FAMILY TIES TO BUDDHIST MONKS AND NUNS IN MEDIEVAL CHINA: A BIOGRAPHICAL AND HAGIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE SOUTHERN XIAO FAMILY BRANCH

by

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Abstract

The roles of kinship and family ties have recently become recognized as a vital yet unexplored area in the study of medieval Buddhism. This is especially critical in restructuring the relationship between political and religious spheres, which for the Sinologist have always been intricately linked to one another. Although there are studies noting the prominence of family connection in the study of monks and nuns, past studies have focused mainly on the manipulation and modification of religion by political figures for solely secular purposes. Not many studies have turned the tables to analyze the significance of a monk or nun’s family background and its intimate influence throughout his or her religious life; nor have they considered how a layman or laywoman’s spiritual devotion greatly shapes his or her social life and political career.

It is my aim to extend such research and explore on a larger scale the intricate relationship between monastic and lay family members, in this case Xiao Yu, his daughters, sons and relatives, ten in all, from the Southern Xiao family branch during the late Sui to early Tang period. This research serves to prove that the life of a monk or nun, while determined by that individual’s vocation and endeavor, is to a degree also conditioned by his or her family background, kinship ties and secular acquaintance. This research, based upon hagiography, epigraphy and relevant materials from canonical and secular sources substantiates the belief that comprehensive study of the monastic order should involve analysis of factors beyond the spiritual sphere.
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Introduction

The roles of kinship and family ties have recently become recognized as a vital yet unexplored area in the study of medieval Buddhism. This is especially critical in restructuring the relationship between political and religious spheres, which for the Sinologist have always been intricately linked to one another. Although there are studies noting the prominence of family connection in the study of monks and nuns, past studies have focused mainly on the manipulation and modification of religion by political figures for solely secular purposes. Not many studies have turned the tables to analyze the significance of a monk or nun’s family background and its intimate influence throughout his or her religious life; nor have they considered how a layman or laywoman’s spiritual devotion greatly shapes his or her social life and political career.

According to Professor Jinua Chen, two main factors account for this lack of attention to the importance of family background and lineage in the monastic world. First is the misconception of the expression chujia 出家, which denotes “leaving one’s family” or “abandoning household life,” generally used to describe a person entering the monastic life. Second is the practice of adopting the word shì 释 as the family name for all Buddhist monks and nuns once they have entered the monastic community. This practice emphasizes the forsaking of the secular life and kinship ties in order to enter a sacred family under the guidance of the Šākyamuni cifu, the 慈父 “compassionate

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1 Yang, “Tangdai niseng yu shisu jiating de guanxi,” 72-75; Yan “Muzhi Jiwenzhong de tangdai funu de fojiao xinyang,” 12-50.

father". Therefore, many scholars believe that “a Buddhist monk or nun automatically and permanently severed all ties with his or her family"\(^3\) once they enter the *samgha*, and consequently, are inclined to focus their studies solely on the roles and responsibilities within the monastic sphere.

The foremost scholar to study and explore the lives of Tang nuns’ was Li Yuzhen in her *Tangdai de biqiumi*. From analyzing tomb inscriptions written for and literature written by nuns, she traces the origin of the earliest nuns’ community and its development from the fourth century to the Tang dynasty, placing great emphasis on its correspondence to the *vinaya* code. Professor Li gives a general overview of these nuns’ background and contribution to society, how they were portrayed in Tang literature, and the relationship between nuns of the *nei daochang* 內道場 (palace chapels)\(^4\) and palace ladies.

In the past five years more scholars have provided detailed research on the relationship between Tang women and Buddhism. Wu Minxia and Su Shimei’s articles explain the attraction and inspiration Tang women had towards Buddhism and their various spiritual practices both in the communal and private spheres. Yang Xiaomei and Jiao Jie look at the influenced society and family have upon the laywomen’s religious practice and devotion to Buddhism. Yan Yaozhong, Huang Qingfa and Yan Chunhua focuses their studies on the interaction between women’s social status and activities of nuns after ordination as well as their intimate interaction with their family as seen

\(^3\) Ibid, 51.

thorough the secularization of Buddhist customs such as adopting non-Buddhist funeral rites. Yang Mei further analyzes the relation between monastic and lay to show how notions of filial piety and chastity influenced the lives of nuns and encouraged them to continuously associate with the secular family members after ordination, subtly altering and Sinicizing the *vinaya* code.

Detailed studies of individual Tang nuns’ lives and religious career must be accredited to Wendi Adamek and Chen Jinhua. Professor Adamek’s article “Inscriptions for Nuns at Lingquan Temple, Bao Shan,” focuses on seventh century donor inscriptions written by and for nuns at Lingquan Temple at Bao Shan, near Anyang in Henan. She connects the Chinese innovated Sanie jiao program to laywomen and nuns’ donor practice by analyzing the inscribed texts on the Bao Shan walls. From a feminist point of view, she argues that although the geographical segregation of monks and laymen’s inscriptions from that of laywomen and nuns’ and the emphasis on themes such as “deployment of alliance,” the recognition of identity in terms of relationship to lineage of males and the “deployment of anti-sexuality,” the discipline of the body “subsumes [woman] within the framework of ... the patrilinear family,”5 the fact that religious women practitioners were able to have their biographies and donation records inscribed for preservation at a specified holy place proves of their remarkable influence and importance in both the religious and social circles.

Professor Chen Jinhua’s thorough study of the lives of Facheng 法澄 (640-729) and Qiwei 契微 (720-781) with particular emphasis on their ordination circumstances,

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5 Ibid, 513.
religious and sociopolitical roles and contributions as female clerics during the Tang confirms the fact that nuns do not completely abandon their secular family but maintain close ties after entering the nunnery. These women clerics were also instrumental in converting their family to become Buddhist believers and supporters. Uprooting the traditional notion that *chujia* means “severing one’s ties with one’s secular family,” these nuns while committed to the Buddhist belief and proselytic activities simultaneous upheld Confucius values and maintained their roles as part of the secular family. Interestingly, the monastic and lay communities did not reprimand their actions, on the contrary encouraged such private commitment.

It is my aim to extend such research and explore on a larger scale the intricate relationship between monastic and lay family members, in this case Xiao Yu, his daughters, sons and relatives, ten in all, from the Southern Xiao family branch during the late Sui to early Tang period. It must be noted that while the ordained female members of the Xiao family mentioned in this research are considered as “close” relatives, separated no more than two generations apart and are of the same southern sub-branch. On the contrary, the six male members are “remote” relatives: Sengfeng (554-630), the first ordained monk, lived some two-hundred years before Lingtuan (755-829), the last Xiao monk. While the connection bridging the relation between the Xiao monks is loose, causing obfuscation while reconstructing the family’s genealogy, I have included their biographies in my research for two reasons: in order to understand the expansion and influence of the Xiao clan as both a politically and religiously significant lineage and to be able to compare the lives and religious careers of monks and nuns (of the same lineage) during medieval China. This research serves to prove that the life of a monk or nun, while
determined by that individual’s vocation and endeavor, is to a degree also conditioned by his or her family background, kinship ties and secular acquaintance. This research substantiates the belief that comprehensive study of the monastic order should involve analysis of factors beyond the spiritual sphere.

Another point which needs some clarification deals with the problem between distilling the “factual” from the “fictional” elements intermingled within these religious biographies. Some scholars tend to view the “prescriptive” details as descriptive information and reconstruct lives of monks and nuns based on these fabricated tales. Another group of scholars who are only interested in “hard core” facts and disregard all idealized elements, fail to realize the cultural and sociological significance reflected from prototypical paradigms. Taking into consideration both methods, I will try to present the relationship and historical accounts between the lay and monastic members of the Xiao family by separating the historical details and scrutinizing and pointing out any unverifiable facts. I will also take into consideration under what circumstances and with what motivations these religious biographies were produced and how these social elements are reflected in the rhetorical passages. Although I am fully aware of the complexity and thin line between fact and fiction, I still believe that historical informations can be distilled from these romanticize tales if we critically scrutinize and analyze all facts and events by comparing and relating them to the social background and historical events.

While it would be most interesting to study the relationship between the monastic community and kinship in a peasant clan, the limitations of the resources, and at times
lack of resources, do not permit the author to do so. Therefore, the focus of this study revolves around a high profile, wealthy and influential branch of the Xiao clan, and the father, Xiao Yu, who served successively as Chief Minister for the first two emperors of the Tang dynasty, and his many descendents, who upon taking up the robe became successful exegetes and well-known religious leaders. I would also like to note that while my findings will be relevant in terms of the majority of renowned monastic figures from wealthy backgrounds, there are always exceptional cases that would not fit this paradigm. Therefore, although it is evident that a Buddhist cleric’s family background is influential throughout his or her monastic life, I speculate, with caution, that this factor would not be of much relevance to the circumstances of a clergy from a peasant family. Such investigation must be left for future research.

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6 For example, the unpleasant circumstances of a peasant’s life might have been his cause for entering the monastic order, in which case, not many would want to reminisce about such a past.
Chapter 1

Xiao Yu: the Stern Official and Pious Layman

In order to understand what inspires an individual to leave the household life, especially from a wealthy and prominent clan where survival is associated with political alliance through marriage and expansion of power and prestige, we need to examine his or her background, in terms of how that background bolsters his or her religious faith. The earliest record of the Xiao clan can be traced back in official Chinese history to Xiao He 蕭何 (?- 193 BC), who aided Liu Bang 劉邦 (256-159BC) in his establishment of the Western Han kingdom (206 BC- 8 CE), and held the title of Grand Councilor, a paramount executive official position, inherited by his descendents in later dynasties. The Xiao clan is one of the most prominent family lineages in medieval China, not only because it claimed emperorship during the Southern Qi dynasty and the Former and Later Liang dynasties, but also because its descendents held important official posts throughout the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties. As this research pertains to the interaction between the lay and monastic members of the Xiao family during the Tang dynasty, we must give due credit to the most prominent man, Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (574-648), the first of the ten male descendents to take on the position of Grand Councilor during China’s most flourishing and prosperous era.
Background

Official bibliographical information on Xiao Yu comes from the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊 唐書,⁷ the compilation of which must have been based on his tomb inscription, of which the author and whereabouts are anonymous.⁸ The biography in the official history was likely compiled by Confucian scholars, accounting for the emphasis on Yu’s family background and political career. Documentation of his religious vocation and community contribution has, however, appeared in the various sections of the *Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō* 大正新修大藏経 (Buddhist Canon Compiled During the Taishō Era). Yu’s religious career will be discussed in the second half of this chapter.

Yu’s distinguished political career and pious belief is not surprising considering the prestigious background and famous ancestors who paved the way for his success. His biography reads as follow:

Xiao Yu’s (574-648) style name is Shiwen. His great great grandfather was Emperor Wu of Liang,⁹ his great grandfather was Crown Prince Zhaoming,¹⁰ his

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⁸ Xiao Yu’s prominent status and fame was so highly recognized that there was no need to mention the names of his tomb inscription authors, as in the case of monks and nuns’ biographies, as we will see later on.
⁹ Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (464-549 CE), reigned from 502-549, founder of the Liang Dynasty of the four Southern Dynasties.
¹⁰ Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531 CE.), commonly known as Crown Prince Zhaoming, the eldest son of Emperor Xiao Yan. He never became the emperor and died from sickness when his father still reigned. The title of emperor was a posthumous title given by his father.
Xiao Yu was the youngest of Xiao Mingdi’s seven sons and was very much doted on by his elder sister, who became imperial consort Empress Xiao (d.u.) to the second emperor of the Sui dynasty, Emperor Yangdi (r. 604-617). Upon the death of his father at the age of 9 sui (eight years old), Xiao Yu was adopted by his sister. It is reasonable to presume that he must have been greatly attached influenced by his sister and brother-in-law in regards to their involvement in politics and their devotion to Buddhism. The couple’s devotion is evidenced by their lavish sponsorship and support of grand Buddhist projects and construction in the south at a time when Yangdi had not claimed the throne and was only appointed as Viceroy of the Southeast, with headquarters in Jiangdu 江都, now modern day Yangzhou 揚州. Even though life in the palace exposed him to the political arena and literati circle, Yu showed an early interest in learning beyond the Confucian curriculum, especially in Buddhist studies and practice. Furthermore, he was

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11 Xiao Cha 蕭詔 (519-562 CE.), reigned from 555-562, the third son of Xiao Tong, founder of the Western Liang 西梁 or Later Liang Dynasty 後梁 (555-587), a puppet state under the Western Wei 西魏 Dynasty (535-551) in the north.

12 Xiao Kui 蕭詎 (541-585 CE.), reigned from 562-585, son of Xiao Cha.

13 One of the Huainan Jiangbiao Commandaries 淮南江表諸郡. Today, roughly located in the southern part of Anhui Province 安徽省 and the northern part of Zhejiang Province 浙江省.


an opinionated young man, not afraid to express his thoughts, a characteristic that
brought him respect and also hostility in later years.

Yu was interested in [the teaching] of Śākyamuni and often practiced Buddhist
cultivation. Every time he argued with the srāmanera about suffering and
emptiness, he would always reach the subtle purport. He once read the Bianming
lun (“Treaties on Arguing about Fate”) by Liu Xiaobiao (462-521), and
resented the fact that he (Liu Xiaobiao) tarnished the teachings of the former
[Sage] Kings, and was confused by the theories of destiny. He then composed the Fei Bianming lun (“Criticism on the Treaties on Arguing about Fate”) to explain
[the true nature of life]. The general theme is as follows: “People are born by
receiving [the essence of] heaven and earth; who can say that it is not [determined by] fate? But as for the auspiciousness, bad omens, disasters and fortunes, they
also depend upon the person. If everything is to be exclusively explained by
one’s destiny, the harm will be quite severe. When the scholars Liu Guyan and
Zhuge Ying were at the residence of [Prince] Jin, [they] saw and praised it:
“During the several decades after Xiaobiao, among those who talk about the
principles of destiny, none is able to criticize and question him. Now with this
treatise of Mr. Xiao, it is enough to remedy the fatal disease of Mr. Liu.”

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16 Can be found in Zhaoming wenxuan 昭明文選 54: 2344-60. This is the first anthology composed of
poetry and essays compiled by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531 CE). After his death, the collections was named
zhaoming, after Xiao Tong’s title Zhaoming taizi 昭明太子.

17 No biography seems to be present in the official histories, however, he is mentioned in other sources,
including Nan Qi shu 52: 901; Nan shi 59: 1455; Sui shu 33: 95.. He is apparently a famous literary critic
and commentator from the Liang Dynasty.

18 The line yi ying ren er you 亦因人而有 literally translate as, “they exist because of [each] person.”

19 This is Liu Bian 柳綬; polite name Guyan 顧言, was a retainer of Emperor Yang when he was still
Prince Jin. He was very talented in poetry and literature and was a favorite companion of the emperor.
Biography in Sui shu 15: 374-5; also see Hurvitz, Zhiyi, 1962.

20 Like Liu Bian, Ying was also a retainer of Emperor Yang when he was still a prince. Biography in Sui
shu 76: 1734.
Yu’s social status rose in conjunction with his brother-in-law’s ascension to power, and when Sui Yangdi took the crown, Yu, in his early thirties, was bestowed three official titles, proof of the crown’s trust. When Emperor Yang was still crown prince (600-604), Yu was made the Crown Prince’s Right Swordsman Guard. When the emperor succeeded to the throne, Yu was moved to be the Chief Steward for the Wardrobe, Acting Left Standby Guard and Commandant of a Soaring Hawk Garrison.

On one occasion, Yu was infected with the leprosy disease and vowed to enter the monastic order so as to redeem his negative karmic force from his past, which he believed was the source of his sickness. After recovering, Yu sincerely planned to become a monk, but his sister’s disapproval caused Yu to abandon that plan. This unfulfilled vow would become a vital factor in Yu’s liberal attitude towards his daughters’ aspirations to enter the nunnery. After this incident, Yu’s political career advanced smoothly due in part to his own merit, but perhaps more so from his sister’s anxiety over Yu’s possible life as a recluse. She may have persuaded Yangdi to bestow prestigious and important official positions on Yu which he gladly accepted.

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21 Abbreviation of the title qianniubeishen 千牛備身. The words ‘a thousand oxen’ are used to refer to a swordsman because of a passage in the Zhuangzi, where a skilled butcher slaughtered several thousand oxen over 19 years without dulling the blade of his knife. See Zhuangzi zhuyi 2: 119. In Sui time, the title was given to people authorized for service in the establishment of the Crown Prince.

22 Responsible for providing and maintaining the emperor’s clothing.

23 A common name for a military unit at the dynastic capital.

24 The basic local unit in the Garrison Militia system from 607-618. From 607 to the fall of Sui dynasty in 618, the Yingyangfu 靈陽府 (Soaring Hawk Garrison) was the formal designation of Garrison units in the fubing 府兵 (Garrison Militia organization).

25 The Chinese character si 師 is an androgynous term which refers to both monasteries or nunneries. I have chosen to use and change the translation of this character as appropriate.
Yangdi's first attempt to attack Koguryo (Korean Peninsula) in the first month of 612 resulted in repeated failures and loss of manpower and material wealth, and brought on numerous rebellions from far-flung regions in the course of three years. Three years later, in 615, the emperor desperately needed to exterminate these rebels and bring about peace to the nation; therefore, he repeatedly issued edicts that ensured quick pacification, not aware of the severity of the turmoil actually facing the empire. It was during his journey to the north, possibly to inspect the progress of his extermination campaign, that Yangdi was almost captured by the force of the Eastern Turks under the leadership of Shibi Khaghan 始畢可汗 (r. Gokturk Empire 609-619), and forced to take refuge in the walled city of Yanmen. Only then did he understand the devastation of his miscalculation:

[When] Emperor Yang arrived at Yanmen, he was surrounded by the Turks. Yu suggested: “If she heard that Shibi (?-619) was here to accompany the imperial hunting trip, Princess Yicheng (?-630) did not know that he had a plan to mutiny. Also according to the barbaric customs of the northern savages, the wife of the khaghan has authority over military affairs. Formerly when Gaozu of the Han...

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26 Twitchett ed., The Cambridge History of China, 144.

27 The capital city of Yanmen Commandery 雁門郡, which was one of the Hedong Commandaries 河東諸郡. The city was roughly located in the northern area of today’s Shanxi Province.

28 This refers to Shibi Khaghan 始畢可汗, the son of Tuli Khaghan 突利可汗. Tuli was one of the Turkic tribal leaders in the north. He was caught in an internal power struggle of the Turks and lost, after which he surrendered to Sui and received the title Qimin Khaghan 啓民可汗. Shibi succeeded to the position of Khaghan after his father’s death and in 615, he rebelled against Sui and surrounded Emperor Yang’s troop in the city of Yanmen. See Bei shi 13: 448-51; Sui shu 3: 68-71.

29 This is likely a sister of Emperor Yang, who was sent to marry Tuli or Qimin Khaghan of the Turks. After Qimin’s death she remarried to his son Shibi Khaghan. See Sui shu 84: 1872-3 and Jiu Tang shu 194: 5154.

30 Kehedun 诃額敦 is a non-Chinese word used by the northern nomadic tribes such as the Turks, Uighurs and Mongols. It refers to the wife of the tribal leader or khaghan 诃汗. And in this case it refers to Princess Yicheng who was married to Shibi Khaghan.
was relieved from the siege of Pingcheng. It was also because of the effort of the Hun leader’s wife. Moreover, Yicheng was married as the daughter of the Chinese emperor; she would certainly rely on the support of the great country. If we send a single messenger to inform Yicheng, then even if it does not help, it will not make things worse either. 炎帝至鷹門，為突厥所圍。炎帝謀曰：如聞始解讖校校至此，義成公主初不知其有遠背之心，且北蕃夷俗，可智此知兵馬事。昔漢高祖解平城之圍，乃智其力。況義成以帝女為妻，必恃大國之援。若發一軍以告義成，假使無益，事亦無損。...

Yu played an important role in the remaining years of the Sui dynasty as both a loyal official despite being detested by the Emperor for his straightforward character. He repeatedly advised Yangdi against his delusion of restoring China to its glorious era with the price of losing the citizen’s trust and conformity:

I have also secretly heard the complaints of the crowd. They are worried that after your majesty quells the Turks, you will further launch another campaign against Liaodong. Therefore, people’s morale is not united and this may lead to defeat. Please issue a clear edict and inform the army. If [your majesty] pardons Koguryo and focuses on the attack on the Turks, then the people’s mind will be relieved and they will naturally fight for you. Emperor Yang followed his advice, and thus sent a messenger to reach the wife of the khaghan and deliver the edict. Suddenly, the Turks retreated from their siege and left. Later they captured a spy [of the Turks] who said: “Princess Yicheng sent a messenger to report an urgent matter to Shibi saying that there was an emergency to the north.” Thus the Turks’ retreat from their siege was indeed due to the help of the princess.臣又竊聽軾人之讒，乃慮陛下平突厥後更事遼東，所以人心不一，或致挫敗。請下明詔告軍中，赦高麗而專攻突厥，則百姓心安，人自為戰。” 炎帝從之，於是發使詔可智敦諭

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31 This refers to the first Han Emperor Liu Bang’s campaign against the Huns. In 200 BCE, Liu Bang and the Han troops were surrounded in the city of Pingcheng by the Hun tribal leader Maodun Chanyu. It was believed that Liu Bang managed to make the Hun army retreat by bribing the wife of Maodun.

32 Like *kehedun*, a non-Chinese word used to refer to the wife of the Huns tribal leader during the Han dynasty.

33 The term *weiqi* literally means “to become [someone’s] wife.”

34 It refers to the Sui dynasty.

35 Literally the east of Liao River, but in this case it refers to Koguryo. The medieval Korean state that occupies today’s North Korea and parts of today’s Northeast China.
Although saved by Xiao Yu, Yangdi was not happy about the fact that Yu openly criticized his military campaign, and therefore, sent out a declaration accusing Yu of cowardice:

[Later], Emperor Yang was going to attack Liaodong again. He spoke to his officials: “The Turks were licentious, deviant and intent on invasion. What can they possibly do? Because they did not disperse for a moment, Xiao Yu [exaggerated and] scared [the army which caused a panic among the soldiers]. This [cowardly] attitude cannot be tolerated [in principle].” Thus [Yu] was sent out to be the Commandery Governor of Hechi; he was sent there right away. 嬰帝又將伐遼東，謂群臣曰: “突厥狂悖為寇，勢何能為? 以其少時未散，蕭瑀遂相恐動，情不可忍.” 因出為河池郡守，即日遣之.

Yu proved his worthiness and ability by dispersing the bandits through his own measures and winning the trust of the civilians. Yu continuously demonstrated his competence in military strategy by successfully demolishing the rebel’s station northwest of the capital Chang’an.

After he arrived at the commandery, there were more than ten thousand mountain bandits who robbed and terrorized [the people there] without control. Yu secretly gathered brave soldiers to stage a surprise attack on them. He faced the battle and made [the bandits] surrender their forces. The wealth and livestock captured [from the bandits] were all presented to those who had merit; therefore, people exhausted their effort [to serve him]. [Later], Xue Ju (?-618)37 sent a force of several tens of thousand to invade and raid the border of the commandery. Yu

36 Roughly located in the southern area of present day Gansu Province, which is between Shanxi and Sichuan Provinces. During the Sui era it was once one of the Bahan Commanderies 巴漢諸郡.

