⁵ Both characters contain the "drag" (*na* 捺) stroke, which, when used, is the last stroke to complete a character and often governs the balance of the composition. The drag stroke in both characters is depicted in a long, slender, and exaggerated manner; instead of dragging downwards, they are stretched outward and, as a result, the character appeared lifted and lively. The provincial copyist, however, seems to lack the precise skill to complete the drag stroke with the sharp angle that was produced by master Chu. In addition, the center part of the character *bian* 變 is crudely abbreviated. This kind of lapse may suggest, according to McNair, "that our copyist might not have met the high calligraphic standards demanded in the capital."⁷⁶ In my opinion, the clumsy abbreviation in the character *bian* may be the result of the time constraints that were faced by all sutra copyists. Sometimes abbreviations were necessary for the same reason. Abbreviating the original character *wu* 無, which contains bountiful strokes, with the simplified form 无, which has only four simple strokes, was a particular convention commonly adopted in sutra copying (see fig. 34).

Regardless, there are always differences that can be detected between a master's hand and that of a copyist's, and close resemblance between them is evidence that the calligraphic quality established in the early Tang court was successful, long-lasting and

⁷⁵ Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 230.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

far reaching. The Buddhists' efforts to sustain high standards of calligraphy in sutra copying and to distribute the copies on a grand scale proved to be of great value in cultivating and elevating the popularity of calligraphy, which began in the Sui dynasty and developed fully during the Tang. However, this impact awaits further corroboration; and its evaluation may be a subject of future research.

Possible Influence of Copyists on Elite Masters

Along with the recognition that copyists often imitated the elite styles of their day, a question arises as to whether or not the work of copyists had made some influences on elite masters. To answer that question, one would have to counter a long tradition of scholarship. Often denied or devalued by the intellectual mainstream, religious manuscripts have not been considered important in the historical development of the calligraphic tradition in China. While literary sources supporting the argument that sutra copyists influenced masters are scarce, one can certainly look for evidence in the surviving manuscripts.

A major shift in the development of Chinese calligraphy is apparent in a change that took place during the mid-Tang period, when elegant, elongated characters were supplanted by rounder and squarish characters. The squarish effect emphasized in the style of the leading calligraphy master at this time, Yan Zhenqing, was said to have initiated this new development. However, as discussed previously, squarish characters had in fact often appeared in the copied sutras of earlier periods. This strongly suggests that Master Yan Zhenqing had encountered many copied sutras and they may have influenced his "distinctive" style.

A few examples support this argument. A twenty-two-line handwritten copy of Empress Wu's *Preface to the Holy Teaching of Tripitaka* (Sanzang shengjiao xu 三藏聖教序) (fig. 40), dated 700,⁷⁷ exhibits brushstrokes and compositional structures that later appeared in Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy. Manuscripts written at the end of seventh century illustrate similar traits: *Taixuanzhen yibenji jing* 太玄真一本際經, transcribed by the Daoist nun Zhao Miaoxu 趙妙虛 (fig. 41),⁷⁸ and a fragment of colophon of the *Lotus Sutra* (fig. 42),⁷⁹ both display round but powerful strokes and squarish characters. These manuscripts were executed many decades before Yan Zhenqing became an influential figure. Similarities in character structure and brushstroke between Zhao Miaoxu's *Taixuanzhen yibenji jing* and the celebrated *Stele of Commemorating Duobao Pogoda* inscribed by Yan Zhenqing are striking. It is presumptuous to assume that Yan utilized the earlier Dunhuang manuscript as a model to develop his style. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to believe that even an elite master like Yan Zhenqing could have encountered some earlier transcribed sutras that may have influenced his stylistic development.

Sutra Copying/Reproducing and Merit Making

Before and after the invention of printing, one important fact remained unchanged: the transcription and propagation of Buddhist texts were acts of faithful devotion, and sutra copying was a pious act performed as a means of cultivating religious merit. Within the Buddhist world of medieval China, it was widely believed that one who copies

⁷⁷ Discussed in section "Steles of Yanta Shengjiao Xu Bing Ji" of Chapter 4, 111 and n. 84.

⁷⁸ Dated 695, the *Taixuanzhen yibenji jing* is housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2170).

⁷⁹ Dated 697, this fragment of colophon of the *Lotus Sutra* is housed in the British Library (S.2157).

sutras, commissions a sutra copyist to transcribe sutras, or pays for printing of sutras (after printing was invented) would accrue enormous blessings in this or a future life.

Numerous passages from various Buddhist scriptures attest to the bliss that was supposedly accumulated through transcribing sutras. In the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most influential scriptures in East Asian Buddhism, the Buddha says, “If any good man or good woman shall accept and keep this *Scripture of the Dharma Blossom*, whether reading it, reciting it, interpreting it, or copying it, that person shall attain eight hundred virtues of the body.”⁸⁰ This passage is part of a long revelation, where Buddha offers blessings and calls living beings to purify body and mind in order to enjoy, love, and revere the *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom*. This is part of a religious practice that includes reading, reciting, explaining, or copying scripture. Similar message, confirming that these religious practices are the means by which one may accumulate merit, can be found in many sections of the *Lotus Sutra*: “If there is anyone who can receive and keep, read and recite, recall properly, cultivate and practice, and copy this Scripture of the Dharma Blossom ...be it known that that person has been praised by the Buddha with the word ‘Excellent!’”⁸¹ From a Chinese perspective, a society that privileges writing as a literary, spiritual, and aesthetic endeavor, the copying of sutras achieves twofold

⁸⁰ T 9.47c: “若善男子善女人受持是經若讀若誦若解說若書寫得八百身功德。”—妙法蓮華經卷第六法師功德品第十九。Translation is from Leon Hurvitz, trans., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, 264.

⁸¹ T 9.061c: “若有受持、讀誦，正憶念，修習書寫是法華經者，當知是人，則見釋迦牟尼佛，如從佛口聞此經典，當知是人，供養釋迦牟尼佛，當知是人，佛讚善哉”——妙法蓮華經卷第七普賢菩薩勸法品第二十八。Translation is from Leon Hurvitz, trans., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, 335.

purpose: it reaffirms the cultural belief that writing cultivates a person's virtue, while, the same time, garners the blessings from the Buddha.⁸²

Encouraging devotees to read, recite, practice, transcribe, and disseminate sutras can be found in many Mahayana scriptures. The *Flower Adornment Sutra* specifies that merits and virtues accumulated in this way will benefit others and facilitate one's entry into the Land of Pure Bliss of Amitabha Buddha.⁸³ In addition to emphasizing the blessings that can be acquired by transcribing sutras, *Flower Adornment Sutra* offers further instruction for a more rigorous form of devotion also attained through writing. A passage in which the bodhisattva Samantabhadra Puxian 普賢 advises the pilgrim Sudhana 善才 to take ten great vows, including the one to "imitate the Buddha," reads: "The Buddha Vairocana was willing to give his life. He peeled his skin for paper, broke off a bone for a pen, and drew his own blood for ink. The scriptures he copied in this manner stacked up as high as Mount Sumerued."⁸⁴ Another important record of blood writing in Buddhist sutras is in the *Brahma's Net Scripture*,⁸⁵ which instructs devotees to: "Cut away your skin for paper, draw your blood for ink and use your marrow for water. Break off a piece of your own bone for a pen and copy out the Buddhist

⁸² My speculation is that, given the Chinese privileging of writing, sutra copying may have been considered the highest form for accumulating merit.