37 A powerful Kansu rebel in West China during the end of the Daye 大業 reign period of Sui dynasty. At the height of his rebellion in 617, he declared imperial titles and called himself the Hegemon of Western Qin 西秦霸王. See Jiu Tang shu 2: 23.
attacked them altogether and since then none of the bandits dared to enter [the area] and the commandery returned to peace. 既至郡，有山贼数余人寇暴纵横，瑶潜募勇敢之士设奇而击之。当阵而降其众。所获财畜，咸赏有功，由是人竭其力。辟举遣众数万，侵掠郡境。瑶要击之，自后诸贼莫敢进，郡中复安。

In the early months of 618, Li Yuan 李渊(566-635, r. 618-627) launched a major campaign to seize the Sui eastern capital, Luoyang, and on the twentieth day of the fifth month, he deposed the puppet Sui child emperor and declared himself the first ruler of the new dynasty, which was named after his hereditary fief, Tang. He selected the reign name Wude 武德, meaning “Military Virtue,” and established his capital in Daxingcheng 大興城, renaming it Chang’an. Gaozu 高祖(Li Yuan’s posthumous title) felt insecure about the founding of his new dynasty and appointed people he could trust such as relatives, close friends and veteran officials who supported the Taiyuan uprising, in administration positions. Historical records have shown that no less than eight of his chief ministers (zaixiang 宰相) were related by marriage to the Sui and Tang imperial families, one of which was the Xiao noble family. The intimate ties between the royal Li family and the Xiao Yu was based on four main things: 1.) Li Yuan and Xiao Yu were related by marriage alliance through the Dugu 獨孤 family; 2.) Li Yuan honored Xiao Yu’s sister, Empress Xiao of Yangdi, in order to return as an honored guest in the


39. June 10th 618.

40. According to Takashi Okazaki’s *Chūgoku no kōkogaku. Zui-To*, Dugu Xin 獨孤信 (503-57) seventh daughter Née Dugu 獨孤氏 (i.e. 文獻皇后 [553-602]) was the imperial consort of Sui Wendi and mother to Yangdi while his forth daughter Née Dugu 獨孤氏 (i.e. 元貞皇后) became the wife of Li Bing 李昺 (d. ca. 572), mother to Li Yuan 李淵(Tang Gaozu [566-635, r. 618-26]), see chart on pp. 80. Another thorough study on the genealogies of imperial families during the Sui and Tang dynasties can be found in Chen Jinhua, *Monks and Monarchs*, 239-42.
capital,\(^{41}\) 3. ) Li Yuan admired Xiao Yu’s talent and fame, proven by his service to the previous Sui dynasty; 4. ) and lastly, men of Li Yuan’s generation were “unaffected by the Confucian conception of loyalty,” forbidding a man who had served one royal house from serving its successor. The sense of loyalty was not directed towards a particular reigning dynasty represented social order.\(^{42}\) Therefore, Xiao Yu did not feel guilty for serving Li Yuan, the person who brought about the collapse of the Sui dynasty and abolition of his sister’s royal position.

As [Emperor] Gaozu pacified the capital, he sent a letter to summon [Yu]. Yu then submitted to the state along with the commandery, and was titled the Grand Master for Splendid Happiness,\(^{43}\) enfeoffed the State Duke of Song and appointed as the Minister of the Ministry of Revenue.\(^{44}\) [When Emperor] Taizong\(^{45}\) became the Right Marshal\(^{46}\) and attacked Luoyang, Yu was made the Vice [Governor] of the Superior Prefecture.\(^{47}\) In the first year of the reign of Wude\(^{48}\), he was moved [to the position of] Chamberlain for the Capital.\(^{49}\) At that time the army and the state had just

\(^{41}\) During the later years of chaos, she was captured by a barbarian tribe in north China. When the Turkish tribe was defeated, she was welcomed back to the Tang court in Zhenguang 4 (789). See Sui shu 67: 2479.

\(^{42}\) Twitchett ed., Cambridge History of China, 154.

\(^{43}\) A prestigious title for civil officials.

\(^{44}\) One of the variable number of top-echelon units in the shangshu sheng 部門省(Department of State Affairs), which is in charge of tax revenue and household registration.

\(^{45}\) This refers to Li Shimin 李世民 (599-650), the second emperor of the Tang dynasty who reigned from 627-650. Although he was referred to by his posthumous imperial title, during the time this biography was written he was still the Prince of Qin 奉王. See Jiu Tang shu 2: 21-37.

\(^{46}\) Common designation for an eminent military officer on active campaign.

\(^{47}\) In this case, the prefix sima 司馬 was used as a title for second or third level executive officials, i.e. Vice or Assistant, in territorial units of administration such as Prefecture 州 or Superior Prefecture 府. While both units were of the same level (that is to be under the larger unit of Circuit 道), the only difference was that a Superior Prefecture was of particular strategic importance.

\(^{48}\) May 30th, 618- January 20th, 619.

\(^{49}\) The administrative and executive [position] for the local metropolitan area where the dynastic capital is located. The same title could also be used in a more archaic sense to refer to the Royal Secretary.
been established and the remote territories\textsuperscript{50} were not yet at peace. [Emperor] Gaozu then entrusted [various affairs] to those he deeply trusted. \textsuperscript{51} As for all of the governmental affairs, all of them were placed under [these ministers’] command. Every time [Emperor] Gaozu rose to the [palace] hall to attend governmental [matters], [as a great privilege] he would always allow [Yu] to rise to the imperial seating area. Since Yu was the son-in-law of the Dugu lady, \textsuperscript{52} when [the emperor] talked to him, he would call him “Brother Xiao” [intimately].

Xiao Yu, now one of the twelve chief ministers, whose status and power was second only to Pei Ji (569-628), was valued by Gaozu, who treated Yu as his own brother, in whom he could confide and on whom he could depend. Even though the emperor was aware that Yu’s highly critical nature might earn him the enmity of fellow courtiers, the emperor entrusted Yu with important duties and depended on him to manage both the battlefield and the court.

As for the state ceremonies and the court protocols, they were also assigned to [Yu to supervise]. Yu diligently motivated himself and as he corrected others’ mistakes and pointed out their flaws. People were all afraid of him. He once memorialized [the emperor] with several dozens of suggestions to expediently [cope with emergencies] and many of them were adopted and enforced. [For this the emperor] wrote down an edict saying: “[My] obtaining of your words is what the state relies on. [One should] carry out the plans of the wise one so that his fineness may be realized. [When one] adopts the words of remonstrator he should reward his virtue with gold and treasure. Now I am giving you a chest of gold in order to reward the wise one. Do not refuse this [out of politeness].” Yu firmly

\textsuperscript{50} In this context \textit{fang} 方, literally meaning corner, is referring to the state/land Li Yuan concurred after 619.

\textsuperscript{51} The terms \textit{xinfu} 心腹, literally means the heart and stomach; since these are vital organs to the human body, they are used as a metaphor for deeply trusting a person.

\textsuperscript{52} The author is probably referring to Empress Yuanzhen 元貞 (Née Dugu 獨孤氏) who was the mother of Li Yuan (Tang Gaozu) and aunt to Yang Guang 楊廣(Sui Yangdi).
refused, but the laudatory did not allow it. Gaozu was aware of Yu’s administrative capabilities, and together with Pei Ji developed the administrative laws promulgated in 634 CE.

During that year, seven posts were created in each prefecture. [The emperor] strived to employ those who were fine in both talent and reputation. When [Emperor] Taizong rose to become the Metropolitan Governor of Yong Prefecture, he made Yu the Prefect Commander-in-Chief.

During Gaozu’s reign, the other court officials were afraid of Yu, but the emperor himself, who relied heavily on Yu’s experience, tolerated Yu’s actions, whether they were to his liking or not.

[Emperor] Gaozu once had an edict and the Secretariat did not announce it promptly. Gaozu blamed [Yu] for being late and Yu said: “During the days of the reign period Daye (605-617), I, your subject, saw that when the Royal Secretary announced the edicts, there were some that contradicted [the orders] before or after them. As the many officials carried them out, they did not know

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53 The emperor issued another edict to decline his rejection.

54 I am unsure what these seven posts refer to.

55 A title assigned to the governor of the dynastic capital, but often a sinecure for a member of the imperial family, in which case a yin Administrator, nominally his assistant, actually bore his responsibility.

56 This actually refers to the Superior Prefecture of Yong, which was the prefecture of the capital region immediately surrounding Chang’an.

57 Eminent military title that originated from the Later Han, and was revived in the Tang for the chief of military forces in a prefecture before giving way to the title Jiedushi Military Commissioner.

58 A top-echelon agency of the central government, nominally responsible for promulgating the emperor’s orders but usually having broader policy-formulating responsibilities.
how to put them into effect. People say that the easy [part] always comes first and the hard [part] always comes after. I have been in the Secretariat for a long time, and I have seen many cases of this. Now that the imperial foundation has just been built, such matters would involve the security [of the state]. If those who are far away [from the capital] have doubts [about the edicts], I am afraid that this might hinder the critical [operation of the state]. [Thus] in the past when I receive an edict, I would always examine it carefully. [After] I make sure that it does not contradict the earlier edicts, only then would I dare to announce and carry it out. The error of being late is actually because of this.” [Emperor] Gaozu said, “[Since] you...what worries do I have?”

Gaozu’s admiration of Yu was not only due to his capabilities as an administrator, but to his sincere and selfless devotion to the imperial house. Yu made great contributions as a strategist and helped Gaozu defeat unexpected rebels and warlords from the preceding dynasties, rebels who did not recognize Li Yuan’s victory, and harbored ambitions to claim the throne left open by the overthrow of the Sui.

When Wang Shichong was quelled, Yu’s anticipation of the military scheme [against Wang] earned him the enfeoffment of two thousand households and the appointment of the Right Vice-Director of the Department of State Affairs. 及平王世充，诩以預軍謀之功，加邑二千戶，拜尚書右僕射.

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59 The term qing is literally translated as “[this] subject or minister [of mine].”

60 Wang Shichong 王世充 (?-621) was one of the post-Sui warlords who fought against the Li family over the dominance of China. He established the state of Zheng at his main base in Luoyang (619). By 621, his regime was crushed by the army lead by Li Shimin and was killed during his escape. See Jiu Tang shu 54: 2227-2234.
Yu was also an amiable family man who treated his relatives well. During one occasion when the emperor bestowed Yu with landholdings, he immediately shared with other members of the Xiao clan, keeping only a shrine for worship purposes.

At first, when Yu submitted (literally, went”) to the Tang court, all the properties and estates within the Guan[zhong]\textsuperscript{61} region were given to those who were meritorious [to the founding of the state]. Now, his land and residence were returned [to him] as a special grace. Yu distributed them all to his kinsmen of various clans. He only kept one ancestral shrine in order to perform the sacrificial rites. \textsuperscript{62}初，瑯之朝也，關內產業並先給動人。至是特還其田宅，瑯皆分給諸宗子弟，唯留廟堂一所，以奉蒸嘗。

However, Yu did not have good rapport with other officials due to his frank character and critical speech. He was not afraid to ‘carp out’ flaws in other officials and made a reputation as a cynical and strict minister.

[The officials’] performance reviews, both inside and outside [of the central government] were all entrusted to him. The Accountant\textsuperscript{63} was the guide for his fellow officials; [therefore], the various affairs were numerous and cumbersome. Sometimes when Yu saw that matters were not conducted fairly, his upholding of the laws would be strict; [consequently] he was disliked by [his colleagues] at that time. 內外考績皆委之。司會為僚指南，庶務繁縕。瑯見事有時偏駁，而持法稍深，頗為時議所少.

\textsuperscript{61} A general geographic term that refers to the capital region in today’s Shanxi Province.

\textsuperscript{62} Both zheng 蒸 and chang 常 are names of ancestral sacrificial rites. Zheng is performed in winter while chang is performed in autumn. When used together they refer to sacrificial rites in general.

\textsuperscript{63} Sikuai 司會 is an ancient official position from the Zhou dynasty, responsible for conducting monthly and annual audits of fiscal records in all governmental agencies; they also maintain land and record population registers and review performance of officials. The position was not in existence by Tang time. The title is mentioned in Yu biography because of his work, which involved reviewing other officials.
While Yu usually made wise decisions and, anticipated well, he often failed to aptly predict a person’s character as with Feng Lun (568-627), which garnered him ill feelings from the throne and his colleagues.

Yu once recommended Feng Lun to [Emperor] Gaozu. Gaozu made Lun the Secretariat Director. When [Emperor] Taizong succeeded the throne, he moved [Yu] to the Left Vice-Director of the Department of State Affairs, and Feng Lun was made the Right Vice-Director. Lun had always harbored malicious intentions [against Yu]. He would discuss with Yu about what can be memorialized [to the emperor], but when he arrived in front of [Emperor] Taizong, he would change all [the content of the memorial]. At the time Fang Xuanling and Du Ruhui had already been newly put in charge of the government; they were distanced from Yu but close to Lun, and Yu’s mind could not feel content about this. He then presented a sealed memorial to inform [the emperor] of this matter, and the words and purport of this memorial were harsh. [Emperor] Taizong thought that people including Xuanling had high merits and because [Yu] defied [the emperor’s] will, he had Yu’s enfeoffed land taken away.

During Taizong’s reign, Yu was removed from his positions and the central court. However, it was not long before the emperor reinstated Yu’s titles and status. The reason behind this sudden change of plan is ambiguous, however, we can assume that the

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64 Like Xiao Yu, Feng Lun 封倫 (568-627) was a prominent official figure during the Gaozu and Taizong’s reign period. He originally served the Sui court, but later surrendered to the Tang. After his surrender, he followed Li Shimin on several military campaigns and acquired merit as a strategist. See Xin Tang shu 100:3925-31.

65 Fang Xuanling 方玄齡 (579-648) was a trusted subject of Li Shimin. He and Changsun Wuji 長孫無忌 were responsible for planning the Xuanwu Gate Incident 玄武門之變 (626) and allowing Li Shimin to succeed the throne. He and Du Ruhui jointly ruled the government as Prime Ministers during Li Shimin’s time. See Xin Tang shu 96: 3853-8.

66 Du Ruhui 杜如晦 (585-630) was another trusted subject of Li Shimin. He used to follow Li Shimin on his military campaign and worked as a brilliant strategist. After Li Shimin succeeded the throne, he and Fang Xuanling jointly ruled the government for many years. See Xin Tang shu 96: 3858-60.
emperor was in need of Xiao Yu’s assistance and guidance (since he was newly enthroned), as well as, to prevent anxiety among the powerful clans.

Shortly afterward, he was appointed as the Especially Advanced Junior Preceptor of the Crown Prince. Before long, he was returned to the post of Left Vice-Director of the Department of State Affairs, with the actual enfeoffment of six hundred households.

One of Yu’s ambitions was to reinstate the feudal system, upon which the three dynasties of antiquity (Xia, Shang and Zhou) were established. The feudal system, according to Tang scholars, was “a system in which authority over specific territories was devolved upon hereditary lords who were enfeoffed as vassals of the ruler. It was the antithesis of the system of prefectures and counties by means of which the central government exercised direct territorial control through centrally appointed career officials.” He believed that their long standing regimes were due to the successful implication of this decentralized government system, that when practiced in court would also bring about political stabilization. However, with only a few supporters, the idea was never put into practice.

[Emperor] Taizong once said to Yu, “I would like for my descendents to last long and my state to be forever peaceful. What would be the principle [in achieving all these]?” Yu replied by saying: “I have observed that in the former generations, the reason for the fortune of the state to last long was none other than enfeoffing the feudal lords and making them solid rocks [for gounding the

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67 A title of great prestige conferred on officials of the central government. As prestigious as it was, this new title was probably a demotion in Xiao Yu’s case, since unlike his previous posts, Junior Preceptor was a position that had no administrative authority.

state]. When the Qin took over the six states, they abolished the marquises and set up governors, and in two generations they collapsed. When Han ruled all under Heaven, the systems of commandaries and feudal states were both installed, to the maintenance of their state fortune for over four hundred years. When Wei and Jin abolished [the feudal system] they were not able to last long. The ways of feudalism can indeed be followed and carried out.” [Emperor] Taizong agreed with it and started discussing feudalism. Although the proposed feudalism failed to materialize, it made a lasting impression on Taizong and this topic reappeared as a political issue on several occasions, often creating heated debates among the officials. This marked the beginning of a subtle power struggle between Xiao Yu and the younger officials. In 637, ten years after the plan was suggested to the crown, Taizong issued an edict which enfeoffed twenty-one imperial princes and fourteen prominent ministers as hereditary governors-general or hereditary prefects and dispatched them to various prefectures as officers protecting the frontiers. Details of this appointmentship or the arranged designate are unclear, but the mere granting of titles rather than actual implementation of parceling out territorial authority demonstrates that the emperor did take notice of Xiao Yu’s suggested feudal paradigm.

As Yu grew older, he became more intolerant of the new generation officials’ ways of dealing with court affairs. He understood that the younger and more energetic officials such as Chen Shuda were favored by the young emperor while he was only a

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69 The marquises and governors are generically used as symbol for the feudal and non-feudal kinds of state structure.
symbolic figure in court. As one of the senior officials, Xiao Yu often bluntly criticized the emperor and showed little fear of opposing Taizong’s edicts.

Soon after, he was implicated in the case caused by his arguing with Chen Shuda,70 the Director of the Chancellery,71 in front of the emperor, when he was harsh both in sound and complexion and was therefore accused of showing disrespect [to the emperor].72 More than a year [later], he was given [the post of] the Commander-in-Chief in Jin Prefecture. In the next year, he was titled the Left Grand Master for Splendid Happiness and also received [the post of] Censor-in-Chief.73 When [Yu] discussed the governmental affairs in the court with the prime ministers he often gave eloquent arguments. Every time he had a critical comment, people such as Xuanling would not be able to counter his argument. However, although in their minds they knew he was right, they never adopted his suggestions. Yu was becoming increasingly unhappy [about this].

When Yu was unable to persuade Taizong to follow his advice he would rely on terrorizing, unsuccessfully, the emperor with his resignation. The emperor finally decided to dismiss him from his chief minister post in 627.

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70 Chen Shuda 陈叔達 (?-635) was a son of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 of the Chen dynasty. As the dynasty collapsed he surrendered to Sui and then to Tang. He served Li Yuan and was engaged in the forming of policies. Once Li Yuan accepted Li Jiancheng’s suggestion and was about to demote Li Shimin. Chen Shuda fiercely remonstrated against this and made Li Yuan change his mind. See Xin Tang shu 100: 3925.

71 The Menxia sheng 門下省 (Head of the Chancellery) is an executive agency in the central government’s top echelon, commonly responsible for advising rulers about proposals submitted through the Secretariat, remonstrating with rulers about the practicality and morality of policy decisions, and serving as the channel through which imperial pronouncements were put in final form and transmitted to the Department of State Affairs in implementation.

72 Zuo 坐 in this context does not imply “sitting” but means “being implicated in a lawsuit.”

73 Yushi tai 御史臺 (Head of the Censorate) is one of the most eminent official of the central government, in administrative charge of Censors 御史 of many sorts who maintained disciplinary surveillance over the officialdom, freely impeaching in any official for public or private misconduct.
Xuanling, Wei Zheng\textsuperscript{74} and Wen Yanbo\textsuperscript{75} once had a trivial mistake. Yu impeached them but their crime was not investigated at the end. Because of this, he became very disappointed. Thus he retired from [the post of] Censor-in-Chief and was made the Junior Mentor of the Crown Prince,\textsuperscript{76} and he no longer took part in the governmental affairs in court. 夏令、魏徵、溫燕博皆有微過，瑀幼之，而罪竟不問，因此自失。由是罷御史大夫，以為太子少傅，不復預聞朝政.

However, Taizong could not fully break relations with this incorruptible and highly experienced minister, and soon afterwards Yu was called back into office for the second time. Even with his abrasive character and bad relations with the other officials, Taizong retained him in the high court as a moral censor.

In the sixth year [of Taizong’s reign],\textsuperscript{77} he was given a special promotion and was made the Chamberlain for Ceremonials.\textsuperscript{78} In the eighth year,\textsuperscript{79} he was made the Great Touring Surveillance Commissioner\textsuperscript{80} of Henan Circuit. Among the people there were those who faced trials and suffered from not being able to plead their innocence. They were then subjected to [the punishment of] the laws and regulations and were sentenced to death. As a special grace [Emperor] Taizong pardoned them from their punishments. In the ninth year,\textsuperscript{81} he was appointed to a special promotion and was again ordered to take part in governmental affairs. 六

\textsuperscript{74} Wei Zheng 費徵(580-643) was a famous scholar at the time and was once put in charge of compiling and editing the state histories of Liang, Chen, Qi, Zhou and Sui. He also had a prominent position in court and enjoyed power and prestige similar to Fang Xuanling. See Jiu Tang shu 71: 2545-62.

\textsuperscript{75} Wen Yanbo 溫燕博(573-636), once served as a general in a campaign against the Turks during the reign of Li Yuan. The campaign failed and he was captured by the enemy, but he refused to reveal any information about the Tang army. During the reign of Li Shimin, he was returned to Tang and became a prominent figure in the court. See Jiu Tang shu 194: 5162-3.

\textsuperscript{76} Another title of great prestige conferred to officials of the central government, but which had no real administrative power.

\textsuperscript{77} January 27\textsuperscript{th}, 632-February 13\textsuperscript{th}, 633.

\textsuperscript{78} In charge of the state’s sacrificial ceremonies, especially at the Imperial Ancestral Temple and at the Imperial Mausoleums.

\textsuperscript{79} February 4\textsuperscript{th}, 634-January 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 635.

\textsuperscript{80} Equivalent to xunchashi 巡察使, which was a central government official delegated to tour a multi-prefectural region, investigating and reporting on conditions among the people and conducts of the officials.

\textsuperscript{81} January 24\textsuperscript{th}, 635-February 11\textsuperscript{th}, 636.
Throughout Taizong's reign, he experienced only one major defeat against the Koguryo in the unsuccessful military campaign that began in 644 and lasted until his death in 649. In an attempt to punish Koguryo for attacking Silla, a loyal vassal of the Tang in 644, even though most of the ministers at court opposed this impractical expedition, Taizong personally traveled to Luoyang. This was the first stop on his way to the battle front, and in 645 he marched on to Liaodong and attacked the Koguryo capital P'yongyang. However, his army was halted at the fortress of the city Anshi and after two months of futile attempts to take the city, the army was ordered to retreat at the onset of the bitter Korean winter. On their return, several thousand soldiers were caught in the cruel blizzard and perished. Xiao Yu, one of the major figures against this campaign and after realizing that Taizong would not abide by his words, asked to be removed from his position in favor of a humble seat in the Chancellery department.

When [Emperor] Taizong attacked the east of the Liao River, with the important strategic point to the capital Luo[yang], which was the gate between Guan[zhong] and [Wei]He, he appointed Yu the Palace Regent of Luoyang. When [the emperor's] imperial chariot returned from Liao, [Yu] asked to be relieved from the post of Grand Guardian and he still jointly served in the

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82 This refers to the military campaign against the Korean state of Goguryeo, which occupies today's North Korea and a large part of Manchuria. During this campaign, the Tang army allied with another Korean state of Silla, which is located southeast of the Korean Peninsula. Goguryeo was defeated by the alliance in 668.

83 Guangzhong is within the central Shanxi Plain.

84 The refers to the Wei River.

85 A prefix generally indicating that an official already serving in one post has been assigned, additionally, to take part in the work of another post, normally more prestigious than vice.
As an experienced official, Yu should have been aware of Fang Xuanling, Changsun Wuji and Wen Zheng’s abilities and loyalty towards Taizong; however, he persisted in framing them as potential usurpers and future rebels against the Tang dynasty. Was this evidence of his paranoia concerning the younger officials? Or was his behavior, as most scholars believe, Yu’s interpretation of his responsibility as the moral censor.

The exchange below shows how Taizong tried to convince the old official to be less critical and to leave the affairs to the younger generations of officials. With patience and respect, Taizong tried to persuade the old minister of the capabilities of those he did not trust.

Yu once said: “Those ministers working under Xuanling\textsuperscript{87} and serving jointly within the Secretariat-Chancellery, they all have allies and clique members everywhere around them. They do not have the sincere will to serve your majesty.” He [Yu] repeatedly memorialized alone saying: “These people work with each other to grasp power; [their schemes are thick] like glue and lacquer, and Your Majesty has not fully realized [their evil]. It is just that they have not revolled against Your Majesty yet.”

[Emperor] Taizong said to Yu: “He who acts as people’s ruler, drives and leads those with fine talents and extends his sincerity to the treat the intellectuals [and talented]. Your\textsuperscript{88} words, are they not too extreme? Why did you have to go this far?” Within a few days [Emperor] Taizong spoke to Yu saying: “No one knows his subjects better than the ruler. Since a person cannot be perfect, I naturally should overlook one’s flaws and employ him for his forte. Although I lack cleverness, I should not suddenly be confused about [the judgment] of good and evil.” Thus he made several serious guarantees to Yu [about the other official’s

\textsuperscript{86} Developed in the early 700s as a combination of the previously separated Secretariat and Chancellery, in recognition of the fact that these two major agencies in the top echelon of the central government had long been virtually indistinguishable by their functions.

\textsuperscript{87} Refer to pp. 12n.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{gong yan 公言} is literally translated as “You, Sir’s word.”
integrity]. After Yu did not get what he wanted, [Emperor] Taizong also began to hold a grudge against him as time went by, but in the end, he did not dismiss him because Yu was mostly loyal and devoted [subject].