⁸³ T 10.846c: "受已能讀，讀已能誦，誦已能持，乃至書寫，廣為人說，是諸人等。於一念中，所有行願，皆得成就，所獲福聚無量無邊，能於煩惱大苦海中，拔濟眾生，令其出離，皆得往生阿彌陀佛極樂世界。"一大方廣佛華嚴經卷第四十。The citation is from the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, a version translated by Prajña 般若, completed around 798, in T 10.661a–848b.

⁸⁴ T 10.845b: "言常隨佛學者，如此娑婆世界，毘盧遮那如來，從初發心，精進不退，以不可說不可說身命而為布施，剝皮為紙，折骨為筆，刺血為墨，書寫經典，積如須彌，為重法故，不惜身命。"一大方廣佛華嚴經卷第四十。Ibid.

⁸⁵ *Brahma's Net Scripture* is "a text that claims to be a translation of an Indian original, but was probably in fact compiled in China in the fifth century." See John Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," 179, and n. 9.

precepts.”⁸⁶ When the actual practice of mixing blood with ink and copying scriptures with a brush on paper was carried out, it reflects “the determined zeal of devotees who saw themselves on the margin of the Buddhist world.”⁸⁷ This implies that great physical suffering combined with perseverance is, for these Buddhists, a joy. *Fayuan zhulin*, a seventh century Buddhist text, reiterates the notion that this particular kind of devotion and affirmation can bring joy.⁸⁸

Although sutras written with human blood have not survived, numerous historical documents and resources assert that many monks and devotees pricked their tongue or finger to draw blood, mixed it with ink, and then used it to copy Buddhist scriptures.⁸⁹ A well-known example, monk Zengren from the Longxing Temple in Lingwu, transcribed two fascicles of scriptures with his own blood and later submitted these scriptures to the emperor.⁹⁰ This kind of ascetic practice is lauded not only in Buddhist texts, but also in Tang history and poetry. *Jiu Tang shu* tells us that when Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756-761) was ill, his empress copied Buddhist scriptures with her blood, in the belief that her action would contribute to her husband's recovery.⁹¹ A poem composed by monk Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912) praises a fellow monk who drained the blood from his ten fingers in order to complete seven rolls of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*.⁹² In addition to

⁸⁶ T 24.1009a. Translation from John Kieschnick, “Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism,” 179.

⁸⁷ John Kieschnick, “Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism,” 180.

⁸⁸ T 53.907c: “我有佛所說一偈，汝能以皮為紙，以骨為筆，以血為墨，書寫此偈，當以與汝樂法。”

⁸⁹ John Kieschnick, “Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism,” 177–78.

⁹⁰ Zan Ning, *Song Gaozeng zhuan*, 26.667–68.

⁹¹ JTS 10.260.

⁹² *Quan Tang shi*, 837.9438.

textual references, a carved inscription on the celebrated *Stele of Commemorating Duobao Pogoda*,⁹³ erected in 752, states that the Chan Master Chujin 楚金 (fl. 740–760) used his own blood to transcribe the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Brahma’s Net Scripture*, and the *Sūtra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue*.

More vivid examples can be found in the Dunhuang manuscripts. According to one colophon in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, an eighty-three year old devotee claims to have drawn his own blood, which he then mixed with ink, to transcribe the *Diamond Sutra*. At the end of the colophon, he gives a date of 906 and dedicates his act to “all the believers in Sha Prefecture; may the state and the land be still and peaceful; may the wheel of the Law turn forever. Should I die in writing it, I ask only that I quickly pass out of this world, I have no other prayers.”⁹⁴ The claim of drawing blood to copy sutra should not necessarily take literally, and could interpret that this eighty-three year-old devotee “ornamented” the writing with his physical suffering as a sign of his sincerity.⁹⁵ It is my opinion that even if these references to the use of blood and skin were metaphorical rather than actual, the conceptual link made from physical suffering as the highest devotion to the actual act of writing underscores the importance of writing as a primary vehicle for the accumulation of merit. In turn, this physical sacrifice, which

⁹³ The *Stele* was penned by Yan Zhenqing. For details on the stele and calligrapher, see section “Tang *kai*,” in Chapter 3, and n. 86.

⁹⁴ A copy of the *Diamond Sutra* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France coded P. 2876 has a colophon reads, “天祐三年歲次丙寅四月五日八十三歲老翁刺血和墨手寫此經流布沙州一切信士國土安寧法輪常轉以死寫之乞早過世餘無所願。” Translation is modified from John Kieschnick, “Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism,” 184.

⁹⁵ John Kieschnick, “Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism,” 185.

signals the practitioner's high degree of religious devotion, increases the value of the writing.

Buddhist Dissemination vs. Daoist Isolation

The spirit conveyed by the artist is a key factor in the evaluation of calligraphy as an art form. As outlined earlier, from the time writing was invented, the act of writing has been imbued with divine power. This emphasis on the metaphysical transformed during calligraphy's formative period to a focus on aesthetic quality. Theories about the practice of calligraphy, as well as the systems that emerged to critique or classify calligraphic works, tended to regard calligraphy as a spiritual pursuit, an attribute that qualified calligraphy as a form of art. Terms such as "untrammelled" or "divine" were used to describe the great masters of calligraphy, while the best kind of calligraphy was often referred to as inspired with "spirit." The phrase "reveled in vacuity"⁹⁶ was used by Sun Guoting in his *Shupu* to describe Wang Xizhi's *Huangting jing*, a Daoist scripture containing the only small standard script written by Wang Xizhi. *Lanting xu*, the most celebrated piece of Wang's work, was written with a graceful ease, which was articulated as "his thought roamed and his spirit soared."⁹⁷

Being highly imbedded with spirit, calligraphy was used by both Buddhists and Daoists as a vehicle to promote their religions. Their ideas regarding production, however, were different. In Daoism, practitioners believe that the fate of manuscripts should be guided by heavenly providence; hence the sacred scriptures were not made

⁹⁶ Sun Guoting, *Shu pu*, in LDSF 128: "黃庭經則怡懌虛無." Translation from *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy: Treatise on Calligraphy (Shu pu) by Sun Qianli and Sequel to the "Treatise on Calligraphy" (Xu shu pu)*, translated and annotated by Chang and Frankel, 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: "蘭亭興集思逸神超." Translation from *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy* (translated and annotated by Chang and Frankel), 10–11.