Before long, Yu said that he had sickness in his feet. Sometimes when he visited the imperial court he would not enter and meet the [emperor]. [Emperor] Taizong said to the attendants saying: “Is Yu feeling unappreciated and therefore, become discontent all by himself to such an extent.” He [the emperor] then wrote an edict saying: “I’ve heard that if things can go along harmoniously, then even if they are different in qualities, they can still accomplish merits; if matters contradict each other, then even if they are the same shape, they will hardly have any use. Therefore, when a boat floats, its oars will paddle and it will be able to cross a river of one thousand 

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lish; when [a chariot’s] shaft is taken away and its wheels stopped, it will not move past even a tiny bit of land. Therefore, I know that it should be a priority for one to achieve harmony and cooperation between the curved and the straight; not to mention the appropriateness between the superior and the subordinate; and the interaction between the ruler and the subject. Since I lack brilliance as a ruler, I hope to entrust the virtue to [my subjects who are like my] thighs and lower arms. I wish to remove the fraudulent and return to the truth, to eliminate shallowness and frivolity and revert to simplicity.

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The lines gu zhi dongjing xiangxun yi wei wu, quzhixiangfan nan wei gong means that people should always try to get along with each other and work in harmony, even though they may be as different as movement and stillness, or straight lines and curved lines.

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The term yuanshou 元首 and gugong 觀眾 are possibly allusions to a passage in the Daoist text Baopuzi (The Master Who Embraces Simplicity) 48: 776-7. “If we take various matters over the distance [to form an example], then heaven is noble and earth is humble, and with [this understanding] we arrive at the general principles of people’s ethic relations. If we take the various body parts close by [to form an example] then [there is a difference between a person’s] head, thighs and shoulders, and with [this understanding] we show the proper order between a ruler and his subjects.” 滅取諸物. 則天尊地卑. 以著人倫之體. 近取諸身. 則元首股肱. 以表君臣之序.
In the last paragraph, Taizong refers to *yuanshou* 元首, *gugong* 股肱, *guizhen* 告真 (return to the truth) and *fanpu* 反朴 (revert to simplicity) as the ideal way to conduct governmental affairs. These are terms used in the Daoist tradition, showing Taizong’s deep understanding and support for this religion. As the Li family was not very fond of Buddhism and most of the Tang emperors claim to be descendents of Laozi, favor towards this religion was inevitable. By forging connections with Laozi, the Tang family was able to claim a sagely heritage. According to historical records, Taizong was hostile to Buddhism throughout his life and never had any intentions to understand its teachings. He even denounced the religion as vulgar and futile in a 646 edict. Nevertheless, he continued to order Buddhist celebrations and the participation of monks and nuns at imperial anniversaries, and he funded the construction of a monastery in dedication to his mother. These superficial gestures of conciliation offered some assurance to the monks and lay community that he had no intention to extirpate the religion, but rather that he wanted complete control of and submission from the Buddhist community. Religious difference was the second factor that caused Taizong’s biased treatment of Xiao Yu. This problem was not a major factor during Gaozu’s reign due to Yu’s activeness in the political arena and minor enthusiasm for religious practice. However, during Taizong’s reign, Xiao Yu developed an inclination for spirituality and openly publicized it in court. In the beginning, Taizong was tolerant of Yu’s religious difference and even showed support for Yu’s practice.

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92 Laozi’s surname was also Li 李. See *Shiji* 63: 2139-2143.
However, with Daoist and Confucian advisors constantly criticizing the Buddhist tradition and devaluing its teaching, Taizong gradually developed antipathy towards this religion. He charged Xiao Yu with believing in a barbaric religion that only causes the fall of dynasties. Nevertheless, due to Xiao’s prestigious influence throughout the nation and among the noble clans, Taizong’s kept Yu by his side.

In the twenty-first year [of Emperor Taizong’s reign], he was called upon to be given the title of Golden and Purple Grand Master for Splendid Happiness and was returned to his enfeoffment of the State Duke of Song. He was given the honor of following the emperor [for a short while] to live in the Yuhua Palace. [But before he got back], he encountered illness and passed away in the palace; he was seventy-three years old. When [Emperor] Taizong heard [of this,] he stopped his meals, while [Emperor] Gaozong griefed for him and sent a messenger to make an offering [at the funeral].

The choosing of a posthumous title was one of the most important events after the death of an imperial family member, a high minister, a scholar or a person with social status reflecting the person’s character, conduct or contribution to society. This title usually carries positive connotations praising the individual’s worthy attributes. And in the case of high officials, the final decision must be affirmed by the emperor before it is bestowed upon the deceased and recorded on the tombstone. This episode occurring after Yu’s death illustrates the tension between him and Taizong. Taizong still harbored ill-

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93 This is referring to Liang Wudi, who in the later years of his reign developed great enthusiasm towards promoting Buddhism and became careless with state affairs. Historians have associated Liang Wudi’s downfall with his piety towards Buddhism.

94 February 2nd 647-January 29th 648.

95 A prestige title for civil officials.

96 Name of a palace built in the Phoenix Valley 鳳凰谷 within today’s Yijin County 宜君縣 in Shanxi Province. It was not part of the main imperial palace in Chang’an.

97 Still the crown prince at this time.
feelings towards this cantankerous and obstinate minister and chose a unique posthumous title representing the complex feelings he had towards Xiao Yu.

The Chamberlain for Ceremonials posthumously titled him “Su”. [Emperor] Taizong said: “As for the reference in one’s posthumous title, we must examine the person’s conduct. Yu’s nature had many suspicions; this posthumous title is inappropriate in its lack of truthfulness. It would be more appropriate to depict the truth.” [Therefore], they changed his posthumous title to Duke Zhenpian. He was given the titles of Minister of Works and Commander-in-Chief of Jing Prefecture. He was given an imperial coffin and was buried in the Shao Mausoleum to accompany [Emperor] Taizong.

The character su means solemn. The character pian had the meaning of narrowness or narrow-mindedness. Therefore, Zhenbian Gong is translated as the Duke of Loyalty and Narrow-mindedness.

Nevertheless, Taizong was not always on bad terms with Xiao Yu but sincerely respected his loyalty and service for the Tang. On one rare occasion, Taizong openly

98 Originally in charge of great state sacrificial ceremonies, especially at the Imperial Ancestral Temple and at Imperial Mausoleums.

99 The character su means solemn.

100 The character pian had the meaning of narrowness or narrow-mindedness. Therefore, Zhenbian Gong is translated as the Duke of Loyalty and Narrow-mindedness.

101 A title of great prestige from high antiquity. Revived for honorific purposes in the Han dynasty, as one of the Three Dukes who were paramount dignitaries in the central government. This usage continued intermittently until 1122.

102 Refer to pp. 10n.

103 This is a mausoleum of Li Shimin located in present day Liquan County of Shanxi Province.
praised Yu as being an honest and loyal minister. This praise was echoed with consent from other high ministers, even some who in the past were reprimanded and scolded by Yu, showing that although Yu had very bad socializing skills within the court, he was still greatly respected by for his moral character, loyalty and integrity.

[Emperor] Taizong once causally spoke to Fang Xuanling saying: “During the days of the Daye [reign period], Xiao Yu remonstrated with the lord of Sui (i.e., Yangdi) and was exiled to be the Commandery Governor of Hechi. He should have encountered the disaster of having his heart cut out. [Now] with a twist [of fate] he witnesses the days of great peace. [It is just like] the old man in the north who lost his horse. It is hard for phenomena [of this world] to stay constant.” Yu lowered this head, bowed and thanked [the emperor]. [Emperor] Taizong went on and said, “Since the sixth year of Wude, the Emperor Emeritus had the intention of setting up [another crown prince] and was indecisive about it. During those days, my existence was not tolerated by my brothers. Indeed I had the fear of not receiving the proper award for my merit. This man [Yu] cannot be lured by lucrative benefits and cannot be scared by punishments or death. He is truly a minister of the state.”

Thus he presented Yu with a poem: “With harsh wind one is able to notice the strong grass. During the time of turmoil, one is able to recognize the sincere minister.” He also spoke to Yu, saying: “As for your integrity in upholding

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104 Roughly located in the southern area of present day Gansu Province, and between Shanxi and Sichuan Provinces. During the Sui dynasty it was one of the Bahan Commanderies.

105 This is a reference to the story of Bi Gan, a loyal minister of the tyrannical King Zhou. When Bi Gan remonstrated against King Zhou’s tyrannical conduct, King Zhou wanted to know if Bi Gan was a real sage before accepting his remonstration. Because it was said that a sage is supposed to have seven holes in his heart, the tyrant king used this as an excuse to cut open Bi Gan’s chest and have his heart taken out. Later this account was often used to describe other loyal and worthy subjects not appreciated by their rulers. See Shiji 3: 107-9.

106 Similar to the proverb saiwengshima in modern Chinese, it is a reference to a story in the Huainanzi. One day, an old man living near the northern garrison lost a horse. It was a great loss to the old man, but on the next day the horse returned and brought another fine stallion with it. The lesson of the story is about the unpredictability of fate and how a loss may sometimes turn out to be a gain.

107 Common designation of an abdicated Emperor during the remaining part of his life, particularly during the reign of his son. In this case, it refers to Li Yuan, since he was forced to abdicate this throne to Li Shimin after the Xuanwu Gate Incident.

108 The term banding can also be written as banding. Originally banding is a reference to times of chaos and upheaval. For this usage see Gao Heng, Shijing lingzhu, 414; for banding see Gaoheng, Shijing lingzhu, 429.
principles, even those in the ancient time could not surpass it. However, you distinguish good and evil too rigidly, [and because of this] you sometimes make mistakes.” Yu bowed again and thanked [the emperor] saying: “As a special grace I have received [your majesty’s] instruction, and [your majesty] also praises me for [my] loyalty and honesty. [I am grateful for this] and even the day of my death would seem like a year of life.”

Wei Zheng approached [the emperor] and said: “When a subject goes against the crowd to enforce the law, a brilliant ruler should forgive him for his loyalty; when a subject holds himself aloof in order to uphold virtue, a brilliant ruler should forgive him for his strength in character. Before I have heard of such words and now I [am able to] witness a real [example of that]. Had Xiao Yu not encountered the wise and sagely, he would certainly run into disaster!” [Emperor Taizong] was please by his words.

The second incident showing Taizong’s high opinion for Xiao Yu was in 644 when he built the Lingyan Pavilion. In honor and to show his utmost gratitude and respect to those ministers who helped his ascension to the thrown and to foster the stability and growing prosperity of the nation, Taizong, built the first museum-like memorial hall to display the pictures of his most valued high ministers, including Xiao Yu.

In the seventeenth year [of Taizong’s reign], the portraits of twenty-four people including [Yu] and Changsun Wuji were placed inside the Lingyan’ge

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109 Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-643) see pp.15n.
110 January 26th, 643-February 13th, 644.
111 Changsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (?-659) was the older brother of Li Shimin’s wife, Empress Wende 文德皇后. He was responsible for planning and carrying out the Xuanwu Gate Incident 玄武門之變 and was
Family Tradition and Religious Devotion

Xiao was born into a family famous for being supporters of Buddhism, grew up with an emperor brother-in-law who lavishly spent money constructing monasteries, giving vegetarian feasts and holding religious rituals, and lastly, himself marrying a women of the Dugu family whose famed as benefactors and lay practitioners could rival that of his own clan. It is not surprising that Xiao Yu was a pious follower who made great contributions to the propagation of Buddhism both within the court and among the monastic community. Surprisingly, such details about his religious career and contribution are lacking in the official biography and must be gathered from other religious and secular sources, such as miracle stories, Buddhist history and biographies of monastic persons who had contact with Yu. The fallibility of these sources and of records of Yu’s religious piety may render scholars skeptical. Nonetheless, they are appointed to very high posts during Li Shimin’s reign. He is considered to be the most influential and powerful chief minister during Taizong’s reign. See Jiu Tang shu 65: 2446-56.

112 The pavilion built by Li Shimin to commemorate highly meritorious subjects, located within today’s Chang’an County in Shanxi Province.

113 This was Li Zhi 李治 (628-683), the ninth son of Li Shimin. He was the later Emperor Gaozong 高宗 who reigned from 650-683. See Jiu Tang shu 4: 65-86.

114 One of the Three Preceptors of the Crown Prince taizi sanshi 太子三師. These posts were considered regular, substantive appointments but normally awarded only as concurrent appointments to officials already having considerable stature at court, solely for the purpose of enhancing their prestige and possibly their income.
mentioned in my academic research as an indication of his popularity among the religious community and of his influence beyond the political arena.

Xiao Yu earned his reputation as the ideal official Buddhist layman by dutifully attending court in the morning, returning to copy scriptures in the afternoon and reciting sutras in the evening. He adhered rigorously to the upāsaka precepts and lived a simple and thrifty lifestyle—abstaining from secular pleasures and detesting flattery and empty talk. As a man with wealth and status, Yu also made great financial contributions to preserving religious architecture and supporting the few monasteries, as well as actively collecting donations for grand religious projects. Like his ancestors, Yu was also a strict practitioner of religious rites, performing daily chanting ceremonies and committing himself to long hours studying Buddhist scriptures or conversing with eminent monks. Undaunted by the imperial house’s favoritism towards the Daoist tradition, Xiao Yu was, on more than one occasion, outspoken and critical of those who openly denounced the Buddhist traditions. On one occasion, he opposed and interfered with the executing of an imperial decree that he deemed detrimental to the samgha community, causing great resentment from the emperor and other court officials. Even on his death bed, Xiao Yu displayed his Buddhist spirit and left a will ordering his family to organize a simple funeral and prevent unnecessarily excessive expenses. His will is as follow:

“When one is born, he will certainly die; this is the constant truth¹¹⁵ in the principle [of life]. After my breath ceases you may dress me with one set of single layered clothes, to be my clothes after death. Place only a single mat in the coffin and only hope that it will rot quickly; you cannot add anything else. Do not wait and select an [auspicious] date, just prepare [my funeral] swiftly. Among the wise and worthy ones from the antiquity, all of them did not [follow] the same

¹¹⁵ changfen 常分 literally means “a constant part.”
example; you should also make an effort [to be like] this.” His sons followed his will and the funeral was simple and modest.\[116\] \[生而必死, 理之常分, 氣絕後可著單服一通, 以充小斂. 棺內施單席而已, 冀其速朽, 不得別加一物. 無假卜日, 惟在速辦. 自古賢哲, 非無等例, 爾宜勉之.”\] 警子遵其遺志, 敛葬儉薄.

One could attribute his last will to Xiao Yu’s lifelong dedication to protecting the well-being of his country and family. From a religious point of view, Yu’s request for a quick and simple funeral could testify to his understanding of the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence and the futility of expensive and cumbersome funeral rituals. Furthermore, his sons were willing to follow his order despite the fact that a plain funeral service for their father could make them appear unfilial or stingy in the eyes of society. Was this because of their devotion to their father, or was it because they themselves could see the logic of their father’s words?

**Early years**

According to Yu’s official biography recorded in the *Jiu Tang shu*, Xiao Yu was “interested in [the teaching] of Sakyamuni and often practiced Buddhist cultivation. Every time he argued with the śramanas about suffering and emptiness, he would always reach the subtle purport”. \[117\] During a serious illness, he seriously contemplated taking refuge in the spiritual world.

Suddenly [Yu] encountered the leprosy disease, \[118\] he ordered his family not to look for medical treatments and persisted in saying: “If heaven would lend me some remaining years [of life], this would support the condition for me to become

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\[116\] The last section of his biography in the *Jiu Tang shu* 63: 2398-2404

\[117\] Translation of Xiao Yu’s biography, see pp. 5.

\[118\] A critical illness that had him paralyzed with physical abnormalities.
a recluse monk.” Empress Xiao heard this and scolded him: “With your talents and wisdom, it is enough to spread your fame and glorify your family. How could you recklessly cause damage to your body and seek for reclusion? If you receive punishment [from heaven] because of this, then your crime is not noticing [heaven’s true intention].” His illness then subsided. His older sister persuaded him to continue on the path toward a career as an official. 忽遇風疾，命家人不即，醫療。仍云：“若天假餘年，因此望爲栖遁之資耳。” 蕭后聞而誥之：“以爾才智，足堪揚名顯親，豈得輕毀形骸而求隱逸？若以此致譏，則罪在不測。” 病且愈。其姊勸勉之，故復有仕進志。

It is not surprising that Yu would have such thoughts when facing a life-threatening incident. Firstly, as the Xiao family had been Buddhist for many generations and especially believed in the powers of merit-making, it would have seemed natural for anyone in Yu’s position to make such vows. Leprosy fengji was a common but incurable disease in ancient China. Those inflicted with this disease had a tendency to turn to a religious or supernatural power, to perform self-mortification, or vow to take up some sort of severe action or merit work in exchange for a miracle to heal their sickness. Yu’s interest in the monastic order was motivated by a need for physical healing, only to be dismissed by his sister’s admonishment. Nevertheless, this inherent spirituality would be ignited once more in the later years of his life, and perhaps, having been unfulfilled by Yu, passed down to his children, especially his daughters. Yu’s devotion was never a clandestine matter and the pro-Daoist emperors were quite aware of this senior minister’s religious preference, and on occasion, religious gifts were bestowed upon Yu.

Because Yu was fond of the way of the Buddha, Taizong once bestowed him an embroidered Buddhist image, and additionally embroidered Yu’s image beside

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119 Famous scholar monk Sengding 謙定 (540-624) was once afflicted with leprosy and through practicing several years of austerities had a successful recovery that had his hair grow thicker than before. He moved to the mountains and never set foot in the city until his recovery. Sengding shut himself in a small room to concentrate on meditation. He only took one bowl of rice a day. See Jinhua Chen’s *Monks and Monarchs, Kinship and Kingship*, pp.191.
the Buddha’s image, in the form of [giving] offerings [to the Buddha]. He also
gave him a set of the *Pañcavimśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* ¹²⁰ copied by
Wang Bao (d.u.), along with a *kaśyāya*, which [he can wear] when he lectures or
chants. 太宗以璜好佛道, 賦寶贋佛像一軀, 並繪璽形狀於佛像側, 以爲供養之容, 又賜王褒所書大品般若經一部, 並賜袈裟, 以充誦詠之服焉.

**Outspoken Advocate**

Xiao Yu multiple interferences with the emperor’s decrees, in addition to the
consistent slander from Daoist adepts positioned closely to the crown diminished what
tolerance the emperor showed to Buddhism in the beginning. According to the *Shishi jigu lüe* 釋氏稽古略 (Investigation of ancient accounts of the monastic community), ¹²¹ in
the seventh year of the Wude reign (624), Faya 法雅 (?-629) ¹²² originally from Hedong
Prefecture, was a licentious monk who favored military techniques over religious
cultivation and served in Gaozu’s court. To reward his effort, the emperor gave him a
wife and memorialized him to stay in the Huadu Monastery 化度寺. At the invasion of
the Turkish tribe at the Tang base in Taiyuan in 622 led by Il/Illig Qaghan( 621-630), ¹²³
Faya memorialized to the throne to select young monks from the Chang’ an capital to form
a new unit of soldiers led by himself. Zhishi 智實 (601-638), surname Shao from Yong
Prefecture 雍州 (in present-day Shaanxi Province), lived in Chang’ an Dazong 大總

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¹²⁰ An early Mahāyāna text that discusses the topic of *prajñā* (wisdom) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness), first translated by Kumārajīva (344-413).

¹²¹ T. 49: 3. 813b3-10.

¹²² See Biography in *Jiu Tang shu* 57: 2888-9; T. 52: 2104. 382c17-383a27.

¹²³ His name is Duobi/Doubi 嘉惠 in Chinese. Titles are Xieli Kehan/Jieli Kehan 順利可汗 / 順利可汗 in Chinese and Il/Illig Qaghan in Turkic.
Monastery, famed for his white eyebrows, upon hearing of Faya’s intention, wrote a letter to try to persuade him to withdraw the proposal. However, Faya did not heed his reprimand and instead, out of anger, urged the crown to hasten this process. Zhishi then personally went to Faya’s resident and gave him a beating and a severe scolding. Faya memorialized Zhishi’s action as rebellious to Gaozu and Zhishi was immediately imprisoned.

Fortunately, when it was almost time to decide Zhishi’s punishment, Xiao Yu and other high officials interfered and urged the emperor to pardon him on the basis of his advanced cultivation, widely known and respected by local citizens. At a time when the newly enthroned emperor was trying to gain respect from his officials and reverence and submission from the citizens, he ordered a sentence firm enough to assert his authority and resolution, but not cruel enough to stimulate resentment or rebellion from the large Buddhist community. Although Zhishi was pardoned from a death penalty, he was disrobed and had to leave monastic grounds for the remainder of his years, in exchange for the freedom of the thousand monks who were allowed to return to their temples and continue their religious practice. Zhishi gladly accepted the sentence even though he had to be disrobed.

A couple of years later, Xiao Yu once again openly defended the Buddhist tradition in court and invoked even more hostility from the crown. The Shishi jigu lüe recorded Xiao Yu’s behavior in the second month of the ninth year of the Wude reign (626). The Grand Astrologer Fu Yi 傅奕 (555-639) instigated the Daoist Li Zhongqing 李

124 T. 49: 2037. 813b3-10.
仲卿 (d.u.) into the court with a memorial called “Shiyijiu milun” 十異九誹論 (An argument of the ten differences and nine confusions), to depreciate Buddhism and slander the Dharma. Xiao Yu openly refuted Fu Yi’s clauses in court. In the fourth month of the same year, the emperor Gaozu gave the monastic community Fu Yi’s argument and Minggan 明概 (d.u.) composed the “Juedui lun” 決對論 which lists eight counterpoints to rebut Fu Yi’s criticism. In addition, the monk Faling 法琳 (?- 495) also composed “The ten analogies and nine warning” 十喻九箴 to refute Li Zhongqing’s essay. There was also an official with the title Supervisor of Palace Rites called Li Shizheng 李師政 (d.u.) who composed three chapters called “Arguments on internal virtues,” 內德論 which explains the magnificent benefits in the propagation of Buddhism. The same incident is also recorded in greater detail in the Fozu lidai tongzai 佛祖歷代通載 (General Records of Buddhism in Successive Dynasties).

In this version, Fu Yi and the Daoist priest, Li Zhongqing sent a memorial seven times to the emperor to persecute Buddhism. The Emperor Gaozu due to old age and devotion to Daoism, agreed to consider this memorial. He then asked among his officials regarding this issue and while most of the high officials were in favor of Buddhism and defended the religion, arguing that the prosperity of Buddhism always directly influenced the stability of a dynasty and helped maintain the good and defend against the evil; therefore, it would be foolish to abandon Buddhism and bring about the fall of the dynasty. However, the Chamberlain for the Imperial Stud Zhang Daoyuan 張道源 (d.u.) agreed with Fuyi’s condemnation. Xiao Yu, who was currently the Chief Minister, refuted their argument and reprimanded the two men saying:

125 See 7. 49: 2036. 564b5-16.
126 See Biography in Xin Tang shu 191: 5503.
“Buddha is a saintly being. Fu Yi’s views and action is ‘blaming’ the saintly method. Therefore, there is no moral standard in this. Please use a harsh punishment to punish him.” In response, Fu Yi argued that while Confucian place filial piety to one’s parents and loyalty to one’s lord as the foundation and ends to all actions, Buddhists advocate leaving one’s family and were in opposition to the traditional Chinese values. He argues: “On the one hand, from the perspective of an individual, this is an expression of directly resisting the monarchy, on the other, from the position of a Chinese descendent, the ways of the Buddha can be considered as being disrespectful to one’s elders and promoting unfilial acts. Xiao Yu, although he has not left the household life, respects this Buddhist religion that does not take into consideration one’s ancestors. I argue that those who criticize the way of filial piety do not have any relatives or family, Xiao Yu is such person.” After hearing this speech, Xiao Yu simply sighed and said: “Hell is a place to punish those still plundering in samsara; this place was established to punish such people as Fu Yi.”

In another incident, Taizong wrote an edict criticizing the practicality and efficacy of the Buddhist religion. Praising the Confucian way of ruling and Daoist way of dealing with daily affairs, he questions the logic of the Buddhist law of karma.

When it comes to the Buddhist teaching, it is not what my mind follows. Although there are [instances in which it was made into] the fixed laws of the state,127 [the Buddhist teaching] is certainly still the empty practice of the corrupt and vulgar ones. How is it so? Those who seek its ways have not verified the fortune in the future128 and on the contrary those who cultivated themselves

127 Probably refers to the former Liang Dynasties, whose rulers greatly promoted Buddhism. It is worth noting that when the Tang Dynasty was first established, the imperial family was more closely associated with Daoism than with Buddhism. The Li family even claimed themselves to be descendent of Laozi, whose family name was also Li (Li Er 太耳).