for everybody, but rather for the initiated. The permanent possession of a piece of scripture assured that the owner enjoyed the direct communication with the spirit and heavenly grace. For Buddhists, however, the practice of copying and disseminating sutras was an act of faithful devotion. Endeavoring to accumulate merit, Buddhists' efforts resulted in the production of a colossal number of Buddhist manuscripts, which contributed to the prolific spread of their religion. At the same time, Buddhists engraved their scriptures on mountain stones and erected steles with inscriptions of either Buddhist texts or words that commemorated Buddhist events or honored eminent monks. These monuments not only served to promote the religion, but also preserved the calligraphy for a long period of time. In contrast, due to the exclusive nature of Daoism and the secrecy of their texts, public stones with Daoist inscriptions were rare, and the mass production of Daoist text was inhibited. Both Buddhism and Daoism, however, sought to transfer the cultural value already ascribed to calligraphy within the Chinese tradition to religious purpose, thereby increasing the prestige and value of their own religions. In turn, religious spirit has long influenced critical evaluations of the aesthetic qualities of calligraphy as well as its practice.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

The primary sources available for the study of Tang calligraphy are inscriptions on steles and manuscripts from Dunhuang. Most of these calligraphic transcriptions are related to Buddhism and reflect complex interactions between the ideology, practices, and agendas of Buddhism, and those of the early Tang court.

Emperor Taizong's efforts to promote Wang Xizhi's calligraphy as the model for the Tang style of standard script, later known as Tang *kai*, provided the foundation for the establishment of a classical tradition of Chinese calligraphy. While refined and energetic, as well as formal, precise, and easily legible, Tang *kai* was widely used for government documents, stele inscriptions, and sutra copies. The use of Tang *kai* increased the accuracy and efficiency of copying, and, in turn, not only propagated Tang culture but also escalated the spread of Buddhism in China. In the support of calligraphic practices, the interests of the Tang government and the mission of Buddhism sometimes converged, often to the benefit of both. In addition, the vigorous promotion of calligraphy orchestrated by the Tang court and the subsequent response from Buddhist monasteries transformed calligraphy from an elite practice to an activity prevalent among commoners. This new cultural milieu is evident from the voluminous Tang Buddhist manuscripts discovered from Dunhuang and examined in this study, and through which a dynamic relationship between the elite calligraphy masters and sutra copyists has been revealed.

This study has illustrated that the reproduction and distribution of Buddhist manuscripts and rubbings taken from Buddhist steles created opportunities for more people, even non-elite and secular populations, to read, appreciate, and ultimately

practice calligraphy. In the service of religious and political ends, calligraphic practices during the early Tang somewhat democratized relationships in society, as aesthetic skill, like calligraphy, could serve to transcend class hierarchies. Like “passing clouds and flowing streams” (*xingyun liushui* 行雲流水), calligraphy was an art form that connected and moved across institutional and social boundaries.

APPENDIX A
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *Bingbian 247* (Rubbing of *jiaguwen*)—preface, charge, and verification of Lady Hao's giving birth, datable to 1200 BCE, in the Collection of Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Source: David N. Keightley, *Source of Shang History*, fig. 12.
2. *Shi Qiang pan*, with rubbing, datable tenth to early ninth century BCE, in Baoji Municipal Museum, Shaanxi Province. Source: Ouyang Zhangshi, *Chinese Calligraphy*, pl. 2.8.
3. Wang Xizhi, *Lanting xu*, ink on paper, original dated 353, Tang imitation, *Shenlong* version, allegedly made by Feng Chengsu, in the Collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: Ouyang Zhangshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 3.23.
 - 3a. Detail of above. Source: Ouyang Zhangshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 1.19.
4. Tang Taizong, *Jinci ming*, ink rubbing on paper, 646. Stele in *Jinci*. Source: Li Gang, ed., *Jinci zhi ming bin xu*, p. 38.
5. Tang Taizong, *Wenchuan ming*, ink rubbing on paper, 648, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.4508). Source: Rao Zongyi, ed., *Facong Dunhuang shuyuan jinhua*, 1.7.
6. Ouyang Xun, *Jiuchenggong Liquan ming*, ink rubbing on paper, 632, Northern Song rubbing in the Collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: Ouyang Zhongshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 4.7.
7. Yu Shinan, *Kongzi miaotang bei*, ink rubbing on paper, 628–630, rubbing from the original stele, now in the collection of the Mitsui Memorial Museum, Tokyo. Source: Ouyang Zhongshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 4.9.
8. Chu Suiliang, *Yique Fokan bei*, mounted ink rubbing, 641, Song dynasty rubbing in the collection of the National Library of China, Beijing. Source: Ouyang Zhongshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 4.10.
9. Yu Shinan, *Feng fashi bei*, ink rubbing, 642, Song dynasty rubbing in the Collection of Mitsui Memorial Museum, Tokyo. Source: Ouyang Zhongshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 4.11.
 - 10a. Chu Suiliang, *Yanta shengjiao xu*, ink rubbing, 653, Ming dynasty rubbing in the Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: Ouyang Zhongshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 4.12.
 - 10b. Chu Suiliang, *Yanta shengjiao xu ji*, ink rubbing, 653, Ming dynasty rubbing in the Collection of Wenwu chubanshe, Beijing. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta shengjiao xu ji* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1983), [p. 36].

11. Wang Xizhi, *Yue Yi lun*, ink on paper, from *Yu Qing zhai fatie* (model book produced ca. 1598–1614). Source: Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition*, fig. 6, also in *Shodo Zenshu* 4.27.
12. *Zhang Xuan muzhi*, mounted ink rubbing of an in-tomb epitaph, 531, in the Shanghai Museum. Source: Ouyang Zhangshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 3.50.
13. *Zhu Dailin muzhi*, mounted ink rubbing of a stele, 571, in the Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: Ouyang Zhangshi, *Chinese Painting*, pl. 3.51.
14. *Ji Wang shengjiao xu bing ji*, ink rubbing, 672, Song dynasty rubbing in the Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. Source: *Song ta shengjiao xu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1983, 1964c), [p. 1–2].
15. *Tongzhou shengjiao xu bing ji*, ink rubbing, 663, Stele is now in Xi'an Beilin. Source: Li Yuzheng, *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, p. 132.
16. Wang Xingman, *Yanshi shengjiao xu bing ji*, ink rubbing, 657, Stele is now in Henan Yanshi. Source: Shi Zhecun, *Tangbei baixuan*, p. 81.
17. Free-hand copy of *Yanta shengjiao xu*, ink on paper, ca. 700, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2780). Source: Wo Xinghua, *Dunhuang shufa yishu*, fig. 2.5.
18. Characters 顯, 能, 驚, from *Yanta shengjiao xu bing ji*, see above no. 10a and 10b, Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta shengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), [p. 58, 37, 43].
19. Top: Chu Suiliang, *Yanta shengjiao xu*, see above no. 10a and 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta hengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), p. [1], [4]; bottom: *Tongzhou shengjiao xu*, see above no. 15. Source: Li Yuzheng, *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, p.132.
20. Top: character 無 in *Yanta Shengjiao xu*, see above no. 10a and 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta hengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), p. [4], [6]; bottom: character 無 in *Tongzhou hengjiao xu*, see above 15. Source: Li Yuzheng, *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, p. 132.
21. Copy of the *Weimojie jing*, ink on paper, 393, in Shanghai Museum. Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan yanjiu*, fig. 2.
22. Copy of the *Shisong biqu jieben*, ink on paper, 405, in the British Library (S.0797). Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan yanjiu*, fig. 3.
23. Copy of the *Siyi jing* (fascicle four), ink on paper, 588, in the British Library (S. 4020). Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan yanjiu*, fig. 29, pp. 266–67.

24. *Zhongahan jing* (fascicle eight), ink on paper, 602, in the British Library (S. 3548). Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan yanjiu*, fig. 33, pp. 280–81.
- 25a-b. *Lanting xu*, fragments, free-hand copy (practice), ink on paper, ca. late 9th century, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3194 and P.2622). Source: Shen Leping, *Dunhuang shufa zonglun*, p. 112.
26. *Lanting xu*, free-hand copy (practice), ink on paper, ca. 9th century, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2544). Source: Shen Leping, *Dunhuang shufa zonglun*, p. 113.
- 27a. Jiang Shanjin, *Zhiyong zhencao qianziwen*, fragment, free-hand copy, ink on paper, 641, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3561). Source: Rao Zongyi, *Facong Dunhuang shuyuan jinghua*, 1.90.
- 27b. Jiang Shanjin, *Zhiyong zhencao qianziwen*, the last section, free-hand copy, ink on paper, 641, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3561). Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan*, fig. 39, p. 300.
28. Tang Taizong, *Wenquan ming* (detail), ink rubbing on paper, fragment with handwriting and date (653), in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.4508). Source: Rao Zongyi, *Facong Dunhuang shuyuan jinhua*, 1.17.
29. Ouyang Xun, *Huadusi bei*, sections of ink rubbing on paper, 631, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.4510). Source: Rao Zongyi, *Facong Dunhuang shuyuan jinhua*, 1.18,19.
- 30a. Shen Hong, copy of the *Apitan piposha lun* (fascicle sixty), ink on paper, 662, in the Calligraphy Museum in Tokyo. Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan*, fig.40, pp. 302–03.
- 30b. Shen Hong, copy of the *Apitan piposha lun* (fascicle fifty-two), ink on paper, 662, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2056). Source: Rao Zongyi, *Dunhuang shufa congkan*, 23.29.
31. Wang Siqian, copy of the *Lotus Sutra* (fascicle 3), ink on paper, 672, in the Dunhuang County Museum (敦博 55). Source: Harrist and Fong, *The Embodied Image*, p. 231, fig. 7.
32. Cheng Du, copy of the *Lotus Sutra* (fascicle 3), ink on paper, 671, in the British Library (S.5319). Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan*, fig. 42, pp. 310–11.
33. Copy of the *Daji jing* (fascicle eighteen), ink on paper, 583, in the British Library (S.3935). Source: Jiao Mingcheng, *Dunhuang xiejuan*, fig. 28, p. 262.
34. Copy of the *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom* (fascicle 329), ink on paper, 674, in the Elliott Collection of Princeton. Source: Harrist and Fong, *The Embodied Image*, pp. 100–101.

- 35a. Character 咸 in the *Apitan piposha lun* (fascicle fifty-two), by Shen Hong, see above no. 30b.
- 35b. Character 咸 in the *Lanting xu*, by Wang Xizhi, see above no. 3.
- 35c. Character 感 in the *Yanta shengjiao xu bing ji*, by Chu Suiliang, see above no. 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta shengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), [p.48].
- 35d. Character 惑 in the *Yanta Shengjiao xu bing ji*, by Chu Suiliang, see above no. 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta shengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), [p. 9].
- 36a. Characters 我, 紙, 義 in the *Apitan piposha lun* (fascicle fifty-two), by Shen Hong, see above no. 30b.
- 36b. Characters 載, 藏, 儀 in the *Yanta shengjiao xu bing ji*, by Chu Suiliang, see above no. 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta shengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), [p. 2, 25, 1].
- 36c. Characters 盛, 歲, 茂 in the *Lanting xu*, by Wang Xizhi, see above no. 3.
37. *The Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom* (fascicle 329), detail, ink on paper, 674, in the Elliott Collection of Princeton. Source: Harrist and Fong, *The Embodied Image*, p. 101.
38. Chu Suiliang, *Yanta Shengjiao xu*, section, see above 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta Shengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), [p. 12]
39. Character 變 in the *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom* in the Elliott Collection of Princeton, see above no. 37; character 徵 from *Yanta Shengjiao xu*, by Chu Suiliang, see above no. 10b. Source: *Tang Chu Suiliang shu Yanta shengjiao xu ji* (Wenwu), [p. 5].
40. Copy of *Sansang Shengjiao xu*, composed by Empress Wu, by an anonymous copyist, ink on paper, 700, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.3831). Source: *Facong Dunhuang shuyuan jinhua*, Rao Zongyi, ed., 1.103, 104.
41. Zhao Miaoxu, copy of the *Taixuanzhen yibenji jing*, ink on paper, 695, in the Collection the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (P.2170). Source: The International Dunhuang Project: the Silk Road Online http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=-15351323537;recnum=59236;index=1
42. Copy of the *Lotus Sutra* (fascicle four with colophon), ink on paper, 697, in the British Library (S.2157). Source: The International Dunhuang Project: the Silk Road Online http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=-15348699867;recnum=2156;index=1

APPENDIX B
TABLE OF CANONICAL BUDDHIST TEXTS CITED IN THE DISSERTATION

Amitābha Sutra (Chi: *A Mituo jing* 阿彌陀經 or *Mituo jing* 彌陀經)

Apitan piposha lun 阿毗曇毗婆沙論 (Skt: *Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra*)

Brahma's Net Scripture/Bodhisattva Precepts Sutra (Chi: *Fanwang pusa jie jing* 梵網菩薩戒經; usually abbreviated *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 or *Pusajie jing* 菩薩戒經)

Chishi jing 持世經

Da zhi du lun 大智度論 (Skt: *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*)

Daji jing 大集經 (Abbriated from: *Da fangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經; Skt: *Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra*; Eng: *Sutra of the Great Assembly of Great Doctrinal Universality*)

Diamond Sutra (Chi: *Jingang bore boluomiduo jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜多經; usually abbreviated *Jingang jing* 金剛經; Skt: *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*)