128 jianglai 將來 literally means “in the time to come.”
according to its teachings had already to suffer from the guilt of their past deeds.\footnote{jiwang 既往 refers to what has already gone away.}

As for [Emperor] Wu of Liang\footnote{Refer to pp. 2n.}, who exhausted his mind to the [teaching] of Śākyamuni, and [Emperor] Jiangwen [of Liang],\footnote{This is Xiao Gang 謝景 (503-551), the third son of Xiao Yan. He reigned from 550-551. See Liang shu 4: 103-9.} who determined his will at the gate of dharma, they poured out money and treasures and gave them to the samgha; they drained out people’s labor and offered them to the pagodas and temples. When the three Huai Rivers had their waves boiling and the Five Mountain Ranges had smoke rising up, they borrowed the remaining breath from the palms of bears\footnote{This is probably referring to Hou Jing 侯景 (?-552), a former general of Eastern Wei who surrendered to the Liang, formed a plot with general Xiao Zhengde 蕭正德(?-549), who was guarding the capital, to raise an army and rebel against Emperor Liang Wudi. During this period, the Liang court was corrupted and loose in their governance, which allowed Hou Jing’s army to easily attack and surround the capital city Taicheng 台城. Later on, Emperor Liang Wudi was captured and Hou Jing and his group set up Xiao Gang as a puppet emperor. Later Hou Jing was defeated and killed by the army of Emperor Yuandi of Liang in 552. Biography in Liang shu 56: 833-64.} and summoned the left-over souls of the young sparrows.\footnote{This means the dynasty was in a terrible state of near-collapse (as weak as the shell of a sparrow’s egg) and had to rely on the strength of trivial creatures to survive.} Their descendents were overthrown and fled and they had not a moment of leisure and very soon afterward, their state became ruins. As for the signs of the [karmic] rewards, are they not ridiculous?\footnote{It refers to the fact that although the Xiao family greatly promoted Buddhism and had supposedly accumulated a lot of good karma, they were still overthrown in the end, proving that the theory of karmic causation is false.}

However, Yu, the Grand Guardian of the Crown Prince and the State Duke of Song, treads the remaining track of an overturned carriage and inherits the bequeathed customs of the fallen state. He abandons his official [duties] and engages in private [affairs], and does not clarify the boundary between reclusion and officialdom; his body [practices] the vulgar arts and his mouth [speaks of] the righteous ways, and he does not have the mind of distinguishing evil from good. He accumulates the disastrous source for many generations, and aspires for meritorious thoughts for his own body. Above he disobeys his ruler; below he encourages showy extravagance.
Before I once spoke to Zhang Liang\textsuperscript{135} saying: “Since you serve [the dharma] of the Buddha, why don’t you renounce the world [and become a monk]? Yu then responded on his own in an upright manner and requested to be first to enter the way [of the monastic life]. I immediately approved of this but in a short while he changed his mind. Each turning of his mind and each rising of his doubt, take place within a split second of his breath; he says yes by himself and he says no by himself and [his mind] changes in between the curtains and screens.\textsuperscript{136} He goes against the overall integrity of the pillars [of the state];\textsuperscript{137} how can this be the capacity of a prominent official?\textsuperscript{138} I have tolerated him until now, but [Yu] has not felt remorseful nor changed his ways at all. It is appropriate for him to leave this court and palace immediately and go to govern a small prefecture.\textsuperscript{139} He can be the Prefect of Shang Prefecture.”\textsuperscript{140} Thus [the emperor] took away his [Yu’s] enfeoffment.

至於佛教, 非意所遵。雖有國之常經, 固弊俗之虛術。何則? 求其達者, 未驗福於將來; 修其教者, 翻受辱於既往。至若梁武窮心於釋氏, 詔文銘意於法門, 傾帑藏以給僧祇, 聖人力以供塔廟。及乎三淮沸浪, 五嶺騰煙, 假餘息於熊蹯, 引殘魂於雀戲。子孫覆亡而不暇, 社稷俄傾而為墟, 報施之微, 何其繆也! 而太子太保, 宋國公瑀踐履車之餘軌, 襲亡國之遺風。棄公就私, 未明隠顯之際; 身俗口道, 莫辨邪正之心。修累葉之殃源, 祀一躬之福本, 上以違忤君主, 下則扇習浮華。往往朕謂張亮云: “卿既事佛, 何不出家?” 瑀乃端然自應, 請先入道, 袂即許之。尋復不用。一週一惑, 在於瞬息之間; 自可自否, 變於帷扆之所。乖積梁之大體, 豈具瞻之量乎? 假猶隱忍至今, 瑀尚全無悛改。宜即去兹相闕, 出牧小藩, 可再州刺史。仍除其封。

\textsuperscript{135} Zhang Liang 張亮 (?-646), a prominent official during the early half of Li Shimin’s reign, participated in the campaign against Goguryeo. Nevertheless, he was later framed and killed in 646. See 	extit{Jiu Tang shu} 69: 2514-6.

\textsuperscript{136} Curtains and screen are both common objects in a room and are close to each other. Like the previous sentence, this metaphor means that Xiao Yu changed his mind within a very short period of time.

\textsuperscript{137} dongliang 捲梁 refers to the beams and rafters. It is used as a metaphor referring to high ranking officials vital to the state.

\textsuperscript{138} Da zhi liang 嘉之里 literally means “he who is looked up to by everyone.”

\textsuperscript{139} Fan 廉 originally refers to a feudal state, but since the Tang did not practice feudalism, it primarily refers to a prefecture in this case.

\textsuperscript{140} Located in the northwest of Shannan East Circuit (山南東道), roughly in the southeast region of today’s Shaanxi Province.
However, when Yu angrily threatened the young emperor by proposing to become a monk, Taizong’s reaction was twofold. On the one hand, he was glad that Yu would finally be leaving the political scene. On the other hand, he felt uncomfortable with the idea that one of his highest and most respected ministers would take on the robes of a religion he detested. Furthermore, when Xiao Yu abandoned his original intentions after Taizong had already publicly announced Yu’s official leave, the emperor was baffled and offended because of having to go back on his own word. Many awkward experiences with Xiao Yu and his devotion to Buddhism certainly intensified Taizong’s negative impression of Buddhism.

When Yu wanted to renounce the world [and become a monk], [Emperor] Taizong said: “I know quite well that you, Sir, have always been fond of the śramaṇa, this time I cannot go against your wish.” Within a short while Yu memorialized saying: “I have exhausted my thoughts and pondering [and decided that] I cannot abandon the household life.” [Emperor] Taizong could not stop feeling upset [about this] because he had already announced this to all his subjects and [after Yu changed his mind] his act [will seem] to have contradicted each other. 會稽請出家，太宗謂曰：“甚知公素愛桑門，今者不能違意。”璠遂鍾奏曰：“臣煩思量，不能出家。” 太宗以對對臣言，而取捨相違，心不能平。

**Sincere Practitioner**

In the *Jingangjing lingyan zhuan* (Efficacious Stories on the Vajracchedikā Sutra), and the *Jingangjing chiyan ji* (Records of

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141 *Sangmen* 桑門 is an alternative translation for śramaṇa, which is more commonly transliterated as *shamen* 沙門.

142 *XZJ.* 87: 1634. 504c10.
Experience of those who hold on to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra),\textsuperscript{143} and the *Jingangjing shouchi ganying lu* 金剛經受持感應録 (Collection of [Mystical] Responses from those who receive and hold on to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra),\textsuperscript{144} there are records of the same mystical stories of Xiao Yu’s escape from a death sentence through the power of chanting an efficacious sutra. Xiao Yu, along with He Ruobi 賀若弼 (544-607)\textsuperscript{145} and Gao Jiong 高颎 (?-607),\textsuperscript{146} were all successful and talented generals of the Sui dynasty. They had helped in conquering the Chen dynasty in 607 and were vocal in their criticism of Emperor Yang of Sui’s ambition to conquer the Gaoli Peninsula (Korea). Charges were laid against these men because of their forwardness and courage to reprimand the emperor even at the cost of their lives. While in prison, Yu, believed in the supernatural powers of Buddha, and chanted seven hundred bian (repetitions) of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra (also known as the Diamond Sutra), for eight days. Miraculously, on the ninth day Xiao Yu’s shackles came-off, forcing the shocked guards to “lose their countenance” shouzhe shise 守者失色. All three men were then brought to the court and only Yu was pardoned, while the other two were sentenced and eventually executed. As a result of this extraordinary experience, Yu composed eighteen clauses on the efficacious experience of the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. He then constructed a three chi tall (about 1.5 meters) stūpa of sandalwood to store this sūtra (and probably his commentaries, which have all been lost). A stone statue suddenly appeared in the middle to his courtyard, containing a hundred pieces of the Buddha’s relics Sheli (it does not say

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{XZJ. 87: 1635. 529a01.}
\footnote{XZJ. 87: 1631. 473b05.}
\footnote{See Sui shu 52: 1343-7.}
\footnote{See Sui shu 41: 1179-88.}
\end{footnotes}
where he found them), which he respectfully placed into a stūpa for worship. And in the eleventh year of the Zhenguan reign era (638).\textsuperscript{147} Yu saw Samantabhadra Bodhisattva\textsuperscript{148} and gradually faced the Western paradise and left this world.

The compiler of the \textit{Liangchu qingzhong yi} (Essential Rites on Various Areas)\textsuperscript{149} praises Xiao Yu as a descendent of the famous Buddhist Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, who followed his ancestors' custom and emulated their piouness by balancing his involvement in political affairs with their religious activities. Xiao Yu is said to have dedicated most of his time to Buddhist practices, such that after finishing his official duties, he would immediately return to the "jingyuan" often meaning monastery but perhaps the family chapel, wore the "san fayi" (three Dharma robes), and "lifo dusong" performed prostrations in front of a Buddha image and recited sutras. After his death, these religious robes were donated to the Jinliang monastery, which he helped build sometime after 621. In the year of the Zhenguan reign period, Xiao Yu took the \textit{yuduoluoseng} (which is worth thirty-thousand [gold coins?] and donated it to the monk Sengzhen of the Shengguang Monastery.\textsuperscript{150} There are two main points of interest regarding the

\textsuperscript{147} This must have been an incorrect calculation because according to official history Xiao Yu died in the twenty-first year of the Zhenguan reign period, which would be in 648 CE.

\textsuperscript{148} Known in Chinese as Puxian pusa.

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{T. 45}: 1895. 851c08.

\textsuperscript{150} Biography and information on Sengzhen and Shengguang Monastery can be found in volume 52 of the Taisho Tripitaka.

\textsuperscript{151} Believed to be established sometime during Kaihuang 10 (509) by Sui Wendi (b. 541; r. 581-604) in the name of his fourth son, Yang Xiu (?-618) who later became the patron of this monastery. Famous monk
description of Xiao Yu’s religious attire and its value. The “san fayi,” which generally refers to the monastic robes of three kinds, is used for different occasions: 1. the "antuohui" 安陀會 (wu tiaoyi 五條衣, Skt: antavāsa), an inner garment also known as the five-piece cassock usually worn to perform menial tasks in the monastery and is worn most often; 2. the "yuduoluoseng" 餓多羅僧 (qiu ti 七條衣, Skt: uttarāsaṅga), also known as the outer seven-piece cassock most worn to perform ceremonies, meditation etc; 3. the last "sengjiali" 伽梨 (jiutiaoyi 九條衣 - ershiwutiaoyi 二十五條衣, Skt: samghāṭi), known as the assembly cassock from nine to twenty-five pieces is worn to enter the palace, give Dharma talks and ask for alms. According to the monastic regulation, wearing the five to twenty-five piece cassocks is only permissible by those who have received the biqiu precepts. It prohibits others to even momentarily try them on. A novice monk or nun called "shami/shamini" 沙彌/沙彌尼 is permitted to wear the no-cuts cassock called the "manyi" 錦衣 of usually brown color and made of long and short strips wove together. In Chinese Buddhism those who have received more than the five basic precepts are also allowed to wear the "manyi." Therefore, while it is not unusual for a Buddhist layman to wear a cassock, it is, however, atypical for him to possess three fayi of the ordained biqiu, even if he is a high profile official and pious lay practitioner such as Xiao Yu. Probably not the first layman who possessed the san fayi but the only one to be recorded, Xiao Yu must have gained trust and reputation among not only the laymen, but from the monastic community, in order that these legends circulated widely and were recorded in a text instructing on monastic etiquettes and customs. The second concern is

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such as Tanqian (542-607) and Daoying (560/550-636) once resided in this monastery. See Chen Jinhua, Monks and Monarchs, Kinship and Kingship, 18.

152 For a detailed study of the san fayi see Kyūma, Kesa no kenkyū, 1967.
the problem in determining what this sanwan actually implies in the Tang dynasty’s currency. Gold, silver and copper coins, in addition to horses and cotton and silks were different kinds of currency used in the market and among traders; therefore, without specifying which of these the sanwan is referring to, we are unable to assess the value of the robe. We can only presume that it is worth a large amount of money to be worth mentioning in the records.

The *Hongzan fahua zhuan* (Stories in Great Praises of the Lotus Sutra),\(^{153}\) records miraculous events involving the Xiao family, especially Xiao Yu and his son Xiao Rui 蕭銳 (d.u.), both of whom were recognized as fervent Lotus Sutra practitioners. It states that although Xiao Yu was of high status, he consistently followed the *upāsaka* precepts.\(^{154}\) Everyday he would recite the complete twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus sutra while wearing the monk’s robes. His upholding of the precepts included *jizhai* 持齋, which followed the later comment of *tong seng lishi* 同僧列食, suggesting that he was very much like a monk in regards to his food consumption; he maintained a vegetarian diet and refrained from the act of killing. According to the records, he and his son both wrote a thousand copies of the Lotus Sutra and constructed a Buddhist *dian* 殿 (ceremony hall).\(^{155}\) Xiao Yu also wrote a commentary on the *Lotus Sutra* of ten *juan*, however, there is no official records of this work in the Buddhist canon, nor can we

\(^{153}\) T. 51: 2067. 45c25-46a19.

\(^{154}\) Precept for the layman and laywoman include abstaining from killing and violent; stealing; adultery; telling lies and consumption of alcohol.

\(^{155}\) It is more precise to say that he constructed monasteries and grand Buddha statues.
locate its presence in any of the Sui or Tang dynasties Buddhist annals. Another interesting story from this text finds the Xiao family having been granted the Buddha’s relics, which they then placed in the family chapel to worship. Soon after, the Xiao family gave a few of these relics to another lay practitioner to worship, however, unexpectedly, the relics disappeared the next day and were all returned to the Xiao’s family chapel.

These narratives, while partly fictitious, nevertheless give us insight into a world in which Yu may or may not have taken part. They reveal interesting information on the rituals and imagination of the majority of Buddhists’ beliefs and popular practices. It is evident in these stories that the notions of merit making and the assistance by the supernatural powers are greatly emphasized. In the Tang dynasty Buddhism was already sinicized with Chinese cultures and the belief and that “sincere faith,” rather than doctrinal studies or Chan practices, was widespread among the majority of Buddhist practitioners. The association of wondrous events with a popular figure such as Xiao Yu becomes an effective way to propagate this tradition of “piety.” In addition, although they are categorized as merely “miracle stories,” we do find some historical relevance, albeit exaggerated to appeal to the minds of the masses.

156 We can only presume that it was not very well received by the public and therefore circulated solely within the Xiao family.

157 This is also mentioned in the Jingangjing lingyan zhuan 金剛經靈驗記. See XZJ. 87: 1634. 504c10.

158 Both He Ruobi and Gao Jiong’s biographies mentions this incident leading to their deaths in 607. For He Ruobi see Sui shu 52: 1343-7. For Gao Jiong see Sui shu 41: 1179-88.
Great Philanthropist

In addition to being a sincere practitioner, Xiao Yu was a generous benefactor in the funding of Buddhist projects and the construction of monasteries. In Xu gaoseng zhuan, there is a passage in the monk Sengshun’s biography which describes the renovation of the Jinliang monastery sponsored by Yu under Shun’s guidance (and where he stayed until his last days at the ripe age of eighty). Passing the Ba River at the southern foot of the Li Mountain, Yu found a badly maintained and neglected temple. He decided to initiate a campaign to renovate the building. Xiao Yu memorialized to Emperor Wu about his intention, who wholeheartedly supported this project by donating money and dispatching manpower to renovate the building. However, the greatest philanthropist was Xiao Yu, who contributed the most funding for the temples throughout the construction period and later on for its daily expenses. This information correlates with the records in Fojiao da nianbiao, which states that in 621 at the Yong Prefecture, the Jinliang monastery was established. Therefore, this event must have happened when Xiao Yu was appointed Puye (Director of the Department of State Affairs), after helping to bring about the fall of Wang Shichong 王世充 (?-621).

\[159\] XGSZ, T. 50: 2060. 670b27-c19.

\[160\] This might have been a mistake because during the Tang dynasty there was no emperor who took the title of Wudi. Therefore, I believe it is Gaozu whose first reign title was Wude (618-616 CE).

\[161\] This is an additional volume included with the 1954 publication of Mochizuki, Bukkyō daijiten 佛教大辞典 [Encyclopedia of Buddhism], see pp. 145.
As a result of his great contribution, Yu would have had much control over the administration of this monastery and the ability to invite different monks to reside, such as Wŏn'gwang (Ch. Yuanguang) 圖光, a person from Silla 新羅 who was known to have always exerted great effort in his cultivation. Yuanguang was invited to enter the monastery, and Yu sincerely provided all his needs, or the ‘four necessities’: clothing, food, bedding and medicine.\(^{162}\) He also invited Faxi 法喜 to stay in this monastery. It is recorded in Faxi’s biography that in times of famine, in order to attend to the needs of those who come to study with him (ordained), as well as visitors from afar, Faxi had to decrease his own expenses. He ate less and wore little in order to save up for such purposes.\(^{163}\)

Another major project in which Xiao Yu was involved was the project of engraving stone sutras. Shenseng zhuàn 神僧傳 (Stories on Supernatural Monks)\(^{164}\) cites Xiao Yu as one of the supporters of monk Zhiyuan’s (?)-639) grand enterprise to engrave the whole Buddhist canon on stone tablets. He began with plans to cut out a cave on the side of Xishan (West Mountain), in You Prefecture 遼州, which at the present is located in the northern part of Hebei and Beijing, and turn it into four storage rooms. After the rooms were completed, he polished the four walls and began to carve sutras on them. In addition, he collected large slabs of rocks and after polishing, began the task of inscribing Buddhist scriptures on each piece. After completion, he cautiously placed them in each room until all were full and carefully sealed the doors to prohibit intruders. During this

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\(^{162}\) *HDGSZ*, T. 50: 2065. 1021b24-29.

\(^{163}\) See *Zengyī ahan jīng*, 增一阿含經, (Skt: *Ekottara-āgama-sūtra*), T. 2: 125. 610a12.

\(^{164}\) T. 50: 2064. 984a3-19.
time, Emperor Yang of Sui was on an expedition to Zhuojun in You Prefecture, along with Xiao Yu, who heard of Zhiyuan’s worry that in the mofo (ending-dharma) period, Buddhist scriptures may be destroyed by evil doers. Yu later told of Zhiyuan’s project to his sister, the Empress Xiao of Yangdi, and she donated a thousand bundles of silk as currency in support of Zhiyuan’s enterprise. Yu followed his sister’s lead and also donated five hundred silk bundles to Zhiyuan. When they heard of this project, government officials and citizens alike were eager to donate. With such generous help and financial support from the public, Zhiyuan’s project could be completed.165

According to the *Hongzan fahua zhuàn* (Stories in Great Praises of the Lotus Sutra),166 Xiao Yu made great efforts towards the end of his life to contribute to the Jinliang Monastery’s and donated his most valuable religious instruments and utensils to the *(changzhu 常住)* temple. It states that Yu had composed a commentary of ten chapters on the Lotus Sutra167 and at his death bed in the Yuhua palace bequeathed all his dharma robes and religious instruments to the Jinliang monastery. Additionally, all of his belongings, including the bark robes bestowed by Emperor Gaozu, the iron *ruyi* ornament (usually an S-shape embellishment symbolizing good-luck), the incense burner,

165 This grand project was also recorded in an inscription craved on the back of a pagoda close to Yunjusi 寧居寺, located in present-day Shuitou 水頭 Village, Shangle 尚樂 Town of Fangshan 房山 County. For translation of the inscription, see Chen Jinhua, “A Daoist princess and a Buddhist temple: a new theory on the causes of the canon-delivering mission originally proposed by princess Jinxian (689-732) in 730,” 267. For a comprehensive survey of the history of the Fangshan stone canon, see Tsukamoto Zemyu 塚本善隆, ‘Bozan Unkyoji no sekkyo daizokyo’ 房山雲居寺の石刻大藏經, *Tsukamoto Zemyu chosaku shū* 塚本善隆著作集 (7 vols. Tokyo: Daito Shuppansha, 1974-76) and Zhongguo fojiao xiehui 中國佛教協會 (comp.), *Fangshian Yunjusi shijing* 房山雲居寺石經 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1978).


167 There may be some truth to this event, as it was also mentioned in *juan* 10 of the *Hongzan fahua zhuàn* (Stories in Great Praises of the Lotus Sutra).
official hat, agate pearl and many other prized possessions were to be donated to the Jinliang monastery. The precise date of Xiao Yu’s death was reported as taking place in the sixth month of the twenty-second year of the Zhenguang reign period, which narrows the specific date to between July 26th and August 25th in 648 CE—a couple of months before his death, according to his official biography, Yu’s former titles were restored upon him and he was given the honor of living in the Yuhua palace.

Relations with Famous monks

Neither his official biography nor these miracle stories mentions under which master did Xiao Yu received the upāsaka precept. In the Biographies of Eminent Monk, however, we find that he befriended many famous monks.

The first monk whose biography mentions Yu is Xuanwan 玄琬 (562-636) of Juyong Prefecture (today’s Shanxi Province). He is described as steadfast in upholding high moral principles and made great efforts in self-cultivation, therefore, the words he spoke became the model “for the world to follow”. As such, the monastic community, consisting of biqiu and biquni, who followed him to take refuge in the Dharma totaled over two-hundred thousand people. His fame and virtue was so influential that prominent people, including Xiao Yu and his brothers, “whose everyday actions abide by humanistic standards and are good example in the society and for a long

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168 Or if he did at all, however from the above passage describing his possession and daily wearing of the ‘three kinds of dharma robes’ suggest that he at the least undertook the basic five precept of a layman.

time have detested secular problems and worries," even visited Master Xuanwan and requested instructions on the essence of the Lotus Sutra. In addition, Xiao Yu, his brother, the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues Xiao Jing, the Chamberlain for the Imperial Clan, Du Zhenlun 杜正倫 (d.u.)\(^{170}\) and many more officials all complied with the precepts administered to them by Xuanwan in his parting words before he died. These ministers also took part in the preparations of his funeral rites.

The second monk Faxing’s 法行 (d.u.)\(^{171}\) relationship with Xiao Yu is unique. Faxing’s background and dates are unknown, although we know he lived during the Later Liang period. He did not reside in any monastery and is said to have been an outstanding monk whose words were mysterious and actions atypical. People would see him wandering freely either in the mountains or in the markets. Later on, because of Faxing’s prophecy that the Liang dynasty would soon be overthrown, Xuandi, the first emperor of Later Liang, became angry and ordered his execution. Sometime after he died, his body disappeared. Later, Xiao Yu, grandson of emperor Xuan, went to Diecai shan 簏彩山 (Gazing in the Four direction Mountain)\(^{172}\) to chant 戒 and 禮悔 lihui (repent) on behalf of Xuandi.\(^{173}\) *Lichan 禮忏, a term that refers to lijö 禮佛 (prostration in front of a Buddha statue), and chanhui 儉悔, a repentance tradition that was instructed by the Buddha himself consisted of various methods to repent one’s negative karmic force. It must be

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\(^{170}\) His biography indicates that he died in Hengzhou 橫州 after being demoted to Regional Inspector of the area in Xianqing 3 (639). See *Jiu Tang shu* 70: 2541-3.


\(^{172}\) Diecai shan 簏彩山 is located in Guilin city 桂林市 in Guangxi Autonomous Region 廣西, famous for its peaks, rivers and scenery.

\(^{173}\) The precise date of this event is not recorded.
noted that the Indian tradition’s method of repentance and the Chinese version have many similarities, but also many variations, mainly involving the recitation of a repentance text, usually written by eminent monks and prostrations before a Buddha or bodhisattva image. This ritual usually demands great mental concentration and a sincere vow to become effectual. That is, contemplating one’s previous wrongdoings, as well as their cause and effect upon ourselves and others around us, and making a sincere vow to refrain from repeating previous mistakes and becoming involved in destructive acts. Interestingly, in the Indian tradition, the person who commits the crime must sincerely perform the repentance ceremony himself in order to be able to reduce his karmic punishment and obtain inner harmony. Repentance on behalf of the offender was not popular and believed to produce less effective results. While in the Chinese tradition, finding a monk or nun or highly cultivated lay person as a substitute to repent a person’s crime was immensely popular among the wealthy lay Buddhists who would occasionally invite, with generous commissions, a practitioner to perform religious services on their behalf.

The last of two monks who Xiao Yu seems to have admired but made little contact with was Xuanzang 难奘 (600-664), the famous Tripitaka Master, who traveled to India to study for eighteen years. Xiao Yu had great respect and admiration for the monk, however, no details as to whether the men ever had close contact is available. When Xuanzang died, the emperor commissioned Xiao Yu and another prominent official Yu Zhining 于志寧 (588-665), to inscribe a tablet for him. The

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174 Tripitaka was a title bestowed upon Xuanzhuang by his contemporaries for his thorough knowledge of the Buddhist threefold canon.

175 Biography in *Jiu Tang shu* 78: 2693-2700.
other monk for whom Yu had great respect was Huibi 慧壁 (570/580-650). It is recorded that Xiao Yu and a person called Shen Shu’an 沈叔安 (d.u.) admired Huibi for 24 years; as to what this ‘admiration’ involves we are unclear.

Concluding Remarks

Indeed, much of the knowledge of Xiao Yu’s religious career is based on fables in various religious texts with ambiguous authorship, which as such, constitutes questionable scholarship. Before closing this discussion of Yu, however, it is important to note that there are in fact several passages within the texts that correspond with actual events recorded in official documents.

Nianchang 念常 (1282-1344+), the author of the *Fozu lidai tongji* (General Records of Buddhist History) praises the Xiao family’s contribution to the prosperity of the Tang dynasty and participation in governmental posts, which is corroborated by information recorded in the official record. Liang Wudi’s Xiao family clan was prosperous in Jiangzuo 江左, (which refers to the lower lands east of the Yangze

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177 According to his biography, Huibi died in the last year of Zhenguan 貞觀 (650) when was over 70 years old, thus we can assume that he was born between 570-580. See *XGSZ*, T. 50: 2060, 522b12-17.

178 Shen Shu’an does not have an official biography, however he is mentioned in the *Jiu Tang shu* as the Minister of the Bureau of Punishment 刑部 尚書 under Tang Gaozu’s reign (618-626).
River located in the northern region of Jiangsu Province). Xiao’s family also made great contributions to the livelihood of the citizens. However, in the end the Liang dynasty was overthrown and the whole clan seemed to have disintegrated after the downfall. Later generations of the Xiao clan fared much better. Beginning from [Xiao] Yu and throughout the Tang dynasty, there were eight Chief Ministers from this Southern Xiao family branch. The *Xin Tang shu* records that there were ten Chief ministers from the Xiao Clan: Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (574-648), Xiao Zhizhong 蕭至忠 (d.u.)\(^{180}\), Xiao Song 蕭嵩 (ca. 669-749),\(^{181}\) Xiao Hua 蕭坯 (d.u.),\(^{182}\) Xiao Fu 蕭復 (ca. 726-783),\(^{183}\) Xiao Mian 蕭僕 (?-837),\(^{184}\) Xiao Ye 蕭鯽 (d.u.),\(^{185}\) Xiao Zhi 蕭箒 (?-865),\(^{186}\) Xiao Fang 蕭侃 (?-875),\(^{187}\) Xiao Gou 蕭遘 (?-878),\(^{188}\) during the Tang dynasty. The discrepancy have been

\(^{180}\) His dates are unknown; however, he is recorded to have served under Tang Zhongzong reign (683-684). See biography in *Jiu Tang shu* 92: 2968-71.
\(^{181}\) His dates are unclear, however according to his biography in Tianbao 8 (749-750), Song was already over eighty years old, therefore, we can assume that he lived between circa 669-749. See *Jiu Tang shu* 99: 3093-5.
\(^{182}\) His dates are unknown. The son of Xiao Song, he is recorded to have served under Tang Suzong (756-762). See *Jiu Tang shu* 99: 3095-6.
\(^{183}\) See *Jiu Tang shu* 125: 3550-2.
\(^{184}\) He served under Tang Muzong (820-824) and died in Kaicheng 2 (837-838). See *Jiu Tang shu* 172: 4476-79.
\(^{185}\) His dates are unknown, however he is recorded to have served under Tang Wenzong (826-840), Xuanzong 846-859) and died sometime during Yizong’s reign (859-873). See *Xin Tang shu* 182: 5365.
\(^{186}\) See *Xin Tang shu* 9: 258-9.
\(^{187}\) He served under Tang Yizong and Xizong and died in the fifth month of Qianfu 2 (875). See *Xin Tang shu* 9: 264-5.
\(^{188}\) According to his biography, Gou served under Xizong (873-888) for five years then was later harmed by Grand Councilor 孔緯 (?-894) in 878. See *Jiu Tang shu* 179: 4645-8.
due to the compilers of the *Fozu lidade tongji* knowing only of these first eight Xiao ministers while the later two lived at a later period.

*Shishi jigu lue* 释氏稽古略 (Summary of ancient study on Buddhism)\footnote{\textit{Shishi jigu lue} was composed by Shi Jue’an 隰岸 (1286–?) in the Yuan dynasty (1264), and finished by Ming dynasty (1627) by various anonymous monks. Consisting of three volumes styled in the manner of the Song dynasty’s *Shishi tongjian* and records of Buddhist history, it contains monastic stories, religious policy, relationship between Buddhism and Daoism.} mentions the fact that Xiao Yu was among the twenty-four ministers, the second emperor of the Tang dynasty, Li Shimin, later known as Taizong (ca. 600-649, r. 626-649), assembled to assist in his government bureaucracy. In recognition of their service, he ordered the famous artist Yan Liben 謝立本 (600-674) to have portraits of these men painted on the walls of the Lingyan Pavilion in his palace. Again, this passage echoes similar information recorded in Xiao Yu’s biography, which serves to emphasize that narratives recorded in Buddhist sources are not entirely based on popular legends or folk gossip, but have some realistic components. While one cannot prove the authenticity of the stories of Xiao Yu’s fantastic religious experience, we can only conjecture that Xiao Yu was a man worthy in the eyes of enough people that so many words would be dedicated to the story of his life, even the countless fabricated tales of his magical encounters. Whether for didactic purposes or entertainment, the fact that these records have been produced and circulated is testament to Yu’s legendary status.

In conclusion, Xiao Yu was a very influential statesman serving two dynasties and three emperors consecutively for almost fifty years. He was respected for being a capable official, loyal subject and straightforward man, although at times his
forthright character would bring out opposition from other officials and intolerance from
the emperor. Many times he was demoted and had his land confiscated. However, Xiao
Yu was never completely detached from the government because of his reputation and
influence in both the political and monastic circles. As he grew older, Xiao Yu’s religious
fervor, which he unreservedly displayed to the pious Daoist emperor, took primacy over
court affairs. Reciting sutras, compiling commentaries as well as sponsoring grand
Buddhist projects became the main focus in his leisure time. This attraction to Buddhism
originated in his childhood upbringing influenced by his sister Empress Xiao and brother-
in-law, Emperor Sui Yangdi who were both devoted Buddhist supporters. Their
philanthropic practice more or less also inspired Xiao Yu’s participation and contribution
to Fangshan’s stone canon project and the establishment of the Jinliangsi to which he
later invited famous monks to take up residence.

Contrary to our expectation, neither Xiao Yu’s official biography nor the miracle
stories mention his association and influence over his three daughters’ decision to
become Buddhist nuns. This is surprising, considering that his son Xiao Rui 蕭銳, a
fervent practitioner and propagator of the Lotus Sutra, did not take the tonsure, was
mentioned in the Hongzan fahua zhuan 弘贊法華傳 (Stories in Great Praises of the Lotus
Sutra). Another point of great interest is the fact that while Xiao Yu sponsored the
establishment of the Jinliangsi and had some authority over its administration, he did not
invite any of the three male relatives (a distant uncle and two nephews) to reside in the
monastery; and none of the five ordained male members of the Xiao family seem to have
even visited this site. These two points of interest and many other inquiries regarding the
relationship between Xiao Yu, his daughters, nephew, niece and far relatives that have
left the household life to enter the monastery will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.
Chapter 2

Eminent Nuns of the Xiao Family

Ancient official records have recorded the genealogy of the Xiao clan, including prominent male descendants who were either noteworthy scholars or government officials; however, they generally do not mention female descendants. This lack of records makes it difficult to correctly understand the circumstances which led to some or all of Xiao Yu’s daughters entering the nunnery. The official records do not specify how many female off-spring lived during Yu’s generation; however, from information compiled by the authors of the monastic hagiographies we are able to confirm that at least three daughters and one granddaughter left their homes to become Buddhist nuns.

Although the female samgha was quite strongly acknowledged during the Tang dynasty and ordination among elite girls and women was not uncommon, the case of the Xiao family would still be considered a rarity in regards to the number of participants. Examining the different circumstances leading to their ordination, as well as the social roles and religious careers performed throughout their lives, demonstrates that their decisions and later accomplishments were in part due to their own efforts and cultivation, as well as their family’s status and elite background, which they were supposedly detached from. My findings will substantiate Professor Cai Hongsheng’s conclusion in his Nigu tan that “the monastic people are not able to forget those of the secular, while

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190 According to the Xin Tang shu in Kaiyuan 14 (736), there were already 50,576 nuns throughout the whole country. See Xin Tang shu 48: 1252.
the present people are not able to forget those of the past."[191] Family members, especially their father Xiao Yu, greatly influenced their religious paths and played an important factor in the reason why their biographies are preserved in the Quan tang wen.

This chapter will analyze the lives and careers of Xiao Yu’s three daughters and one granddaughter, and try to provide answers to the following inquiries: why did they choose to become Buddhist nuns? Or did they even have a choice? What was the family response? How does that reflect society’s view of female ordination? Were they in contact with their family and relatives after ordination? Did they keep in contact with one another? What sort of religious work did they perform and what sort of religious practice did they pursue as Buddhist nuns? Were they in any way suppressed or their religious careers limited because of gender discrimination, or did the fact that they were from a prominent and wealthy lineage help enhance their religious status and add to their career potential?

**Fale 法樂 (599-672): the Eldest Daughter**

Shi Fale, Xiao Yu’s eldest daughter, was born in 599 when her father was merely twenty-five and not actively involved in political affairs. This was likely sometime after his recovery from the leprosy disease, a major turning point in his religious conviction. Like the biographies of most other nuns, there is no record of a secular name or the mother’s identity. The biography begins in the typical style with a narration of her

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family’s background and information on famous ancestors and their accomplishments.

While this could be dismissed as merely a Chinese biographical tradition, it also illustrates an important issue between the relationship of an ordained monk or nun with the secular family members and relatives. It is evident that even a monk or nun who has left the household life, on their tombstone inscription, the most important information that is written in their biography is their paternal lineage and family background.¹⁹²

The dharma master’s taboo name is Fale; her secular family name was Xiao and she was a native of Lanling.¹⁹³ She was the fifth generation grand daughter of Emperor Wudi of Liang. Her great-great grandfather was Emperor Zhaoming; her great grandfather was Emperor Xuan; her grandfather was Emperor Xiaoming. Her father Yu was Duke Xin-an of [Later] Liang, the Gold and Purple Grand Master of Guangle of Sui, an Attendant Gentlemen of the Imperial Palace, the Secretariat Director of the Imperial Court, and the Left and Right Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs. Under a special promotion he became the Grand Guardian of the Crown Prince, the Supreme Pillar of State, and the State Duke of Song. He was [also] given the title of Minister of Works.¹⁹⁴ The glorious accomplishments of [her family] continue ceaselessly, which were all recorded in the [state] history and [family] genealogy. Their virtues were thriving and honorable that can be known in details [from these records].¹⁹⁵

The authors of the biography and tombstone felt it necessary to trace her origins as far as Xiao Yan, her fifth generation grandfather, whose posthumous title was Emperor

¹⁹² In Yan Yaozhong’s article “Fo jiao jelu yu tangdai funu jiating shenghua,” (pp. 101) he states that sometimes detail on family background and famous ancestors exceeds the nun’s own information. He also concludes that this is explicit evidence of the close relationship nuns have with their family and the secularization of Buddhist customs with Confucius values.

¹⁹³ In the northwest area of Wujin County in today’s Jiangsu Province, supposedly the hometown of Emperor Wudi of Liang.

¹⁹⁴ See Ch. 1 for full description of each member’s information.

¹⁹⁵ Biography in QTW 65.3b3-4a10.
Liang Wudi (r. 502-549). Regardless of the details of the grandfather’s achievements, the question is why the author felt a need to bridge a connection from Fale to such a distant relative? One suggestion could be that among her ancestors, Xiao Yan is most well-known because of founding the short-lived Liang dynasty and for being a pious emperor and philanthropic supporter of Buddhist activities. Making this connection illuminates her prestigious roots and foreshadows the religious influence she would receive from her family. With such a religiously empathetic background, it would not seem incomprehensible that her parents would choose to send her to the temple at an early age without any opposition from relatives.

Unlike the majority of elite women who only after widowhood would take up the precepts in the nunnery, records show that Fale, who was never known to have been betrothed or married, joined the samgha at an early age. This is surprising given that she is described as being a gifted child and probably had the potential to become a well-trained and respected noble girl who would bring pride to the family if married into the imperial Li family or a prestigious clan.

The dharma master was the eldest daughter of the Grand Guardian. Since her childhood, she was diligent and had sincere virtues. She experienced the profound marvel, and [was known as a] prodigy. When she just reached the age

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196 See Jinhua Chen “Family Ties and Buddhist Nuns in Tang China: Two Studies," 2002; also see Yan Chunhua’s “Fojiao jielu yu tangdai jimi jiating shenghua” (pp. 77) which categorized two types of nuns during the Tang dynasty. The first are young girls from noble family who enter the monastery at an early age and the second are married women consisting of widows and palace ladies who are forced into the monastery to cultivate merit on behalf of the deceased emperor.

197 This expression originated from the fourth poem in the Shengmin 生民 chapter of the Daya 大雅 section in the Book of Songs: Dan shi pupu, ke qi ke yi. (When he was able to crawl, He looked majestic and intelligent.) According to the traditional commentators of the classic, qini 岐嶷 means to be brilliant and prosperous like mountains and peaks that are both vast and high. Later this term was often used to describe an extremely gifted child. See Gao Heng, Shijing jinzu, 401.
of three, she [had already] taken refuge in the six paramitas. She took off her shoes in her prominent clan and shaved her hair in the nunner
from the above passage, it seems that the author is trying to explain her early entry in to the samgha by asserting that even as a child of two she was already able to comprehend the significance of the Mahayana doctrines and choose for herself to practice the bodhisattva’s vows. This is likely an exaggeration of the truth. However, the author’s intention might not have been to relate the truth but to explain Fale’s unique religious orientation as a child. He also aims to clarify any suspicion that Fale was forced into the monastery, by her father, who was unable to fulfill the vow he made to lead a recluse life after recovering from a fatal illness, may have passed on the responsibility to Fale. Yan Chunhua in the article “Mubei wenzhong de zhongtang biqiuni chutan,” suggests that there was a surprising percentage of little girls entering the monastery before they could understand their own actions. This seemingly volitional resolution was likely a decision made by their parents for various reasons such as to pray for the royal family’s prosperity or for their own lineage’s well-being. In Fale’s case, was her entry into the monastery for the welfare of her family or an act of sacrifice to appease her father’s guilt-ridden conscience? Our suspicion of the veracity of this story increases when the author

198六度 is short for 六度波羅蜜多, sad- pāramitās or sat- pāramitās in Sanskrit. Literally it means the six ways of crossing to the other bank, which refers to the six methods of achieving Buddhahood: (1) 布施 dāna, charity, or giving, including the bestowing of the truth on others; (2) 持戒 sīla, keeping the commandments; (3) 忍辱 kṣānti, patience under insult; (4) 精進 vīrya, zeal and progress; (5) 順定 dhyāna, meditation or contemplation; (6) 智慧 prajñā; wisdom, the power to discern reality or truth.

199 Qiyuan 祇園 is short for qishu gei gudu yuan 祇樹給孤獨園, Jetavana Anāthapindada-ārāma in Sanskrit. It is a Buddhist holy land in India, originally a monastery built for the Buddha and his disciples. In this context, however, it is used as a synonym for a Buddhist monastery or nunery.

200 Yan Chunhua, “Fojiao jielu yu tangdai funu jiating shenghua,” 77.
intentionally does not specify her master or the temple in which she lived prior to joining the Jidusi 濟度寺 and Xianghaosi 相好寺 where she later died.\textsuperscript{202}

Although Fale never held a high position in the nunneries and was less famous than her sisters, she was titled \textit{fashi} 法師 in her biography, which according to Yan Chunhua is a prestigious title during the Sui dynasty presented to those who are thoroughly knowledgeable in Buddhist philosophy and are able to actively \textit{yindao} 領導 and propagate Buddhism widely.\textsuperscript{203} During the Tang dynasty, this term was widely used to refer to both Buddhist monks and nuns without having any specific connotation. Nevertheless, she was well respected and admired by both the lay and \textit{samgha} community for her wisdom, virtue and ‘masculine’ work.

Then as she rippled the essence [of wisdom] in the meditation room and mastered the elephant-like-mind\textsuperscript{204} and enriched [its capacity]. As she searched for the mysterious in the dharma site\textsuperscript{205}, she contained the Gāthā of Dragons\textsuperscript{206} and left nothing out. [On] the dharma platform she expounds the secrets [of the dharma], containing the dragon hymns and leaving no traces. Her companions in pursuit of enlightenment took her as their prime example, and she is modeled by

\textsuperscript{201}The son of Sui Gaozu, Prince Xiao of Qin, in Zhenguan 賢覲 1 (649), established Jidusi on his own private property. Taizong moved the temple to where Xiushansi 修善寺 used to stand (in Anye 安業 district, city block inside of Chang’an), and changed its name to Lingbaosi 靈寶寺. Some historical records state that after Taizong’s death, his concubines, including the future Empress Wu, were sent there to become nuns. In Yifeng 儀鳳 2 (677), it was merged with Chongshenggong 崇聖宮, renamed as Chongshengsi 崇聖寺.

\textsuperscript{202}She could have always lived at the Jidu Monastery, however, if so why did the author not mention this fact?

\textsuperscript{203}Yan Chunhua, 79.

\textsuperscript{204}The elephant here may just be a symbol for Buddhist teachings, since the term King of Elephants 象王 is often used to refer to the Buddha or other great bodhisattvas.

\textsuperscript{205}Another term that refers to a monastery or nunnery.

\textsuperscript{206}Like elephants, the dragon is a legendary powerful and magnificent creature that symbolizes the greatness of the Buddhist teachings.
those in the gate of truth. 既而禪室淪精，羈象心而有裕; 法場探秘, 蘊龍偈而無遺。覺侶攸宗, 真門取範。

Four main points can be concluded from the above passage. Fale, like most of her sisters, practiced meditation and did not seem to have had any interest in the Lotus Sutra, which is the central text for her father and other lay relatives’ spiritual practice. Fale’s disinterest towards this tradition could be justified because of her early entrance into the monastery and, therefore, was not influenced by the secular family’s customs. The second detail that strikes us is the fact that she, “[on the] platform, expounds the secrets [of the dharma],” which indicates that Fale was quite famous and well respected to have laymen and laywomen listen to her lectures. In addition, while it may seem that expounding the Buddha’s dharma to a public audience is natural and expected for any monastic person, in reality, for a nun to be able to do so is less common, and as such, highly significant. In the traditional patriarchal Chinese society such a “masculine” task would be difficult for an ordinary woman to accomplish. A nun, like Fale, must first be literate and confident in her own abilities in order to present the dharma as well as to attract people to her platform (social). The audience, which may consist of intellectual male scholars, must be able to put aside gender prejudice and have a liberal mind to accept the fact that they are being taught by a female priest. This liberal attitude was influenced by the social openness of the early Tang in tolerating women’s intervention into the male dominant sphere according to Jiao Jie’s speculation on the influence of Buddhism on Tang women.207 Women clerics of great fame were invited to perform

207 Jiao Jie, “Cong tang muzhi kan tangdai funu yu fojiao de guanxi,” 98.
sermons in the palace such as Facheng 法澄 (640-729),\textsuperscript{208} and Ruyuan 如願 (707-775)\textsuperscript{209} while novice nuns and laywomen were able to study with male masters of their choice such as Qiwei 契微 (720-781) who studied under the Esoteric master Vajrabodhi (Ch. 金剛智 Jin'gangzhi [6717-741]), vinaya master Dingbin 定賓 (an expert of the Four-divisions Vinaya who played a central role in transmitting the Chinese Vinaya tradition to Japan)\textsuperscript{210} and last of all, Hongzheng 弘正 of the Shengshan 聖善 monastery.\textsuperscript{211} To some degree, nuns of the early Tang benefited from liberal attitudes in society and were able to become involved in various activities and professions like their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{212}

While the biography also mentions that Fale was active in promoting her school’s teaching (again we are not sure which school she belongs to, perhaps some sub-sect of the dhyānā tradition), and effective in proselytizing Buddhism, it fails to specify in what way she was able to perform such activities, and does not offer firm examples of how she was able to have “prolonged her school [of Buddhism].” It is also obvious from the passage that Fale never held any leadership position or was a member of the nunnery’s administration board, but remained an ‘ordinary’ member throughout her life.

Interestingly, with such fame and respect, Fale does not seem to have had any disciples,

\textsuperscript{208} For a detailed study on Facheng, see Jinhua Chen, “Family Ties and Buddhist Nuns in Tang China: Two Studies,” 51-65.

\textsuperscript{209} See Li Yuzhen, *Tangclai de biqiuni*, 27. For her biography see *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編 100: 13-15.

\textsuperscript{210} See Jinhua Chen, “One Name, Three Monks: Two Northern Chan Masters Emerge from the Shadow of their Contemporary, the Tiantai Master Zhanran (711-782),” 64.

\textsuperscript{211} See Jinhua Chen, “Family Ties and Buddhist Nuns in Tang China: Two Studies,” 75.

\textsuperscript{212} This liberal attitude towards female Buddhist clerics began as early as the Liu-Song period (420-579), however, it was during the Tang that the nuns’ community was most powerful and influential. It was a privilege to have daughters enter the monastery, therefore, nuns were greatly respected and their status elevated to a very high social and religious standing.
or if she did, their names were not considered worthy of mention by the biographer, remaining in the text as unspecified juelu 覺侶 or “companions in pursuit of enlightenment.”

Fale’s religious career is vaguely outlined in the first half of the biography and the second half describes her death and burial details.

However, her thoughts then [perished] quickly and her shadow fell at the peak of Mount Sumeru; the auspicious omens were thus revealed and her spirit ascended to the Tuṣita Palace. On the nineteenth day of the ninth month of the third year of the reign period Xianheng (October 15, 672 CE), she passed away in the Xianghao Nunnery in Pu Prefecture. She was seventy-three years old. She was temporarily buried in Hedong, and her coffin was returned to the southern plain of Yichuan District in Mingtang County of the Yong Prefecture on the twenty-third or xinmao day on the gengwu portion of the third month of the second or xinsi year of the reign period of Yonglong (April 16, 681). Everything went in accordance with the rites.

213 The name of a mythical mountain in Indian legends. Its peak is inhabited by the god Śakra Devānām-INDRA 帝釋天. It means that Fale has passed away and ascended to a higher realm.

214 Fale’s death is described as an auspicious event here, because she is said to have joined the gods after death.

215 Tuṣita is the Indian deity Tuṣita, now this term refers to a heaven. There is also the expression “Reincarnation of Tuṣita” 兜率往生 from the MAITREYA-VYĀKARĀṆA SŪTRA 彌勒下生成佛經, which means that when one dies, he will join the rank of Tuṣita and come back to our world along with the future Buddha. The expression is used here to describe Fale’s death in a very elegant and respectful manner.