Heart Sutra (Chi: *Bore boluomiduoxin jing* 般若波羅蜜多心經; usually abbreviated *Xin jing* 心經; Skt: *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya sūtra*)

Flower Adornment Sutra (Chi: *Defang guangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經; usually abbreviated *Huayan jing* 華嚴經; Skt: *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka sūtra*, usually abbreviated and commonly known as *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*)

Foming jing 佛名經 (Eng: *Sutra on the names of the Buddha*)

Foshuo shanxin pusa ershisi jiejing 佛說善信菩薩二十四戒經

Lotus Sutra (Chi: *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經; usually abbreviated *Fahua jing* 法華經; Skt: *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka sūtra*)

Nirvana Sutra (Chi: *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經; usually abbreviated *Niepan jing* 涅槃經; Skt: *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*)

Piyu jing 譬喻經 (Eng: *Parable Sutra*)

Qishi jing 起世經

Sifenlu shanbusuiji jiemuo 四分律刪補隨即機羯磨

Siyi jing 思益經 (Skt: Viśeṣacintabrahma-pariprcchā-sūtra)

Sutra in Forty-two Sections (Chi: *Sishierzhang jing* 四十二章經)

Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue (Chi: *Fo shuo guan Puxian Pusa xingfa jing* 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經 or *Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing* 觀普賢菩薩行法經; usually abbreviated *Puxian guan jing* 普賢觀經 or *Puxian jing* 普賢經)

Sutra of the Most Honored King (Chi: *Jinguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經; Skt: *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-uttamarāja-sūtra*)

Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom/Great Sutra of the Wisdom (Chi: *Dabanro polomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經; usually abbreviated *Dabanro jing* 大般若經; Skt: *Great Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*)

Ten Discourses of Being Initiated into Monkhood (Chi: *Shisong biqio jieben* 十誦比丘戒本)

Vimalakīrti Sutra (Chi: *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經; Skt: *Vimalakīrti nirdeśa sūtra*)

Yogācāra-bhūmi (*Yujia shi tilun* 瑜伽師地論)

Zhongahan jing 中阿含經 (Eng: *Middle Length Āgama Sutra*; Skt: *Samyuttanikāya Saṃyukta-āgama Sūtra*)

APPENDIX C
ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF THE PREFACE TO THE HOLY TEACHINGS OF
THE TRIPĪṬAKA OF THE GREAT TANG, COMPOSED BY TANG TAIZONG

大唐三藏聖教序

Preface to the Holy Teachings of the Tripiṭaka¹ of the Great Tang

太宗文皇帝製

Composed by Taizong [r. 629–649], the August Emperor Wen²

蓋聞二儀有像，顯覆載以含生；四時無形，潛寒暑以化物。

It is said that the two primordial principles [*yin* and *yang*]³ have visible form and harbor life by the manifestations of [Heaven's] covering and [Earth's] support⁴; although the four seasons have no shape, they transform all things through their latent ability of cold and heat.

是以窺天鑑地，庸愚皆識其端；明陰洞陽，賢哲罕窮其數。

For this reason, peering into heaven and inspecting the earth, [even] the common fools all distinguish the two extremes; [yet] while illuminating *yin* and penetrating *yang*, the virtuous and wise seldom exhaust the multitude [of their diversity].

¹ Tripiṭaka, Sanskrit for “three baskets,” is the earliest collection of Buddhist scripture, which can be found in many versions, while the oldest and most complete one is called the Pali Canon. Therefore Tripiṭaka is also known as the Pali Canon with an alternate spelling: Tipiṭaka in Pali. The three Baskets of the Law in Pali includes: the Vinaya-pitaka (pitaka means “basket” in Pali) containing the rules of communal life for monks and nuns; the Sutra-pitaka, a collection of sermons of the Buddha; and the Adhidharma-pitaka, which contains interpretations of analyses of Buddhist concepts.

² Li Shimin 李世民 (599–649), second son of Tang Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626), was enthroned on 626 as the second emperor of the Tang dynasty with the Temple title “Taizong” 太宗. At his death on 649, the posthumous Memorial title “Wen” 文 was added. He proclaimed his era, the period of *Zhenguan* 貞觀 (627–649). During his reign, China flourished economically and militarily. He contrived political harmony by tempering and adapting Buddhism along with Confucianism and Daoism inside and outside the imperial court. Biography in XTS 2.23–50.

³ In *Xici* 繫辭, the so-called Ten Wings appended to the core text of the *Changes* 易經, it states, “The Changes embodies the universe from which the two spheres (*yin* 陰: heaven, and *yang* 陽: earth) were created, and from these were born the four images (lesser yang, greater yang, lesser yin, greater yin).” (“易有太極，是生兩儀；兩儀生四象。”) For the original text and annotations see *Zhou I quanyi* 周易全譯, by Xu Zihong 徐子宏 (Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1991), 367. The “four images” is interpreted as the four seasons.

⁴ *Fuzai* 覆載 refers to heaven and earth and their huge coverage. The phrase was originated from Yuben liji, “zhong yong” section 語本禮記中庸: “天之所覆，地之所載。”

然而天地苞乎陰陽而易識者，以其有像也；陰陽處乎天地而難窮者，以其無形也。
That Heaven and Earth, being bound to *yin* and *yang*, are easy to distinguish is because they possess visible form. That *yin* and *yang*, residing in heaven and earth, are difficult to exhaust is because they have no shape.

故知像顯可徵，雖愚不惑；形潛莫睹，在智猶迷。
Thus it is apparent that when an image is sufficiently manifest to be verified, even a fool would not be confused; but when a shape is hidden and not at all detectable, a wise man may still be deluded.

況乎佛道崇虛，乘幽控寂，弘濟萬品，典御十方，舉威靈而無上，抑神力而無下。
All the more so in the case of the exalted vacuity (or immateriality)⁵ of Buddha's Way which avails itself of solitude to control loneliness. It extends salvation to the myriad categories [of things] and its code manages the ten directions⁶. When its authoritative spirituality is uplifted, there is nothing higher, when its spiritual force press down, there is nothing lower.

大之則彌於宇宙，細之則攝於毫釐。
In its size, it is more boundless than the universe; in its minuteness, it is more [easily] crushed than the slightest particle.

無滅無生，歷千劫而不古；若隱若顯，運百福而長今。
Admitting no destruction nor birth, [the Way of Buddha] has passed through a thousand kalpas⁷ and not grown old; seemingly hidden, yet seemingly manifest, it has conveyed countless blessings yet is eternally of the present moment.

妙道凝玄，遵之莫知其際；法流湛寂，挹之莫測其源。
The abstruse doctrine is composed in dark mystery. When following it up, none can perceive the boundaries. The flow of the doctrine is steeped with solitude. When ladling it out, none can fathom its origin.