216 qielan 伽藍 is the Sanskrit word vihāra, which means dwelling [for monks and nuns], or saṅghārāma, which means the place of gathering [for monks or nuns].

217 Pu Prefecture was located in the southern region of Hedong Circuit. The prefecture is located between today’s Shaanxi and Henan Provinces.

218 It is located inside the Capital Circuit 京畿道, near Chang-an.

219 This is the same time, date and location that her sister Fadeng was also formally buried.
Fale lived beyond the life expectancy of most women of the medieval period, including both of her sisters. She died in the Xianghao Nunnery, located in the same district as Jidu Nunnery, where it is assumed she resided and performed her missionary work for most of her life. The location of her death may perplex some. That is, did she choose to die at the Xianghao Nunnery or was her death unexpected and the location accidental? Could it be that she was invited to give a lecture or was merely on a visit to the Xianghao Nunnery (as they are located in the same district), and unexpectedly died during her stay? Or did she actually reside in Xianghao Nunnery in her later years, despite the author’s choice to have readers believe that she always resided in Jidusi, a much more famous and larger institution? We are unable to answer such questions. We can, however, presume that Fale was an active nun even until her later years, during which time she traveled between the Jidu Nunnery and Xianghao Nunnery.

While her father’s funeral service rite was completely absent from his biography, Fale’s narrative was more compelling. Quite different from the traditional burial rites of a Buddhist monk or nun, in which the body is either cremated or left in its original form and placed into a stūpa, Fale’s body was buried temporarily in one unspecified location before being removed and reburied in another location nine years later. The biographer

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220 This custom of cremation burial was very influential even among the laywomen during the Tang. In Su Xiaomin’s “Cong muzhi kan jojiao dui tangdai funu shenghua de yingxiang,” she identifies that among the 176 laywomen’s tombstone inscription in the Tangdai muzhi huibian, 19 were recorded to have chosen this method of burial. This custom was based on the Indian burial tradition that the Buddha performed at his death, 時須燄陀羅。即於佛前。入火界三昧而般涅槃 (The Buddha saw that it was the proper time and sat crossed legged, and in front of everyone, he entered the tejo-dhātu-samādhi and nirvāṇa.) see Da banniépan jìng 大般涅槃經, T. 01: 07. 204b05-26; and Su Xiaomin, 88.
does not indicate whether or not she was buried on monastic grounds or on family property, however, we can conclude that her funeral rites were performed under the Confucian guidelines and influenced by popular taboos. The tradition of digging up the bones of the deceased in order to rebury them in a different location is in accordance with the Confucian notion of returning the ashes and bones of deceased family members to the proper lineage burial ground for communal worship. This custom may have been practiced to promote a sense of unification between the dead and living members of a family lineage. Or as Yang Mei argues, Fale’s burial rite resembles the rituals performed for unmarried daughters of noble families. According to Chinese secular customs, the event that a daughter dies unmarried is inauspicious because they do not have descendents (especially male off-spring) to worship and provide them a permanent resting place, therefore, they wander endlessly. The parents of the deceased would have to establish a tablet in their ancestral hall and allow her (the daughter) a burial space in the family’s private graveyard.\footnote{See Yang Mei, “Tangdai nuseng yu shisu jiating de guanxi,” 25.}

During the Tang dynasty, while it was very common for monks and nuns to be cremated and placed in stūpas, there were a few who had similar funeral rites as Fale. It can be concluded that even though Fale left her secular family and lived in the monastery for almost seventy years, her siblings and relatives still considered her an unmarried daughter of the Xiao lineage more than an ordained bhikṣunī. This also indicates that her funeral was likely sponsored and organized by her secular family and relatives. This is not an uncommon phenomenon especially among nuns from prestigious backgrounds to be buried in private family graveyards. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether the southern
plain of the Yichuan District was the southern Xiao clan’s private burial ground, we can nevertheless assume that the Xiao family had control over this property and decided to retain it as the resting place for Fale and her younger sister.

A second interpretation for this reburial custom stems from the Daoist belief that the proper burial ground of the dead and fengshui of the tomb would affect the fortune of the living. Therefore, we see that both sisters, who died in different years, had their remains reburied in a new location on the same day. This complicated and un-Buddhist funeral procedure indicates very clearly that neither Fale nor the people of the temple in which she resided had control over her funeral rites, the method of disposing of her body, or the location of her tomb. Rather, it was her secular family which had great influence over this event. It is obvious that neither she nor the temple would request the performance of such complex and financially straining rites. Yet, this also indicates that the elders and nuns in the Jidu Nunnery were unable to resist the request of her socially and economically powerful relatives, who also requested the erection of her tombstone and biography.

Before ending the inscription, the writer, whose identity is unknown but who is likely to be a respectable scholar or famous monk, was asked to dedicate a gāthā on Fale’s behalf.

222 It is quite common that the family also chose the writer and composer of Fale’s inscription and epitaph. Such as in the case of Fawan 法院(Styled Jing'jin jun 稅進軍, [724-790]) of Jingai 敬愛 monastery whose inscription was written by her own stepson. See Yan Chunhua, 78; for full biography see Tangdai muzhi huibian, 1862.

223 Poetic verses that are commonly found in sutras and hagiographies’ of eminent monks and nuns.
We were afraid that pines and fields would be difficult to stay unchanged [over time], and cypress and hazel trees\(^{224}\) would eventually wither; therefore we carve on durable stones\(^{225}\) and wrote down the instructions [left by the dharma master]. Thus we made a epitaph saying:

The noble household inherited the auspiciousness, and the [the dharma master] treasure-like-lineage was carried over from the immortals. Then her gentle qualities were born and she put her heart in the fields of merits\(^{226}\).

Her accomplishments has reached the tenth stage [Dharma-Cloud stage of Bodhisattvahood],\(^{227}\) her [benevolent] karmic [achievements] are praised by [beings in the] three realms\(^{228}\), her spirits wanders to the end of the Dharma\(^{229}\), her enlightenment occurred in the early stage of her childhood.

The raft of metaphor\(^{230}\) was suddenly abandoned, and the boat of compassion was abruptly deserted. The mysterious door became dim forever, and [the dharma master's] elegant reputation was passed on in the emptiness. 恐松剛離固，樭枝終盡，式鶴賒石，用節光規。適為銘曰：華

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\(^{224}\) The character *con* 槿 is a kind of fruit tree similar to the tangerine tree or mandarin orange tree. However, this could be a misprint for the character *zhen* 槿, the hazel tree, which like pine and cypress is able to live through harsh winters and grow for many years. If the character is really *con*, then perhaps the author is saying that trees in both cold and tropical regions will wither eventually. If it is a misprint for *zhen*, then it is a more conventional image for the ravage of time, where even the sturdy and long-living trees have to die out in the end.

\(^{225}\) Refers to the tomb tablet.

\(^{226}\) A reference to the three treasures: the Buddha, the *saṅgha* and *dhārma*; also, one's parents and the poverty-stricken. These are the objects toward which one should direct his/her religious practice.

\(^{227}\) *Di* 地 is *bhumi* in Sanskrit, which literally means ground or residence, and is used in the sense of level or stage in the term *shīdi* 十地. Depending on the context, this term can refer to a number of things. For example, in *sānchēng gōng shīdi* 三乘共十地, it refers to the ten stages of achievement in cultivation that are commons across the Three Vechiles. In *dāchēng pūsa shīdi* 大乘菩薩十地 it refers to the ten stages of cultivation for boshisattvas. In this context, the term is used to praise Fale’s spiritual cultivation having reached a very high level.

\(^{228}\) The three usually refers to the three Indian deities: Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā; however, it is can also refer to the three realms of sentient beings, or *tridhātu* 三界, which consists of the realm of desire 欲 (*kāma*), form 色 (*rūpa*) and formless 無色界 (*arūpāvacara*).

\(^{229}\) This statement praises her as having been able to transgress time and space and being able to wander even to the end of the world, otherwise known as the end of the existence of the Buddha’s teaching *mōfa* 末法.

\(^{230}\) 道 is the Chinese translation for the Sanskrit word *dṛṣṭānta*. It refers to the Buddha’s method of using metaphors to let people understand his teachings. The raft of metaphor thus refers to Fale, who used Buddhist teachings to help people cross over to the shore of salvation.
The gāthā emphasized three points: the fact that she had a tombstone erected on her behalf illustrates that Fale had a proper burial service that was based primarily on secular customs and rites and organized by her family members instead of the traditional Buddhist cremation rite. The verse reemphasizes that Fale’s entrance into the monastery was at a very early age, and due to long years of cultivation she is believed to have achieved a high level of spiritual enlightenment and was treated as a living bodhisattva. This shows that great respect and public eulogize of eminent nuns during the Tang was quite common among the lay and monastic community. Lastly, Fale was remembered and respected for being a virtuous daughter, sister and nun.

Fayuan 法顗 (601-663): the Distinguished Daughter

Born in 601, only two years after Fale, Fayuan seemed to have been pampered and favored among her siblings. We will find that Yu’s biased affection and special concern for this daughter directly influenced her importance and status within the family, and indirectly augmented her reputation and fame among the elite lay followers and within the monastic community. This is obvious from an analysis of the title of her tombstone inscription and biography. While she and her sister Fale both lived in the Jidu Monastery, after their death the elder is only referred to as the “Late Bhikṣuṇī,” while Fayuan is called the “Great Bhikṣuṇī.” This difference, although subtle, touches on many
important issues, such as monastic status, religious criteria and social judgment regarding
the selection of appropriate posthumous titles.

Among the biographies of female Xiao members who left the household,
Fayuan’s proved to be the most detailed and lengthiest.\textsuperscript{231}

The dharma master’s taboo name is Fayuan (601-663). Her secular family
name was Xiao, a native of Lanling Sub-prefecture in Lanling Prefecture. She
was the sixth generation descendant of Emperor Wu of Liang (464-579). She was
the third daughter of the State Duke of Song, the former Tang dynasty’s
Minister of Works. Originally, as Weizi\textsuperscript{232} left Yin, his great accomplishment in
holding on to the [ceremonial instruments of] music\textsuperscript{233} was glorified. [Later]
Wenzhong\textsuperscript{234} rebelled in Pei\textsuperscript{235}, and he began the greatness by receiving the
[empire’s] map on behalf [of the Han emperor]. The residence of jades was
thriving and stood above the clouds; the water source of pearls was vast and
peaceful and was bathed by the sunshine. [Emperor Wu of Liang] extended
auspiciousness, bestowed fortune and opened the calendar of phoenix\textsuperscript{236} in the
direction of the red\textsuperscript{237}; he passed on celebrations, connected legal states and
collected the talismans of dragon at his purple canopy\textsuperscript{238}. When the [imperial] tri-

\textsuperscript{231} See QTW 997.3a9-6a5.

\textsuperscript{232} The founder of the State of Song in the Zhou dynasty. He was the elder half-brother of King Zhou, the
last ruler of Yin. He originally served in his brother’s court but left because the king was tyrannical and did
not listen to his remonstrations. After King Wu of Zhou overthrew Yin, he was enfeoffed the State of Song.

\textsuperscript{233} It was said that as Weizi left Yin he brought with him several sacrificial vessels and ceremonial musical
instruments, so that the ancestral rituals can still be performed by a righteous person. See Shi Ji 史記,
Yinbenji 殷本紀.

\textsuperscript{234} The posthumous title of Xiao He 蕭何 (?-193 BCE), who assisted Liu Bang 劉邦 (247-195 BCE) in
establishing the Han dynasty.

\textsuperscript{235} Liu Bang’s hometown and also the place he launched the rebellion against Qin.

\textsuperscript{236} This refers to an ancient Chinese yearly calendar. The term originated from a passage on Shi qinian 十七
year in section Zhaogong 昭公 of Zuozhuan 左傳 (pp. 205): zhaogong shiqinian: fengniao shizhi, guji yu
niao, wei niaoshi er niaoming, fengniaoshi, lizheng ye. 鳳鳥適至，故紀於鳥，為鳥師而鳥名，鳳鳥氏，曆
正也 (The Seventeenth year of Duke Zhao: A phoenix happened to arrive/appear [in that year]; therefore
we used the bird to record [this year].* We set up officials of the bird and named them after the bird. The
clan of the Phoenix [was in charge of] correcting the calendar).

\textsuperscript{237} Referring to the south.

\textsuperscript{238} This is a symbol of the imperial carriage.
pods\textsuperscript{239} moved to the southern land\textsuperscript{240} and the [royal] helmets\textsuperscript{241} immigrated to the eastern edge [of the world], the outstanding spirits [of his descendants] are crowned at the top of the Upper Kingdom\textsuperscript{242} and their tall caps contained over half of the Central Land\textsuperscript{243}.}

Judging from the content, structure and writing style of the inscription, the writer of Fayuan’s biography is a different person from that of Fale’s. Unlike her sister’s biography, in which the compiler does not specify Fale’s rank among her siblings, Fayuan is explicitly called Yu’s third daughter. This could have been the compiler’s attention to such details, or simply the fact that there was no need to record the rank of the eldest daughter because it was obvious to contemporaries. Another fact that confirms the employment of different compilers is the separate method they use to count the generations from Liang Wudi’s period to his later descendents. While Fale is referred to as the fifth generation granddaughter, Fayuan is referred to as the sixth, which will seem illogical when they are both sisters of the same father and only two years apart. However, if one considers Fale and Fayuan’s generation as one generation and counts backwards to Liang Wudi, this would make them sixth generation granddaughters: this method was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{239} This is referring to imperial authority.
\item \textsuperscript{240} \textit{Fu} is a word used in Zhou to mark territories based on the distance to the capital region. For example, a \textit{fu} that is within 500 \textit{li} to the capital is called the \textit{Hongfu} 紅服, and a \textit{fu} that is between 500 and 1000 \textit{li} is called \textit{Dianfu} 甸服 etc. The known world was roughly divided into five \textit{fu} using this method. \textit{Nanfu} 南服 is thus a way of referring to the land of the south.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Also a symbol of imperial authority.
\item \textsuperscript{242} This is referring to China.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Also referring to China.
\end{itemize}
used by Fayuan’s biographer. However, Fale’s compiler began from Liang Wudi and counted forward to Fale’s generation and concluded that they were the fifth.

Similar to her sister’s biography, this compiler begins by tracing Fayuan’s lineage. However, he attempts to connect her origin further into history with Xiao He, the Prime Minister and one of the three pillars that helped Liu Bang establish the Former Han Dynasty (206 BC- 8 CE). This direct suggestion that she was somehow related or even the descendant of such a great historical figure glorifies her prestigious background. She comes not only from a long tradition, which can be traced back to the Han dynasty, but also one which produced prominent individuals holding the power to influence the rise and fall of different Chinese eras. The compiler then praises an individual (with specifying his name or title) of the Xiao family, who was not only able to hold great power within the government, but actually rose to be head of the nation. While the name is not clearly mentioned, judging from the content of the passage, it is clear that the writer is referring to Xiao Yan, Emperor Liang Wudi of the Liang dynasty. Before ending the introduction, the compiler does not fail to acknowledge that excluding the two figures already mentioned, the Xiao clan was able to preserve their prominent heritage and social status as well as produce legendary descendants, perhaps alluding to her father Xiao Yu, the first of ten Grand Councilors from the southern branch of the Xiao clan.²⁴⁴

Interestingly, the author of Fayuan’s biography felt it necessary to provide an explanation for her appearance in the Xiao family and the auspicious signs that accompany her birth.

²⁴⁴ Information about the other nine Xiao Grand Councilors is discussed in chapter 3.
The dharmabhānakā then rode on the causes to distance herself from the kalpa and planted the root in her long life. [Her mother] was pregnant with the heavenly look of the moon and followed the pure precepts in the Sandbar of Emperor; she modeled on the treasure-like appearance of the stars and brought down a graceful example to the noble household. During the time when she was still an infant, her elegant qualities were first marked. During the years when she was a child, she suddenly became exceptional in her gentle sentiments. Her brilliance and quick-mindedness arose from her natural wisdom; her filial piety and friendship [among her siblings] were based on [a quality] given by heaven. Among her paternal and maternal families and relatives by marriage alliance, everyone treated her as someone special.

This detailed description of her birth and childhood emphasizes three main issues. First, Fayuan’s rebirth into the Xiao family, and her future religious life, was a result of the merit she performed in her previous lives. Second, it hints that the people of the Xiao clan were no ordinary human beings but were blessed with fu, or merit, and that Fayuan, who possesses great merit, chose to enter this virtuous household. During pregnancy, her mother, who remains anonymous, experienced marvels usually associated with the coming of a sacred child. These miraculous events usually present in ancient hagiography of prominent masters foreshadow her distinctive life. Like her elder sister, Fayuan was an intelligent child and praised for her exceptional qualities. Unlike her sister, who was sent to the monastery at an early age, Fayuan grew up among her relatives and had a normal childhood.

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245 Ch. fushi 法師.

246 According to the legend, the two daughters of the sage King Yao drowned themselves at the sandbar of the River Xiang. Thus the term dizhi 帝渚 is sometimes used to refer to the River Xiang.

247 Wu Mei Xia’s article “Cong Tang muzhi kan tangdai xuxing fojiao xinyang ji qi tedian,” identifies nine reasons why women of the Tang were inspired and attracted to Buddhism. One of these she calls “tianxing sheng zhi, sushi shengyin” (naturally born and fated to be a Buddhist) which implies that this abstract reason was commonly used in Buddhist nuns’ hagiographies and tombstone inscriptions.
Moreover, the structure of her bones [was so superior that it] had no match. Her goodness and grace stood out uniquely. Makeup did not need to be applied [to her] and the color [of her face] was resplendent more than spring peach blossoms. Her jade-like complexion contained brightness and her radiance is that of the morning hibiscus. She [properly] arranged her ornaments and maintained her appearance. She was dignified, compassionate, and restrained herself to be virtuous. She often paid attention to [literary] scholarship and especially lingered her interest in weaving. As for the treasures such as beautiful jades, jade rings, gold and gree jades and the ornaments such as mats, bamboo seats, quilts and curtains, she always brought out their beauty and marvel to the utmost. As she took them and appreciated them in her room; they were beautiful but not wasteful, abundant but not to overflowing.

In the next passage the author places great importance on her physical appearance and the worldly leisure to which she was exposed while growing up. From the description, it seems that Fayuan was an attractive lady who was concerned about her outer appearance and composure and was fond of wearing ornaments and using luxurious items for personal use. She grew to possess all the virtue of a noble lady and occupied herself with the traditional feminine works, such as weaving. In addition, it is also mentioned that Fayuan did have some literary education, which indicates that the Xiao family, or in this case specifically Xiao Yu, did not discourage daughters from entering academia and breaking orthodox Confucian taboos.

Then her heart was at ease in the hall of learning. She organized her thoughts and what she said was orderly. With one look and all the corners and bends were included. With a second glance and all the fineness and essence were extracted. Her brush flew among the eight forms [of writing], and she studied the strange writings of the high antiquity. Her calligraphy had the quality of the

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248 Could either refer to the eight kinds of scripts established in the Qin government (大篆, 小篆, 刻符, 鬼書, 蕃書, 署書, 篆書, 銘書) or the eight kind of prose styles suggested by Liu Xie 虢 in Wenxin diaolong 訥心騁龍 (典雅, 頻緩, 粉約, 顯附, 繁繡, 壯麗, 新奇, 輕靡). See biography in Liang shu 50: 710-2.
Two Masters, and she followed the extraordinary deeds of Lady Wei. Her many artistic skills became more and more refined and her womanly manners became more and more prestigious. Contrary to general perceptions, Fayuan was perhaps allowed to study alongside her brothers or was privately taught by her father, not only how to write and read, but also “writings of the high antiquity,” which refers to ancient scripts from the early Shang and Zhou dynasties. This is quite common among daughters of elite family who more or less had private tutoring. However, it is exceptional that she is publicly recognized for her excellent calligraphic skills and for being a charismatic speaker comparable to the famous Lady Wei of the Spring and Autumn Period. Fayuan grew up to be a refined noble lady with great artistic skills and renowned womanly virtues, which, along with her prestigious family background, made her a potentially attractive bride and daughter-in-law. However, her decision to become a Buddhist nun was unexpected to the family.

The Duke of Song paid special attention to her fostering and treated her as someone unique. He was going to find her a good family to marry into, have many splendid grandsons, and glorify the heritage of the Song. But as the strict family passed down the [Buddhist] teachings, she bathed in the waves of compassion. She received the instructions in a magnificent room and since she was little she understood the true meaning [of the Buddha’s teachings].

249 Referring to Wei Guan 衛瓘 (220-291) and Suo Jing 索靖 (239-303), the two calligraphy masters in the Jin dynasty.

250 Women of the Tang had high literacy therefore, one of their favorite religious activities were to read and copy sutras either for free distribution or worship. See Wu Minxia, 263.

251 The wife of Duke Han of Qi during the Spring and Autumn period. She was said to be a virtuous and worthy woman who once persuaded her husband to cancel a potentially disastrous military campaign. See Hou Han shu 80: 2619.
Like wind blown flowers her appearance was snow pure. At first when she accompanied the Grand Mentor [of the Heir Apparent] to go to a [Buddhist] temple, she picked a leaf to make incense out of it and [people] were suddenly surprised by her will of tranquility and compassion. She then made the grand vow and her thoughts witnessed the bodhi. She rejected the worldly emotions in the Six Rituals and then promoted her piety in the Ten Chants. She used the opportunities, directly asked [her father] and requested to leave the secular life.

We can assume that with such talents and admirable character, her father would naturally be fond of her and make plans to arrange for her marriage to a noteworthy family. However, it seems that her interest in Buddhism, of which few were aware, guided her on another road. The compiler suggests that her reason for entering the monastery was purely religious fervor. Nevertheless, we are still doubtful when her fondness for precious ornaments and love for secular learning seems far greater than her religious orientation. We can discern that Fayuan was generally kept in her quarters but occasionally allowed to accompany her father to visit temples. It was during one of these visits that the people around felt her unusual devotion to the religion. The above passage narrates a trip to a guan, which usually refers to a Daoist temple. However, from the context of this passage, it could have been a place where Daoist deities were worshiped alongside Buddhist images, Fayuan was encompassed by a sense of tranquility from the solemn atmosphere. There are no accounts of her having any personal desire for spiritual

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252 Abbreviation for Taizi taifu 太子太傅, the person responsible for educating the crown prince, which in this case is her father, Xiao Yu.

253 Zhong is sometimes used to translate the Sanskrit word sāksāt, which means to witness or “to make with eyes”. See Hirakawa, Buddhist Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary, 1995.

254 Can either refer to the six procedures during the process of marriage (納采，問名，納吉，納徵，請期，親迎) or the six major ceremonies one goes through in life (冠, 婚, 葬, 祭, 請, 相見).

255 Refers to the Shisong li 十誡律 or Sarvāstivāda-vinaya, one of the major text on Buddhist precepts.
salvation, but only indication that she “understood the true meaning of the Buddha’s teaching,” which does not seem to be a sufficient explanation for her sudden decision to reject marriage and leave secular life. However, one main point is clear: Fayuan was not afraid to voice her own thoughts to her father. This may be due to her charm to persuade others and the fact that her father was a pious Buddhist who had a liberal mind about allowing his daughters to choose their own paths. This is another important characteristic of Tang women. Except court ladies who were forced to enter the monastery after their serving emperor died the majority of Tang nuns were able to voluntarily choose to take up the tonsure with approval from their family and society. Surprisingly, the records do not mention whether Fale’s early entrance into the monastery was influenced by Fayuan’s early admission, but it could not be a mere coincidence that she was ordained at the same monastery in which her sister was currently residing.

The Duke of Song lectured on the principles at the top of the Three Dukes and his skills in painting are marvelous. His heart was sincere in the monasteries and he followed the true Dharma in his home. It was hard for him to go against her noble will and he allowed her to leave the secular life. When she had just reached fourteen years of age, she then put on the dharma robe at

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256 See Yang Mei, “Tangdai nuxing chujia yinyuan kao,” 73. Of course, there were some who were disapproved by their parents such as in the case recorded in the Tai ping guangji 194: 1457. When Nie Yinniang was in her childhood, she a nun who came to her residence for alms. After this first encounter, the nun wished to have Yinniang as her disciple, however, her father disapproved.

257 Huai 槐 is a kind of locust tree but it often symbolizes the eminent position of the Three Dukes, as in the terms 槐卿, 槐位, and 槐府.

258 Naiyuan 奈苑 refers Ambapālīvāna(Ch. anlou shuyuan 瞿羅樹園). Supposedly the place where the Vimalakīrti Sūtra was first lectured. The term was later used generally to mean monastery. See Ding Fubao, Foxue da cidian, 1553.

259 Literally means, “between his beams and pillars.”

260 Ji 簦 literally means hairpin. In ancient China, girls are supposed to put on a hairpin as a sign of reaching adulthood when they become 15 sui or 14 years old.
the Jidu Monastery. She bade farewell and lived by the order of meditation; her garden was marked with pagodas.

Over the distance she looked down at the terrace of Lady Song, she hid and dismantled the Dragon Palace, and from afar she laughed at the chamber of marrying ladies. Thus she followed the emptiness and silenced her thoughts. She received wisdom and her heart was gradually influenced. She was happy with her robe and in a short while, she abandoned her beautiful gauze. She found her vegetarian diet to be delicious and greatly rejected the stench of meat. Her actions in compliance with the precepts were virtuous as the pine and cypress [trees]. Her insightful interpretations were as clear as the ice and spring. She surpassed the others and stood out from the rest. She was at peace as she meditated. She was happy with her robe and in a short while, she abandoned her beautiful gauze. She found her vegetarian diet to be delicious and greatly rejected the stench of meat. Her actions in compliance with the precepts were virtuous as the pine and cypress [trees]. Her insightful interpretations were as clear as the ice and spring. She surpassed the others and stood out from the rest. She was at peace as she meditated. She was happy with her robe and in a short while, she abandoned her beautiful gauze. She found her vegetarian diet to be delicious and greatly rejected the stench of meat. Her actions in compliance with the precepts were virtuous as the pine and cypress [trees]. Her insightful interpretations were as clear as the ice and spring. She surpassed the others and stood out from the rest. She was at peace as she meditated.

Fayuan entered the monastery at the age of fourteen with the blessing of her father. As the daughter of a famous official, Fayuan seemed to have possessed an air of arrogance after entering the monastery. According to the writer's description and

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261 Jialan 等蘭 is the Chinese transliteration for vihāra or samgharāma, a place of dwelling for monks and nuns.

262 Yanta 雁塔 literally means wild goose terrace. It refers to a story in Datang xiyu ji 大唐西域記 3, 7. 51: 2087. 883b27-c7. According to the story, a wild goose smashed itself onto the ground in order to be a sacrifice for a group of monks. The monks later built a monument there to commemorate this wild goose; therefore, the term was later used to generally refer to Buddhist pagodas.

263 Refers to Song Jian 戴霸, supposedly the mother of the founder of Yin. The Quan tang wen 全唐文 edition has the character e 戴 instead of song 戴, in which case the term would simply mean “the terrace of beautiful ladies”.

264 An underwater palace inhabited by dragons and various deities, often associated with Daoist legends.

265 Luguan 魔館 literally means the house of Lu. It refers to a story where Duke Zhuang of Lu was arranging a marriage between a royal Zhou princess and a marquis of Qi. Before arriving at the state of Qi, she passed through the state of Lu. Duke Zhuang welcomed the princess to the state but did not take her into the palace. Instead he built a house for her to spend the night outside the palace. The term has since been used to refer to the temporary dwellings of noble ladies who are going to be married somewhere far away.

266 Literally means “to make fragrant.” It may also mean “to moderate,” however in the above context the former meaning seems most appropriate.
explanation, the reason Fayuan rejected secular life was because she looked down upon
the typical life of noble ladies, was dissatisfied with Daoist teaching and belittled the
Confucian notion that a girl must be married by a certain age. It seems that Fayuan took
some time before becoming comfortable with the new environment and sincerely
“abandoned her beautiful gauze.” This phrase could suggest two interpretations: the first,
as mentioned above, that Fayuan was not especially prepared for a monastic lifestyle and
needed time before feeling comfortable with eating a vegetarian diet, being confined to
monastic precepts and regulation, as well as devoting time and energy to reading and
understanding Buddhist doctrine. The second interpretation would suggest that Fayuan
stayed at the temple as a laywoman for a short period of time before actually cutting-off
her hair and going through the proper ordination rituals. This is a typical procedure young
girls go through before they officially receive their juzu 真足 precepts and are titled
bigiuni. 267

After entering the monastery, Fayuan maintained close contact, more than her
sister Fale, with the secular family and relatives. She did not ‘distance’ herself as the term
chujia ren 出家人 (person leaving the household life) denoted. Rather, she became the
center of attention during family gatherings disguised as religious functions.

When her siblings made an offering and her relatives set up a vegetarian
banquet [for the monastery], the bells 268 echoed their sounds and her robe. 269

267 A majority of young girls who enter the monastery at an early age (before twenty) usually go through a
three stage process before becoming an official nun: chujia 出家 (ordination), xuexi 學習 (study period) and
shoujie 授戒 (receive full-ordination). See Huang Qingfa, “Tangdai sengni de chujia fangshi yu shisuhua
qingxiang.” 89-9.

268 Jiuru 九乳 refers to the nine nipple-like dots on the surface of a large bell.
The siblings referred to in the above passage would likely be her brothers who were also pious Buddhist laymen. Making offerings and holding a vegetarian banquet at Jidu Monastery benefited the ordained sisters financially and the Xiao family socially. First, donating money to the temple would ensure their sisters’ religious status and well-being in the temple, as well as providing the financial support for their religious activities. For the lay family, this devout act would enhance their good karma and enhance the family’s prominence among the religious community as great beneficiaries and supporters of Buddhism. This passage confirms that even though Fayuan and her sisters had left their secular life, they did not sever ties with their family and relatives but on the contrary kept in close contact and even indirectly encouraged them to become involved with religious work. This reciprocal relationship is an important factor for upholding the nuns’ community and society’s support for female ordination: the relatives being the support for the nuns’ religious work, while the nuns inspired their spiritual lives. Mental as well as financial support from the family is the most important factor that allowed Tang nuns to effectively further their religious career as Hao Chunwen states, “sen 

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269 A zhu 銭 is a weight unit roughly equivalent to one-forty-eight of an ounce. Six zhu is, therefore, a very light weight robe that is commonly believed to be worn by deities; later it is also used to refer to a monk or nun’s robe.

270 Literally, pingxi 鍾錫 means “the bowls and staffs of monks and nuns,” here it is used as a symbol for the monastic order.

271 Literally, guangai 髮帯 “the tall caps and canopies,” here used to symbol the noblemen.
jiating, jiating hu wei yicun 僧尼與家庭，家庭互為依存 [monks and nuns and their family, with the family’s support [these monks and nuns] are able to survive.]$^{272}$

However, there could be two reasons for Fayuan’s refusal to see ‘far’ relatives: first, she would not want to be distracted with the affairs of the outside world. Second, there were people who came with other intentions; rather than wanting to learn Buddhism, they came to ask for a favor from her father. If it was the latter case, this would show that Fayuan was still considered as Xiao Yu’s daughter and a member of the prestigious southern Xiao family branch.

Regarding her religious practice and education, Fayuan, who already was a gifted scholar, possessed linguistic abilities that most nuns from humble families lacked. Therefore, she was able to learn and comprehend a variety of Buddhist sutras and sastras. During the Tang, there were four main scriptures well received by the public; they were the Banruo 般若 (Skt. Mahāprajñā), Fahua 法華 (Skt. Saddharmapundarīka), Nieban 涅槃 (Skt. Mahāparinirvāṇa), Weimo 維摩 (Skt. Vimalakīrti)$^{273}$ Unlike her father, Fayuan did not take the Lotus sutra as her main recitation text but focus on the other two popular texts: Banruo 般若 and Weimo 維摩 and the philosophical Samparigraha-śāstra.$^{274}$

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$^{272}$ See Hao Chunwen, Tanghou qi wudai songchu dundhuang sengni de shehui shenghua, 80, 84-5, 87, 94-6.

$^{273}$ See Su Shimei, 84-6.

$^{274}$ Shelun 禪論 is short for she dacheng lun 摹大乘論 or Mahāyāna-samparigraha-śāstra in Sanskrit. This śāstra composed by Asaṅga 阿含(b. ca. 400) focuses on expounding the principles of Mahayana Buddhism. Vasubandhu 世親 (b. ca.320) prepared a summary of it which was later translated by Paramārtha 般若 (ca. 499-569) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 596-664).
Furthermore, she [also] investigated and researched the sūtras and śāstra and explored the various realms [of knowledge] to the utmost; she examined the subtle words among the incense and covered the deep meanings of the precepts. As for the Lotus sutra, the Prajñā sutra, the [Mahāyāna] Samparigraha-śāstra and the Vimalakirti sūtra, she chanted them from morning till dusk and also lectured on them.

Fayuan like her sister, was able to study various texts independently. Not only was Fayuan an ardent student of Buddhist philosophy, but also a fervent practitioner and strict holder of the vinaya. This point is important because a virtuous monk or nun is not only respected in the Buddhist community, but well esteemed in medieval Chinese society. Influenced by Confucian values of chastity, women were expected to be able to restrict their desires and discipline the body. Under the Buddhist precepts, female ordained disciples were to adhere to one hundred more restrictions than their male counterparts. Therefore, to be known as a vinaya preceptor was one of the fundamental qualities for a nun who is to be respected and revered in both the monastic and secular communities. This tight restriction on disciplining the body could have also been influenced by the large amount of widowed women who chose to enter the monastery to preserve their chastity. Over time and with a large number of widows entering the

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275 Pakho or chutupo is the transliteration of the Sanskrit word turuska, also transliterated as douloupo. It is a kind of fragrant grass used as incense during Buddhist rituals. It is perhaps used here as a symbol for Buddhist teachings.

276 Pini is the transliteration of the Sanskrit word vinaya, also translated as lu. It refers to the rules and precepts monks and nuns adhere to.

monastery because of a “secular” purpose, the meaning of biqiuni and chastity inevitably became entangled and associated with one another.\textsuperscript{278}

Like her sister, Fayuan expounded Buddhist teachings and gave sermons to the public, which consisted of male and female lay and ordained disciples. It is indicated that Fayuan was able to elaborate upon the essential meanings of major Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstra from different Buddhist sects. This makes sense because it was during the Tang dynasty that the major Buddhist traditions began to establish their own sects and schools,\textsuperscript{279} and monks and nuns were not prohibited to study under different masters.\textsuperscript{280} It must have been this knowledge in a variety of teachings that allowed her to be able to address and appeal to a large number of people’s needs and circumstances.

She had nearly several dozens of ordained disciples, and all of them looked up [to her] and appreciated the true teachings, [they] competed to rush to the sandal chair, peek into her classroom\textsuperscript{281} from the side and [even] fight to visit the mysterious\textsuperscript{282} door. [Her disciples were] so respectful and many. The seven kinds of disciples\textsuperscript{283} [all] looked up to her [as if she was] Śākyamuni\textsuperscript{284} and

\textsuperscript{278} See Yan Yaozhong, 101.

\textsuperscript{279} Kenneth K. S. Chen, Buddhism in China, 297-364.

\textsuperscript{280} Jiao Jie, 98.

\textsuperscript{281} Jingshi 景室 is often used to describe rooms in temples or monasteries. In this case it probably refers to the room where Fayuan gave her lectures.

\textsuperscript{282} Originally \textit{xuan}玄, however, because of a taboo during the Qing dynasty which prohibited the use of characters similar to emperors’ first name, it was replaced with the character \textit{yuan}元.

\textsuperscript{283} This includes the five types of monastic disciples: biqiu, biqiuni, shichamona, shami, and shaminith and the two types of lay disciples: youposai and youpoyi 優婆塞、優婆夷. However, in this context the writer may have used as a metaphor to emphasize Fayuan’s popularity and fact that she had many disciples, not necessarily from all these seven categories.

\textsuperscript{284} Tan 塔, short for Xitanduo 形像多, which is a transliteration from Siddhānta, the Buddha’s secular name when he was a prince.
Maitreya\textsuperscript{285} [Buddha]. How could it be more venerable? Moreover, she had thoroughly understood the nine kinds of meditations\textsuperscript{286} and she used branches of \textit{dhyana} to broadly inspect her own thoughts; she had fully grasped the three kinds of emptiness\textsuperscript{287} and purified her feelings with the water of meditation.

Fayuan was clearly a well-respected nun among those in the Jidu monastery and had a considerable number of ordained disciples. It also seems that she was a charismatic preacher who would attract a large number of people, who because of limited space in the hall, had to “peak in” from the outside just to attend her lectures. However, there is also a different interpretation to this scenario. Fayuan although a famous nun, did not hold a prominent position in the Jidu monastery so that the hall in which she conducted her lectures was rather small. It does not seem that she was given the privilege to use the main ceremonial hall, which should have been able to hold hundreds of people. Interestingly, these disciples came from a variety of backgrounds from both the lay and monastic communities. This is surprising for it indicates that she not only had lay male students but also ordained male disciples, an uncommon and taboo phenomenon. According to the Buddhist customs, the \textit{biqiu}, or fully-ordained male disciple, always ranked higher than the \textit{biqiuni}, or fully-ordained female disciple. Therefore, for a person who has thoroughly read and studied the \textit{vinaya} regulation, it would not seem possible for Fayuan to make exceptional cases. However, this could be the writer’s attempt to

\textsuperscript{285} Mi 弥 is short for \textit{Mile pusa} 弥樂菩薩 Maitreya Bodhisattva.

\textsuperscript{286} Jiuci 九次 is short for \textit{jiuci diding} 九次第定 or \textit{Navámupúrva-vihāra-samāpattayah} in Sanskrit, which refers to the nine stages of \textit{dhyāna} meditation.

\textsuperscript{287} Sankong 三空 refers to three kinds of liberation: \textit{yanking}, 言空 speaking of emptiness, \textit{wuxiang} 無相, having no form and \textit{wuyuan} 無願, having no wish.
demonstrate Fayuan’s fame and charismatic reputation; she may have had many disciples but they did not necessarily come from all the seven categories.

Her disciples are praised as being obedient and respectful to their master, even to the extent as to worship her as a living Buddha. This comparison between Fayuan to Śākyamuni and Maitreya Buddhas, illustrates that by the Tang dynasty Daosheng’s 道生 (?-434) notion of universal Buddha-nature in all living beings, had become widely accepted among the elite and common citizens and it was not uncommon to praise a virtuous female master as a living sage. In the Buddhist hierarchal system, women’s status was elevated to that of men’s and they were treated with respect for their wisdom and spiritual cultivation, rather than their beauty and family background. As a result of her cultivation, Fayuan is said to have predicted her the time of death and made preparations for this event.

She was tired from all these infringements and suddenly illness appeared in her body. In the morning of her death, she said to all her relatives saying:

288 Scholars such as Jiao Jie and Yan Yaozhong agree that Buddhism concept of equality and universal Buddha-nature was one of the reasons that attracted female devotees because elevates their status as an equal individual in a male dominant society. However, Yang Xiaomin argues that such egalitarian concept and attitude, Buddhism after adopting Confucian customs and becoming secularized with folk traditions, gradually becomes a patriarchal religious system. See Jiao Jie, 98; Yan Yaozhong, 101; and Su Xiaomin, 22-3.

289 Changai 長蓋 refers to the shichăn 十顛 ten bonds ( shameless, unblushing, envious, mean, regretful, torpid, busy, absorbed, angry and secretive of sin), while the wugai 五蓋 five coverings are desire, anger, dullness, agitation, and doubt.

290 The phrase huxian shenji 忽現身疾, meaning sudden illness appearing in the body, is a reference to the Śākyamuni Buddha who entered nirvana when he believed that the time was proper and he had no one who he could teach. Therefore, this sentence compares Fayuan with the Buddha, implying that she is able to choose the time and method of her death.
This body is not permanent, to make an example, it is like the duckweed on water. This body has bondage, [but the bondage] is like a leaf in the wind [to me]. The cycle of life and death are actually all like [the alternation] of day and night. As for the message expressed by Vimalakīrti, its basis is in the rapid decay of life. When Buddha passed down his teachings, he hoped for an early transformation. A golden coffin is an instrument of death, and how can a jade box be a residence for the spirit to dwell in? It will be indeed appropriate to abandon my body to the grabbing birds and entrust my corpse to the devouring beasts.

She straightened her lapel and stopped her thoughts; suddenly she was without a word. Thus on the twenty-sixth day of the eight month during the reign period of Longshuo (October 3rd, 663), she passed away in the annex of the Jidu Monastery; she was sixty-two years old. 西此缠葛; 忽現身疾, 大做之晨, 謂諸親屬曰: 是身無我, 取響水萍; 是身有累, 同夫風葉。生死循環，實均晝夜。然則淨名申誠, 本乎速朽。能仁垂則, 期於早化。金棺乃示滅之機, 葉匣豈入神之宅? 誠宜捐軀攀鳥。委形噬默。斂衿正念。奄然無言。頥以龍朔三年八月廿六日, 捨 籟於濟度寺之別院。春秋六十三。

Fayuan’s death is depicted as her own doing, her own wish to leave this world. Therefore, she was able to decide when and where she would die and perform the appropriate preparations. It is questionable as to whether or not her farewell message to relatives was actually her words or an invented speech by the author himself. Nonetheless, it would seem that her wishes before death included having no funeral and letting her body become food for the wild animals, modeling after the examples of previous

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291 This line shengsi xunhuan 生死循環 is a reference to one of the main themes in Zhuanzi, who believes that our existence is composed of interleaving cycles of darkness and light; sadness and joy etc. and that every transformation process needs the harmony between two components to be complete. See Zhuanzi jishi 1a: 53-5.

292 Jingming 淨名 is the translation of Vimalakīrti, which means “pure name”

293 Nengren 能仁 is the translation of Śākyamuni, which means “sage of the Śākya clan.”

294 The transformation cycle of life and death, which means that the Buddha did not wish to live a long life.

295 Shimie 示滅 refers to the death of a Buddha, bodhisattva or an eminent monk or nun.

296 This is a reference to the utensils (armor, nail, coffin and lock) used during the Han dynasty to bury the emperors.

297 Literally xing 形 means shape.
Buddhas who sacrificed their body to tigers. If this is true, then Fayuan’s last few moments were dramatic. Like her sister, Fayuan lived a long life and died in an annex of the Jidu monastery. Some speculation can be made with regards to this issue. When a monk or nun, excluding the head abbot and abbess, reaches a certain age and condition of ill health which prohibits them from functioning at the same level as the other members of the monastery, it is tradition that they are given a residence outside of the main building where several of their own disciples visit and attend to their master’s everyday needs and wellbeing. This may have been the case for Fayuan. Her death is described as a very sad occasion for all her secular and religious relatives, especially for both her sister, who resided with her at Jidu monastery, Fale, who was already sixty-four, and Fadeng, who was only twenty-six years of age.

Her siblings missed her forever and their deep sorrow was hard to bear. They followed the wish she left behind and then on the seventeenth day of the tenth month of that year (Longshuo [November 22nd, 663]), they built for her a tomb by the side of Shaoling Plain\(^{298}\) and everything was done with simplicity and in accordance with the vinaya.

As the dharma master always bathed in the pool of meditation, she provided an auspicious origin and nurtured the talented. As she first leaned against the bodhi tree,\(^{299}\) she was entrusted to a noble household and brought down the numinous. She contained the righteousness of earth in her harmony and wrapped the sentiment of heaven in her grace. If she saw one good then she became happy and at ease; if she heard one evil then she would become worried and sad. She encouraged one’s benevolence and righteousness at the starting point of her speech; she clarified [the relation between] material and emptiness with ways unfathomed by others. Therefore, she could leave her terrace and chamber and entrust [herself] to the gate of meditation while abandoning the various treasures and removing all the delicate food. Her act of hard effort [in cultivating herself] stood out uniquely among the clergymen and the model she set up for the precepts and rules was closely followed by her dharma companions. For a long time [she acted like] a bridge or ford in the ocean of suffering and in a short while

\(^{298}\) Located in the southern part of today’s Chang’an District in Shaanxi Province, northwest of the Chang’an City.

\(^{299}\) Daoshu 道樹 is a way of referring to the bodhi tree which symbolizes wisdom.
she passed away in a monastery. [Her brothers and sisters were separated from her like] the prunus calyx\(^{300}\) being separated from the flower, and they felt sorry for the change of color in the autumn.\(^{301}\) [Her siblings parted from her like] the thorns and roots\(^{302}\) being cut from the trunk of a tree and their sentiment was magnified as they gazed at the green branch.\(^{303}\) 姊弟永懷，沉痛不忍，依承遺約，乃以其年十月十七日，營窟於少陵原之側，儻以從事，律也。法師夙罄禪池，資慶源而牘彩；初依道樹，託華宗而降靈。藉地義於闊和，苞天情於婉娈。覩一善則怡然自悦，聞一惡則怒爾疚懮。激仁義於談端，明色空於虛表。故能辭台閭，託禪門；捨七珍，祛八膳。精苦之行，標印繚徠；戒律之儀，鍥銅法侶。佇津梁於苦海，奄滅度於仁祠。棣萼分華，悲素秋之改色。荆株析柯，望青枝而增感。

Contrary to her dying wish, Fayuan’s body was placed in a tomb outside of the monastic vicinity, perhaps her family’s personal burial grounds. It is not specified whether she was cremated beforehand or not or whether her coffin was buried or placed in a stūpa, as is the traditional method of showing respect to a highly ranking monk or nun. In addition, her bones were not retrieved and relocated to another location as in the cases of Fale and Fadeng. The family and disciples tried to fulfill her dying wish and kept the funeral ceremony simple, in accordance with the vinaya, which seems illogical because there is no mention of any burial procedure or regulation in the vinaya.\(^{304}\)

\(^{300}\) Di 槿 is prunus japonica and e 碧 is the calyx of a flower. When the two characters are used together they refer to one’s siblings. The expression originated from an allusion from chapter on Changdi 常棣 of the Xiaoya 小雅 section in the Book of Songs: xiaoya changdi: changdi zhihua, e bu weiwei, fanjin zhiren, moru xiongdi: “常棣之花，鄂不韻韻，凡今之人，莫如兄弟。” (The flower of Changdi, the base of its calyx is bright and clear. Of all the people nowadays, none is [close/dear to me] like my brothers). See Gao Heng, Shijing jin zhu, 221.

\(^{301}\) Suqiu 素秋 can also refer to one’s old age.

\(^{302}\) Jingzhu 棘株 literally means thorns and roots but can also refer to siblings like the expression di’e 槿鄂.

\(^{303}\) Perhaps the author suggests that the green branch causes sorrow because it reminds people of the ephemeral nature of youth and life.

\(^{304}\) Some scholar such as Gregory Schopen argues that there were many instances in the vinaya which suggest the preference of a cremation burial for Buddhist clerics. A passage in the Mulasarvāstivāda-vinaya states, “Again on that occasion another monk died. The monks, having carried out his body, having simply thrown it into the burning grounds, returned to the monastery.” See Schopen, Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks, 104-5.
Perhaps the author meant to be in accordance with the Jidu monastery’s funeral rites.

This is doubtful, because cremation and erection of stūpas for Buddhist monks and nuns by the time of the Tang dynasty has become the accepted method of disposing of a monk or nun’s body. However, Fayuan’s corpse was not cremated but placed in a tomb.

What perplexes the reader is the decision to erect Fayuan tomb in the Shaolin Plains and not in Yichuan District, the burial place for Fale’s remains. Was this due to the intervention of her disciples and monastic members? While we do not have sufficient information to explain this disparity, we can assume that both her family and monastic colleagues and disciples took part in the funeral ceremony. It is unknown which group made the final decision about the format of the service, however, it is not unreasonable to suggest that her wealthy and influential family, who must have financed the majority of the funeral expenses, would have had control over her body’s last resting destination, as well as the selection of the writer and information to be included in the tomb inscription.

They were afraid that [one day] the dust might fly to the seaweed and one would get lost [while finding] the tomb by the bank of the Wei River; [moreover] the rocks might exhaust her immortal clothes and one would not recognized the tunnel of the Tan Creek. To declare this message once again, they then wrote a eulogy saying:

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305 See Wu Minxia, 265.

306 The line, “suojuchen fei hai dai” 所墳塵飛海帶 means that eventually the world will change dramatically to the point that dust and dirt would be found in places where the ocean once was.

307 A tributary of the Yellow River. It passes through the area north of Chang’an and is therefore not very far from Fayuan’s tomb.