故知蠢蠢凡愚，區區庸鄙，投其旨趣，能無疑惑者哉！
Therefore, in the case of the doltish masses, being very simple and ordinary, although they [may] take interest in the doctrine, how could they not be confused!

⁵ *Xu* 虛 is defined as that which is without shape or substantiality in Buddhism. It is often combined with *kong* 空 or *wu* 無; both *xukong* 虛空 and *xuwu* 虛無 can be interpreted as empty, void, or immaterial.

⁶ "Ten directions," *Shifang* 十方, is a Buddhist term including the four main directions towards East, West, South, and North, with four corners of southeast, southwest, northeast, and northwest, plus two upward and downward directions. In total, that completes every direction and every corner of universe.

⁷ Kalpa, a Sanskrit, means the length of a Day and Night of Brahma, described in the Pali Canon as the "unrolling and rolling up" of the universe.

然則大教之興，基乎西土，騰漢庭而皎夢，照東域而流慈。

Nevertheless, the florescence of the great doctrine was based in a Western land.⁸ It rose to the court of Han and brightened our blind slumber, as it shone up on borderlands of the East and caused compassion to stream forth.

昔者，分形分跡之時，言未馳而成化；當常現常之世，民仰德而知遵。

Long ago, when the form and footsteps [of the historical Buddha] could be discerned, his words had not yet spread far but his enlightenment has already accomplished. In the world now, people look up his virtue and understand how to follow it.

及乎晦影歸真，遷儀越世，金容掩色，不鏡三千之光；麗象開圖，空端四八之相。

By the time his shadow faded away and returned to the ultimate truth, the Nirvana,⁹ he changed his look and transgressed another world. [Sculptured] faces cast in shining gold do not mirror [His] three-thousand beams of light; elegant images used as illustrations vainly reach toward [the teaching about] the Four Phases¹⁰ and Eight Directions.¹¹

⁸ In Mahayana Buddhism, Westland *Xitu* 西土 is an abbreviated term for the “Pure Land of the West,” referring to India.

⁹ “歸真” (*guizhen*) literal means to return to the place where one was originally from. It can be traced in many classical writings, such as the “Eastern Capital Rhapsody” by Ban Gu (32–92) 班固東都賦: “遂令海內棄末而反本，背偽而歸真。” In current text, it refers to the Buddhist term, “Nirvana,” which is the supreme goal of Buddhist; release from suffering and individual limitations of existence, as the “Enlightenment,” the ultimate goal of all Buddhists. The word is derived from a root meaning extinguished through lack of fuel, and since rebirth is the result of desire, freedom from rebirth is attained by the extinguishing of all such desire. The attainment of nirvana breaks the otherwise endless rebirth cycle of reincarnation. Nirvana is, therefore, a state attainable in this life by right aspiration, purity of life, and the elimination of egoism.

¹⁰ The four phases of life, *sixiang* 四相 in Buddhism refers to *shengxiang* 生相—from the void to the existence, *zhuxiang* 住相—the growth, *yixiang* 異相—the change to be old and decayed, and *miexiang* 滅相—the final elimination. These four phases act in a continuous motion; as one is born, the other one dies; while one dies, the other one is born.

¹¹ The eight directions of life, *baxiang* 八相 in Mahayana Buddhism refers to: *jiang doushuai* 降兜率—descending from heaven, *rutai* 入胎—taking possession of a foetus (being conceived as a foetus), *zhutai* 住胎—growing in a womb, *chutai* 出胎—being born, *chujia* 出家—leaving home life and becoming a devotee, *chengdao* 成道—attaining spiritual perfection, *zhuan falun* 轉法輪—promoting the wheel with roller breaking heresy, carrying forward Buddhism, and *rumie* 入滅—entering the final elimination. These eight directions are actually the extension of four phases of life (see note 10). Each phases (being born, growing, getting old and die) has a greater and lesser phases; one is main phase while the other one is subordinate and total completes the eight directions of life.

於是微言廣被，拯含類於三塗；遺訓遐宣，導群生於十地。

Hence it is the words broadly extended that save and protect all things from the three evil paths¹²; the bequeathed doctrines, preached far and wide that guide the all living creature to reach the ten realms.¹³

然而真教難仰，莫能一其旨歸，曲學易遵，邪正於焉紛糾。

Nevertheless the true doctrine is difficult to rely on, for none have been able to unite meaning into a single [body]. Distorted schools of thought [about it] are easily followed; the deviant and the truthful are mixed in confusion therein.

所以空有之論，或習俗而是非；大小之乘，乍沿時而隆替。

Therefore, there are [different] disquisitions about [the meaning of] *Śūnyatā*¹⁴, and which ones are right or wrong is often decided by habitual custom; [just as] the Greater Vehicle and Lesser Vehicle¹⁵ have in alternation prospered over the course of time.

有玄奘法師者，法門之領袖也。

[Now] there was a Dharma master by the name of Xuanzang [569 or 602–664],¹⁶ who became a leader of the Buddhist faith.

¹² Buddhist expression for the lowest transmigrations—the path of fire (hell), the path of blood (hungry ghosts), and the path of the knife (beasts).

¹³ In Mahayana Huayan Scripture, the ten realms refer to different stages of entering the path towards final enlightenment, including 歡喜地, 離垢地, 發光地, 焰慧地, 極難勝地, 現前地, 遠行地, 不動地, 善慧地, 法雲地.

¹⁴ *Śūnyatā*, (Sanskrit noun from the adj. *sūnya* - 'void'), is kòng/kū, 空 in Chinese/Japanese, meaning "Emptiness" or "Voidness", is a characteristic of phenomena arising from the fact (as observed and taught by the Buddha) that the impermanent nature of form means that nothing possesses essential, enduring identity. In the Buddha's spiritual teaching, insight into the emptiness of phenomena (Pali: *suññatānupassanā*) is an aspect of the cultivation of insight that leads to wisdom and inner peace. The importance of this insight is especially emphasized in Mahayana Buddhism, and receives a more "positive" explication in the Tathagatagarbha sutras.

¹⁵ The terms of "The Lesser Vehicle" and "The Greater Vehicle" appeared around the first century as to distinguish the early Buddhist schools and later reformulated teachings of Buddha. Hinayana, a Sanskrit and Pali term literally meaning "the lower or lesser vehicle (a way of going to enlightenment)," is also known as Theravada Buddhism with focus primarily on meditation and on the monastic life. On the contrary, Mahayana, "the greater vehicle," in order to accommodating masses, turned Buddhism into a more esoteric religion by developing a theory of gradations of Buddhahood. Mahayanists believe that at the top stand for Buddhahood is preceded by a series of lives, the numerous Bodhisattvas, hence the religious authority is extended to a greater number of people rather than concentrating it in the hands of a few.

¹⁶ See Chapter 4 n. 12.

幼懷貞敏，早悟三空之心；長契神情，先苞四忍之行。

Imbued with virtue and perspicacity at young age, he apprehended [things] with the mind of “Three Empties”¹⁷ in his early life. Committed to matters of spirituality for a long period of time, he previously bound himself to the practice [of contemplating] the “Four Endurances.”¹⁸

松風水月，未足比其清華；仙露明珠，詎能方其朗潤。

[Even] the breeze through the pine trees and the moon [reflected] in the water could never compare with his purity and elegance; [even] the dew of immortality and the most lustrous pearl cannot be set alongside his limpidity and smoothness.

故以智通無累，神測未形，超六塵而迥出，隻千古而無對。

Hence with his wisdom, he could reach without bondage, and with spirituality, he could fathom the formless. He transcended and removed himself from the six worldly environments (six defilements).¹⁹ He was unique, through a thousand ages, without counterpart.

凝心內境，悲正法之陵遲；栖慮玄門，慨深文之訛謬。

He concentrated his mind very deep inside, and was saddened by the deterioration of the orthodox Dharma; his ponderings settled at the “Gate of Mysteries,”²⁰ (or Gate of the Abstruse Teaching?) and he deeply regretted the errors in its [transmitted] writings.

思欲分條析理，廣彼前聞，截偽續真，開茲後學。

He formed the intention to distinguish points of doctrine and analyze the truth, to broaden that which had earlier been known, to cut away the false and to add to the true, and to open this way for later learners.

¹⁷ Three contemplations of the aspect of emptiness is the profound meaning of the Mahayana teaching: non-attachment as its significance, and no form nor deeds, no rising nor falling are its implications. The Buddha was able to realize “emptiness” (“śūnyatā” in Sanskrit), and by doing so he freed himself from unsatisfactoriness (s. dukkha). From the standpoint of enlightenment, śūnyatā is the reality of all worldly existences (s. dharma). The realization of Śūnyatā leads one to no attachment and clinging but towards enlightenment.

¹⁸ In Mahayana text, the noble truth of suffering includes the four aspects of endurance: birth, aging, illness and death (生,老,病,死).

¹⁹ *Liuchen* 六塵, a Buddhist expression, means the six states of carnal world: color, sound, smell, taste, touch and perception of power (色,聲,香,味,觸,法). It can also refer to Six Defilements: greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, and false views.

²⁰ *Xuanmen* 玄門, literally translated as the Gate of Mysteries, implying the Gate of Abstruse Teaching which refers to the profound school, i.e. Buddhism. Also that of the Huayan 華嚴 (Kegon) which has a division of *Ten Mysterious Gate* (shi xuanmen 十玄門) or *Ten Mysterious Affinities Arise* (shi xuan yuanqi 十玄緣起), the ten philosophic ideas, indicating the ten metaphysical propositions, or lines of thought.

是以翹心淨土，往遊西域。乘危遠邁，杖策孤征。

For this reason, with a heart longing for the Pure Land,²¹ he set out on a journey to the Western Regions.²² Bearing dangers on a faraway journey, he [grasped] a riding whip²³ [to set out] on his lonely expedition.

積雪晨飛，途間失地；驚砂夕起，空外迷天。

Piled-up drifts of snow flew in the morning, causing him to lose his way along the route; sandstorms arose in the evening, obliterating the sky to the farthest horizon.

萬里山川，撥煙霞而進影；百重寒暑，躡霜雨（別本有作「雪」者）而前蹤。

Through ten-thousand miles of mountains and rivers, he pushed aside mist and fog as his shadow crept forward; through a hundred changes of cold and heat, he treaded upon frost and rain as his footsteps advanced forward.

誠重勞輕，求深願達，周遊西宇，十有七年。

His earnest sincerity was so weighty that his labors became light; his yearning was so profound that his compelling desire was realized. All around the Western Lands he traveled, for a total of seventeen years.

窮歷道邦，詢求正教，雙林八水，味道餐風，鹿苑鷲峰，瞻奇仰異。

He traveled exhaustedly through the country where the Way of Buddha was prevailed in order to acquire the orthodox teachings [of Dharma]. By the Twin [*śāla*] Trees²⁴ and Eight Rivers,²⁵ he ate his meals under the wind while tasting the flavor of the Buddha's Way. In the Deer Park²⁶ and on the Vulture Peak,²⁷ he watched magnificent scenes and looked at marvelous things.

²¹ *Jingtu* 淨土 refers to India, as in the “Pure Land of the West,” see above n. 8. Literally, *Jingtu* can be translated as pure locality, i.e., where a chaste monk dwells. It has, however, become a standard term for The Pure Land, or Paradise of the West, in Sanskrit *sukhāvātī*, presided over by Amitābha. Other Buddhas have their Pure Lands; seventeen other kinds of pure land are also described, all of them of moral or spiritual conditions of development, e.g., the pure land of patience, zeal, wisdom, etc.

²² Western Regions refers to the region in China west of the yangguan 陽關 (gate to the path of the sun; i.e., the main gate). During the Ha and Tang dynasties, the area was traveled by merchants and missionaries, and various routes known collectively as the “Silk Road” played an important role in cultural exchange.

²³ *Zhangce* 仗策, literally translated as “to grasp a whip,” refers to riding a horse.

²⁴ Twin trees, refers to the *śāla*-trees in Kusinagar under which the Buddha entered nirvana. In the Mahāparinibbana Sutta it was recorded that the petals of *śāla* flowers rained on him as he breathed his last.

²⁵ Eight rivers of India—Ganges, Jumna, Sarasvatī, Hiraṇyavatī or Ajiravatī, Mahī, Indus, Oxus, and Sītā.

²⁶ The first sermon of the Buddha was given in the Deer park at Isipatana. There he addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five.

²⁷ Mountain of vulture, *Jiu fong* 鷲峰, is a mountain in India said to be like a head of a vulture, and often known as the resort of Buddha and called Vulture Peak.

承至言於先聖，受真教於上賢，探蹟妙門，精窮奧業。

There having inherited most valuable sayings from previous saints, and having received genuine instruction from superior sages, he explored to the wonderful gate [of Buddhism], and diligently sought for the subtle meaning of [Buddhist] doctrines.

一乘五律之道，馳驟於心田；八藏三篋之文，波濤於口海。

The course of “One Buddha Vehicle”²⁸ and “Vinaya in Five Parts”²⁹ were speedily achieved in the field of [Xuanzang’s] mind; as for the texts of the Eight Treasures³⁰ and the Three Baskets,³¹ they poured out like waves and billows of the ocean rolling from his mouth.

爰自所歷之國，總將三藏要文，凡六百五十七部，譯布中夏，宣揚勝業。

Then from the countries he passed through, he collected all the important texts of the Tripitaka. In total six hundred fifty-seven works³² were translated and distributed in the land of China for the promulgation of great deeds.

引慈雲於西極，注法雨於東垂，聖教缺而復全，蒼生罪而還福。

[By doing so, Xuanzang] drew forth clouds of compassion from the extreme West that purified Dharma rain upon the Eastern reaches. Holy Teachings that had been lacking were again complete, and common beings who were living in sin were restored to a blessed state.

²⁸ One Buddha Vehicle, *Yi cheng (sheng)* 一乘 (*Ekayana* in Sanskrit) refers to the Vehicle that offers the path to Enlightenment. In *Ekayana* it is believed that the buddha-nature in all is recognized and the noblest form of Buddhist practice is the way of the Bodhisattvas, those who devote themselves to attaining enlightenment not only for themselves but for all beings. In the context of the Lotus Sutra (*Ekayana* Buddhism — “One Vehicle”) unifies all spiritual paths as ways to Enlightenment, and empowers the believers to lead more creative lives by developing a flexible mind.

²⁹ Vinaya in Five Parts, *Wu fen lu* 五分律 (*Mahisasakavinaya* in Sanskrit), was introduced into China by famous monk Fa-Xian (died before 432) about 412. Vinaya refers to the regulations of the monastic life. The Chinese version of this Vinaya came out in 418 and its Chinese title “Mo-ho `Shen-chih Lu` (摩訶僧祇律)” was given. The clerics in the the Ch’ang-an (長安) area, welcomed this set of monastic rules and practiced them in their daily life.

³⁰ There are four categories of Buddhist scriptures in each Theravada (Hinayana) and Mahayana: Vinaya pitaka (*lu* 律)—the regulations of monastic life, Sutra pitaka (*jing* 經)—the discourses of the Buddha, Adhidhamma pitaka (*lun* 論)—the interest in scholasticism, and vidya-dhara pitaka (*zhou* 咒)—the incantations. Total those Buddhist literature is sometimes called Eight Treasures, *Bazang* 八藏 or *Babuzang* 八部藏.

³¹ *San jia* 三篋 refers to *San zang* 三藏, three major Buddhist scriptures: *lu*, *jing*, and *lun* (see above n. 1).

³² The total number of 657 books includes 224 books of Mahayana sutras, 192 books of Mahayana sastras, 15 books of the Tripitaka of the Sthavira School, 15 books of th Tripitaka of the Sammatiya School, 22 books of the Tripitaka of the Mahisasaka School, 17 books of the Tripitaka of the Kasyapiya School, 42 books of the Tripitaka of the Dharmagupta School, 67 books of the Tripitaka of the Sarvastivadin School, 36 books concerning the Hetuvidya Sastra and 13 books concerning the Sabdavidya Sutra. See Li Rongxi, *The Life of Hsuan-tsang*, 208–09.

濕火宅之乾燄，共拔迷途；朗愛水之昏波，同臻彼岸。

The dry flames of a burning house were extinguished, such that all people could be plucked away from the path of delusion; murky waves of the “river of infatuation” were clarified, such that all people could together reach the other bank [or the other end of realm].³³

是知惡因業墜，善以緣昇，昇墜之端，惟人所託。

Therefore we know that evil befalls us in consequence of [past] sins and good things arise through [appropriate] conditions. The extremities of the befalling [of evil] or rising up [of good] owe solely to that upon which men rely.

譬夫桂生高嶺，零露方得泫其華；蓮出淥波，飛塵不能汙其葉。

This may be compared with the osmanthus that grows on a high peak – only then may its flowers be moistened with scattered dew; or with the lotus that emerges from waves filtered [of impurities]³⁴ – there flying dust cannot defile its leaves.

非蓮性自潔而桂質本貞，良由所附者高，則微物不能累；所憑者淨，則濁類不能沾。

It is not the case that the essence of the lotus is naturally pure, or that character of the osmanthus is originally chaste. It is very much owing to the height on which the tree depends that it cannot be entangled by trifling things,³⁵ and also because of the pureness upon which the flower relies that nothing foul can stick to it.

夫以卉木無知，猶資善而成善，況乎人倫有識，不緣慶而求慶！

Now then, if inanimate plants and trees avail themselves of the quality of goodness in order to achieve goodness, so how much more should not human beings, who are full of consciousness and awareness, follow what is felicitous in order to seek felicity?

方冀茲經流施，將日月而無窮；斯福遐敷，與乾坤而永大。

It is my hope at this time that the circulation and distribution of this scripture will be as unending as the sun and moon, and that the far-reaching expanse of the blessings therein will share with Heaven and Earth an eternal greatness.

³³ In Buddhism, the other end of realm refers to the place in which the masses can escape the world of laity and reach for the Buddhahood. The Buddhist expression is “Faramita.”

³⁴ *Lubo* 淥波 implies a manmade pond.

³⁵ *Weiwu* 微物 means extremely small things.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

As an immigrant to the United States from China via Taiwan, Ruth Sheng manifests an extraordinary case of east meets west. That meeting has benefitted her own life as well as the various communities with which sheng has become affiliated. After graduated from the National Taiwan University as a history major in 1969, she moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where she earned a Master of Arts in Art History in 1976 and Master of Library and Information Science in 1978 at Case Western Reserve University. Her academic accomplishments led to positions respectively at Harvard University and Princeton University, where she was in charge of Asian slides and photos collection for supporting research and teaching. Her design of a system to classify and catalogue the visual resources has allowed the efficient and user-friendly access to retrieve the large amount of materials in both of the collections.

In the late 80s, Sheng moved to Gainesville, Florida, with her husband Peter, a coastal and oceanographic engineer, and three-year old son, David. In the following decades, she devoted herself to child rearing and community work. She became an active docent at the Harn Museum of Art in the University of Florida, participating in curatorial research, collection development, and various educational activities. Sheng also founded the Gainesville Chinese School to raise awareness and promote local interest in learning Chinese language and culture. In addition to overseeing the general development of the school, her responsibilities included curriculum design and teaching courses in Chinese language as well as painting and calligraphy. During the 90s, she taught Chinese language courses at the University of Florida, and was periodically invited to lecture on Chinese art for both academic classes and community programs pertaining to Chinese culture.

In the spring of 2004, Sheng was accepted to the doctoral program at the University of Florida's School of Art and Art history. At the same time, she was invited to teach Chinese calligraphy at the university. Since then, her teaching and research have complemented each other. Her choice of dissertation topic reflects her lifelong love of studying, teaching and practicing calligraphy. Sheng designed her calligraphy class to integrate learning about the historical development and aesthetic principles of calligraphy with hands-on practice. Through her devotion and enthusiasm, the class has successfully produced the beautiful calligraphic works which have been publicly exhibited at the end of each semester. For the past three years, Sheng and several of her students were invited to display their work at the International Calligraphy Art Exhibition in Shanghai. Bestowed in the homeland of calligraphy, such recognition affirms that these beautiful calligraphic works offer, in large part, a celebration of the success of cross-cultural study. Ruth Sheng will continue to devote herself in teaching and research in the field of Chinese calligraphy.