308 Perhaps the author meant that over time the clothes on Fayuan’s body will eventually decay underground.

309 In present day Xiangfan City, southwest of Hubei Province.
There may be varying levels (literally: titles) of wisdom but there is not different origin for the dharma. [All followers of the dharma] compete to drive away the horse-like mind and they all [try to] subdue the ape-like heart.\(^{310}\) When one’s will is disturbed his sentiment becomes disorderly; when his mind concentrates the principles can be preserved.

Truly [the dharma master] is like a graceful example; all by herself she appreciates the profound (literally dark) gate [of knowledge]. Her jade-like complexion (literally color) looks as if [her face was] scattered with stars; her jewel-like appearance looks as if it is lifted by the moon. Her reputation is contained on the road of locust trees\(^{311}\) [while] her integrity dispersed by the wall of cassia.\(^{312}\) Cloud is emitted at the Bramble Terrace;\(^{313}\) rosy cloud covers the sandbars at the Luo River.\(^{314}\)

Her learning comparable to that of Lady Ban\(^{315}\) and her diction is finer than that of Lady Cai.\(^{316}\) Making an offering with birds is not her ambition;\(^{317}\) [it is the act of] saving the ants\(^{318}\) that glorifies her benevolence. She [thus] abandons the luxury of the terraces and chambers

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\(^{310}\) The horse-like mind and ape-like heart are common Buddhist metaphors for the unenlightened mind. Horse and ape are two hyper-active animals that are hard to subdue and settle down. Thus they are used to describe the mundane and secular mind that lacks concentration and tranquility.

\(^{311}\) The locus tree is often used as a symbol for the Three Dukes, one of the most exalted titles for the aristocratic dignitaries. Here the road of locust trees probably refers to Fayuan’s own family, because her father was one of the Three Dukes during Taizong’s reign.

\(^{312}\) Another way of referring to the palace; probably used here because her family had close connections with the imperial court.

\(^{313}\) A high terrace in the ancient state of Chu. Its remaining site is in the northern part of Jianli 監利 in Hubei Province. Perhaps the luxury of the high terrace is used to symbolize Fayuan’s prominent background.

\(^{314}\) A place associated with beautiful goddesses and fairies, the most famous one being Lady Fu 蘿姬, the goddess of River Luo. The river flows through Shaanxi and Henan Provinces and enters the Yellow River. Perhaps the term is used to compare Fayuan’s beauty to that of these goddesses.

\(^{315}\) Refers to Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (48-2 BCE), during the Han Dynasty, a concubine of Emperor Chengdi 成帝 who was well-known for her literary talents.

\(^{316}\) Refers to Cai Yan 蔡琰 or Cai Wenji 蔡文姬 (172-? CE), a daughter of the scholar Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132-192 CE). Like Ban Jieyu, Cai Yan was well known for her literary talents.

\(^{317}\) According to the wedding customs of ancient times, the bridegroom was supposed to present a wild goose as a wedding gift to the bride’s family. The term is used here as a symbol for marriage.

\(^{318}\) Saving the ants is probably referring to the story of a shami 沙彌, who saved a group of ants that were drowning in a pond. Because of such compassionate acts, his life, which was supposed to end, was prolonged and he was allowed to live into old age. This reference attempts to show how compassionate Fayuan was towards other beings, be it a small insect or a person.
and is bathed in the way [of Buddhist teaching] at the profound (literally dark) ford [of wisdom].

The dharma pass opens its door bolt and the broad road of the [dharma master’s] mind drives away the [worldly] dust. From her nine orifices she sends away the bondage; in the eight kinds of meditation truth resides.

[She] bears [the sickness without] medicine and shares the nourishment [with other sentient beings], the precept incense contains her chastity. The passing on of the lamp will never get tired and the pouring of the vase will never come to an end.

Suddenly [everyone] was sad for the departure of her spirit, and vainly sorrowful for [passing away of the sentient being’s] the Eye. Thus we carefully carve down her gentle virtues [so that after her] death they will no be forgotten (literally cut-off).

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319 Another way of saying jiukong 九孔, the nine orifices found in the human body: two eyes sockets, two nostrils, two ears, one mouth, and two for urinating and defecating.

320 Refers to the four kinds of meditation in the sejie 色界 (world of material), and the four other kinds of meditation in the wusiejie 無色界 (world of non-material). It may thus be the abbreviation for sichan bading 四禪八定, or catvārīdhyanāni in Sanskrit.

321 The character ren 忍(to tolerate) is common in Buddhist terminology. It means to bear the suffering of the world without feeling upset. The term renyao 忍藥, however, is less common. In this context, perhaps it is referring to bearing the pain of being ill without medicine, thus detaching oneself from the obsession of maintaining this body. The term appears in a gāthā in chapter sixty of the Zhengfa nianchu jing 正法念處經 60, T. 17: 721p358. 忍藥為第一, 能除於臍毒 (Bearing [the lack of] medicine ranks the first; it can get rid of the poison of anger).

322 The term is commonly used to describe a well known and virtuous clergyman. The virtuous fame of a monk or nun is so well known that it is like the fragrance of incense spreading in all directions and making all other things fragrant as well.

323 This is a common metaphor for the transmission of the Buddha’s teachings from one master to another. The knowledge and wisdom is passed down like the fire of a lamp being transmitted from one lamp to another.

324 Another metaphor for the transmission of the Dharma; however in this case the author makes a reference to Ananda, the closest disciple-attendant of the Buddha, who was known to have a great memory; the Buddha used the metaphor of pouring water from one vase to another without spilling a single drop to show that Ananda could memorize every single word the Buddha spoke without having any mistakes.

325 This is referring to Fayuan’s death. The eye is used to symbolize the wise teacher who helps guide others to enlightenment, which usually refers to the Buddha. Therefore, the author believes that the death of this wise nun will bring as much sorrow and losses to sentient beings as the death of the Buddha.

326 Roufan 柔範 may be equivalent to kunfan 閣範 or guifan 閣範, which all mean womanly virtues.
Fadeng (637-669): the Youngest Daughter

Fadeng was Xiao Yu’s fifth daughter born to him at the age of 63, eleven years before his death. Like her sisters, she did not seem to have a secular name and was recorded as the Late Bhikṣunī Fadeng Fashi, a title very similar to that of her eldest sister Fale. The structure of her biography also resembles that of her eldest sister, while it is shorter and less detailed than Fayuan’s. The reason behind this distinction could be that Fadeng’s death occurred six years after Fayuan, but only two years before Fale. Therefore, the writer of Fale’s biography must have been asked to write for Fadeng as well. In addition, the similar script and style could also result from the fact that both sisters’ lives were comparable to one another—less active and not as successful as Fayuan’s. Fadeng’s inscription begins with a similar preface tracing her family background and ancestor’s fame, emphasizing her relation to Xiao Yu and distant connection to Liang Wudi.\(^\text{327}\)

\(^{327}\) QTW 64.11b10-12b8.
The dharma master’s taboo name is Fadang, her surname was Xiao, a native of Lanling and the sixth generation grand-daughter of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. Her great great grandfather was Emperor Zhaoming; her great grandfather was Emperor Xuan; and her grandfather was Emperor Xiaoming. Her father [Xiao] Yu (574-648) was Prince Xin’an of Later Liang, the Gold and Purple Grand Master of Guanglu of Sui, and Attendant Gentlemen of the Imperial Palace, the Secretariat Director of the Imperial Court, and the Left and Right Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs. Under a special promotion he became the Grand Guardian of the Crown Prince, the Supreme Pillar of State and the State Duke of Song. He was [also] given the title Minister of Works. In the state history and clan genealogy there are detailed records about [her family’s] exalted basis and flourishing foundation. The dharma master was the fifth daughter of the Grand Guardian. When she had just reached fifteen years of age, she began practicing the Four [Noble] Truths.

Like her sister Fale, there was no record of her ‘auspicious birth’ or her childhood years lived among her father and siblings. Since Fayuan already left the household by the time Fadeng was born and Xiao Yu reached old age, he did seem to dote on this young daughter as he had with her elder sister, Fayuan. Although, the inscription does not provide a clear record of her life before ordination, we can presume that Xiao Yu’s Buddhist fervor greatly influenced Fadeng. As his youngest child, Xiao Yu must have kept her by his side in the remaining years of his life. At the age of fifteen, four years after her father’s death, Fadeng began the monastic life.

Ointment did not need to be applied [on her]; lead makeup did not need to decorate [her face]. Her earnest sincerity was true to the utmost, and she admires

328 The foundational/ fundamental Buddhist concept about the nature of life: suffering ku 痛 (ābhādhi), the cause of suffering ji 集 (abhiṣkārtā), the cessation of suffering is attainable mie 消 (abhāva) and the path to salvation dao 道 (adhvan).
the dignified (lit. high) trace of the paired trees. She left the secular household at an early age and distanced herself from the self vow of Cypress Boat. Like her sister, Fadeng must have been a fair lady and a desirable daughter-in-law. However, upon coming into contact with Buddhist teachings at an early age (presumably still in her teens), Fadeng decided to enter the Jidu nunnery. This was the nunnery where both her sisters, already in their fifties, were residing. While the inscription indicates the reason for her decision to leave household life was based purely on her faith and admiration for the Buddhist teaching, this is subjected to skepticism. I speculate that there exist other factors which influenced her decision. Fadeng was a girl in her early teens who felt solitude upon the death of Xiao Yu, even though she may have been invited to live with her brothers and sisters-in-laws. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why she would find comfort in her sisters; especially Fayuan who seems to have had close contact with the secular family. Fadeng’s status as a parentless child would be problematic for a matchmaker searching for a potential bride-to-be. In addition, Xiao Yu’s reputation had already decreased considerably in his later years, while none of his sons ever reached the status he once held in court. In order to avoid lowering her status and family prestige by

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329 An alternative name of the *śāla* tree, according to the legend, the Buddha reached nirvana under four pairs of *salsa* trees, with each pair sharing the same roots. Later it is commonly used as a symbol for Buddhist teachings.

330 *Baizhou* is originally the title of a poem in chapter on *Yong* in the section *Shiwu guofeng* in the *Book of songs*. According to the traditional commentaries, this poem was composed by a widow to show her determination not to remarried, and remain single. The allusion is used here to show Fadeng’s lack of interest in marriage. See Gao Heng, 64.

331 Wu Minxia identifies eight reasons why women of the Tang were attracted to Buddhism. One of these reasons were spiritual comfort women found in Buddhist philosophy, participating in religious activities and befriending other misfortunate women who lost their relatives and family members, in most cases it was their husband or parents. She See Wu Minxia, 259.
marrying a man from a lower social class (since sons from prominent families would not find her circumstance suitable), Fadeng chose to enter the monastic order. This was an alternative path with many benefits: on the one hand, preserving her virtue and dignity, while on the other hand glorifying her family’s pious reputation.

After taking on the full bigiuni precepts, Fadeng is also described to be an earnest vinaya practitioner.

Nothing is left out in terms of the precepts [she followed] and the passing of the lamp never came to an end. Along with her siblings, all four of them left the three realms. She expounded the marvelous in the terrace of flowers and it was as if she opened a forest of sparrow plums. Her saintly accomplishment had reached the truth and [her lectures] were just like the Buddha’s in the ten-direction.

This next passage reaffirms our earlier presumption of Fadeng’s wish to reunite with her elder sisters. While neither Fale or Fayuan’s inscriptions ever makes mention of

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332 Yan Chunhua also suggest that girls from noble families (royal lineage of the previous dynasty) who have passed marriageable age (twenties) and cannot find a suitable partner, would prefer to take up the tonsure instead of living an old maiden’s life and becoming a burden to their parents and brothers. Enter the monastery would allow them to preserve their dignity while bringing respect (and merit) to their family. See Wu Minxia, 78.

333 Refers to juzu jie (juzu jie) or upasamponna in Sanskrit. These are the full precepts a monk or nun takes on after being a sramanera for a certain period of time.

334 This would be her two older sisters 法樂, 法願, and older brother 薩堅, although we do not have the biography nor the dates for this brother.

335 See footnote 44 and 104 for sanjie. In the above phrase the author notes that the four sisters all left the secular household life.

336 Refers to the poem “Tangdi zhi hua” 蘇頌之華(Flower of Sparrow Plum )in the Book of Songs. According to the traditional commentaries, this poem was about the reunion of two brothers. The term is thus commonly used as a symbol for brotherhood or sisterhood. The word forest that follows this term probably refers to the fact that Fadeng had several sisters who also became nuns. See Gao Heng, 32.

337 The term chengdeng 成等 may have come from the phrase “chengdeng zhengjue hua bu shishi” 成等正覺化不失時. It refers to the fact that when a Buddha comes to the world, he will begin preaching the true law or transforming others without missing any opportunity. It is one of the ten kinds of “not missing an opportunity”十種不缺時. See Dafang guangfo huayan jing 大方廣佛華嚴經 46, T. 10: 279. 242c02-4.
siblings entering the *samgha*, Fadeng’s inscription constantly emphasizes this detail. In addition, it is stated that “four sisters and brothers” of the Xiao family entered the monastery. While it is obvious that the writer is referring to Fale, Fayuan and Fadeng, who is the fourth person? Fadeng, like her sister, was probably educated by Xiao Yu or had some private education before entering the monastery. Therefore, they were able to read and study Buddhist scriptures. Like her elder sister, Fadeng was granted the title *fashi*, and must have conducted sermons for the public. The writer also compares Fadeng’s lecture to those given by the Buddha, which suggests she must have been a well-known preacher.

Fadeng died prematurely at the age of thirty-eight, four years earlier than her eldest sister Fale. Interestingly, both sisters died at the Xianghao monastery and their funeral rituals and burial procedures were very similar. Both sisters were not cremated, as would have been the traditional Buddhist custom, but were temporarily buried in one location and relocated to a private graveyard of the Xiao family afterwards. This evidently shows that while the Xiao family was known as pious Buddhists, they were also keen observers of Confucian values. The notion that one must treasure the body given by one’s parents and is prohibited from performing any harm to the body, even after death, transcends religious boundaries and applies here to even those ordained in the Buddhist tradition.

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338 According to Dr. Li Yuzhen’s book *Tangdai biqiuni*, this fourth person is Xiao Kai, Fadeng’s younger brother, about whom we have little information. Detail discussion on Xiao Kai is in chapter 3.
How can it [be known] that as the dharma wheel just started turning and the vessel of the way was first destroyed. The dharma master passed away in the Xianghao Monastery in Pu Prefecture on the fifth day of the tenth month of the second year of the Zongzhang reign period (November 3rd, 669). She was thirty-eight years old. She was temporarily buried within Hedong County and her coffin was returned to the southern plain of Yichuan District in Mingtang County of Yong Prefecture on the twenty-third or xinmao day of the gengwu portion of the third month of the second or xinsi year of the Yonglong reign period (April 16th, 681). [All of this] was done in accordance to the rites.

It seems that the monastic members of the Jidu Nunnery had no say in Fadeng’s funeral rituals, nor did she have any ordained disciples to organize the event. Therefore, it is obvious that Fadeng’s funeral, like her sisters’, was organized and sponsored by her secular family and relatives. The eulogy inscribed on Fadeng’s tomb is unique; while not mentioning much about her life as a nun. It emphasizes her ancestral achievements, family religious fervor, and sibling relations. This causes us to wonder whether Fadeng was more recognized as a knowledgeable fashi, as indicated in the above lines, or for her relation to her famous sisters, especially Fayuan, and her connection to Xiao Yu.

[People] were afraid that hills and valleys might change and fields and oceans might transform and alternate [someday]. Thus they wrote down her honorable accomplishments (lit. foundations) to commemorate her virtues and made an epitaph saying:

339 Turning the dharma wheel is a symbol for a monk or nun propagating the dharma through preaching and lecturing to the public.

340 The term originated from the Book of Changes. The character dao was used to describe abstract matters without shape and chi was used to describe concrete matters with shape. However, perhaps in this case it simply refers to the body, which is viewed merely as a container to help achieve one’s spiritual cultivation. See Yijing, 24.
As the Prime Minister\textsuperscript{341} assisted the Han and the Minister of Education aided the Tang,\textsuperscript{342} their accomplishments have reached all under heaven, and suddenly there was the Great Liang.

After the graceful virtues grew [in the family], [the dharma master] then admired Emperor Wu.\textsuperscript{343} Her family tradition did not alter and companions of dharma can be lined into a row [in her family].\textsuperscript{344} Cloud of compassion accompanied her shadow\textsuperscript{345} and the torch of wisdom passed down the light.\textsuperscript{346}

[However], as the middle branch was hindered by snow, the small leaf was destroyed by frost.\textsuperscript{347} Before she could reach the Lower Age,\textsuperscript{348} she suddenly

\textsuperscript{341} This probably refers to Xiao He 謝何 (?- 193 BCE), who assisted Liu Bang in his founding of the Han Dynasty. He was thought of as Fadeng’s ancestor since his last name was also Xiao.

\textsuperscript{342} On the surface this seems to refer to Fadeng’s father Xiao Yu 謝玨, who was a prominent figure in the Tang court. However, Xiao Yu’s title was Sikong 司空, or the Minister of Works, and not the Minister of Education. Furthermore, in the next two lines the author refers to Fadeng’s lineage from the Liang Dynasty and it does not make much sense to mention her immediate family in Tang before that. Therefore, perhaps the Tang here refers to the ancient and legendary state established by the sage King Yao 尧. According to the Record of History 史記, there was a person named Qi 契 who served under Yao and was given the title of Minister of Education when Shun 商 succeeded the throne. This Qi later became the ancestor of the royal family of Yin Dynasty. Since Weizi 微子, the brother of the last king of Yin, was the founder of the state of Song, and Fadeng’s father was the State Duke of Song, which may be the reason why the author mentions the title Minister of Education in this line. 撫政八年而堯崩。三年喪畢，謚丹朱，天下歸舜。而虞，皋陶，契，后稷，伯夷，夔，龍，倕，益，彭祖自堯時而皆舉用，未有分職。... 殷契，母曰簡狄，有娀氏之女... 契長而佐禹治水有功，帝舜乃命契曰：「百姓不親，五品不訓，汝為司徒而敬敷五教，五教在寬。」封於 商，賜姓子氏. See Shiji 1: 38-9.

\textsuperscript{343} Emperor Liang Wudi.

\textsuperscript{344} This probably refers to the fact that she has two other sisters who also became Buddhist nuns, thus the clergywomen among her family were numerous and “can be lined into a row.”

\textsuperscript{345} This image is probably just a symbol for her proper behaviors and the way of life as a nun.

\textsuperscript{346} This is a common metaphor that compares the passing on of the Buddhist teaching with the passing on of the fire from torch to torch.

\textsuperscript{347} The middle branch probably refers to her old sister Fayuan, and the small leaf probably refers to Fadeng. Fayuan passed away in 663 and Fadeng passed away six years later in 669.

\textsuperscript{348} Ancient Chinese classified a person’s age into Upper, Middle and Lower Ages. The definition of the ages, however, is problematic and has two versions. In the Zhangzi 莊子, the Lower Age is used to describe those who reach sixty sui and the Middle Age eighty. In Kong Yingda’s孔穎達 (574-648), commentary on Zuozhuan 右傳, however, the Lower Age is used to describe those who reach eighty sui and the Middle Age a hundred. In either case, this line means that Fadeng died prematurely and should have lived into the Middle or even Upper Age. 人上壽百歲，中壽八十，下壽六十。左傳僖公三十二年: 中壽，爾篡之木拱矣。孔穎達疏: 上壽百二十歲，中壽百，下壽八十. See Zhuangzi jishi 9a: 1000.
went to [the paradise of] the west. Once she has surpassed the Realm of Desire, for a thousand years [later] her fragrant (reputation) shall [still] remain. 聲陵谷負遷．田海變易．式題貞礎．用紀芳猷．乃為銘曰．丞相輔漢．司徒佐唐．功格天 下．奄有大梁．暨茲令淑．爰慕武皇．家風靡替．法侶成行．慈雲比影．慧炬傳光． 中枝犯雪．小葉摧霜．未登下壽．忽往西方．一超懸界．千載餘芳.

Huiyuan 惠源 (662-737): the Extraordinary Granddaughter

The last female member of the Xiao family to take up the monastic robe was Xiao Yu’s granddaughter, Huiyuan, whose long life and dynamic religious career could be said to be the most fascinating out of the four nuns. Even the detailed emphasis in her inscription is vastly different than the previous generation. Before introducing her family’s genealogy as typical with the other three biographies, the compiler for Huiyuan chose to begin by elaborating on the Buddhist concept of Tathāgata, which hints that the subject of the inscription was respected or admired as a living Buddha.

I once heard that seeing one’s nature is what forms the foundation [of cultivation], and knowing about [the ephemeral nature of] consistency is called enlightenment. The profound pearl [of knowledge] which one searches for in the obscured and the dharma seal which [one master] passes [to another] will certainly have an owner. [The transition of knowledge will seem so authentic that] people will not have disagreement about it; this is how the former Tathāgata is established in the past, present, and future. 會聞見性為本．知常曰明．幽探玄 珠．相付法印．必將有主．人無聞言．故如來立三世之事也．

According to the inscription, Huiyuan is known only by her taboo name and surname Xiao. She was the daughter of Xiao Yi, the third son to Xiao Yu, who held the

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349 This is kāma-dhātu, the lowest among the Three Worlds or tri-dhātu of sentient beings.

350 An alternative title referring to the Buddha.

351 QTW 396 19a4-20b7.

352 The QTW version uses 元.
post of Governor in Li Prefecture, located in present day Sichuan province. Her mother is not mentioned and we are only told that she had many unnamed siblings. Nevertheless, the compiler does not forget to foreshadow Huiyuan’s future success and fame by describing her auspicious birth and extraordinary talent as a child.

The great master’s taboo name was Huiyuan. Her secular family name was Xiao. She was a native of Lanling. Her great grandfather was the Xiaoming Emperor of Liang. Her grandfather’s taboo name was Yu (574–648 CE.), the Secretariat Director of the Imperial Court, the Left and Right Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs, the Minister of Works, and the State-duke of Song. Her father’s taboo name was Yi ( ?~670 CE.). He was the Supervising Secretary and the Prefect of Li Prefecture. With myriad accomplishments her family was prosperous; it was a prominent family for generations. Originally when the great master was first born, her kind voice was pure and far-reaching and her aura was soaring and bright. She received the natural and unrestrained qualities during an age of great peace and concentrated the divine blessings in her great fortune. The year of “great peace” is referring to the reign of Tang Gaozong, who, although a frail man and weak politician had a prosperous and peaceful reign. It was also during this era that Buddhism was less constrained by governmental regulation and received much support by prominent households, which included Gaozong’s second wife, Empress Wu Zetian. Huiyuan, born into a Buddhist family in which three aunts had already left the household, was undoubtedly immersed in Buddhist customs and ideas.

353 The term xianqi 間氣 or jianqi 間氣 literally means the “in-between aura.” In the ancient time when a great person was born, his birth was often said to correspond to the will or order of heaven and earth; therefore, inside his body there was this aura or energy that is caught between heaven and earth.

354 The term chungu 純嘏 originated from a line the poem Binzi chuyun 宾之初筵 of the Xiaoya in the Book of Songs. “謂爾純嘏，子孫其誇。” (We confer on you great blessings, ’ [says the representative of the dead], And may your descendants [also] be happy! ) The term has since been used to describe fortunes in having many gifted descendants. Original script see Gao Heng, 343. For English translation see James Legge, 397.
while growing up. She might have had a chance to meet face to face with Fale, who was sixty-three, and Fadeng, who was thirty-seven, but probably did not have any memories of them. Although not stated explicitly, it is possible that Huiyuan might have had a chance to accompany her father to visit her aunts at Jidu nunnery and was greatly influenced by these nuns, and so adopted monastic habits at a young age.

When she reached a few years of age, she always showed respect when she received care and all her actions were in accordance with the [Buddhist] principles. When she began her steps they fit\(^{355}\) the way [of Buddhist teachings] and when she uttered her words they all have order. She rejected the gold and jade and felt suffocated by their luxuries and beauties; she was cut off from the meat and stench and was isolated from the obsessions and desires. Transcendently she triumphed over [all desires] and all she thought about was becoming a nun.及數歲後, 養必申敬, 動皆合理; 發跡契道, 出言有章。屏金翠而窺其繁華, 絕荤腥而割其嗜欲; 超然戰勝, 但思出家.

Contrary to her aunt Fayuan, who made an unexpected decision by entering the monastery and relinquishing her cherished ornaments and beautiful clothing, Huiyuan showed signs of renunciation early in her childhood years by rejecting secular luxuries and mundane desires. This rejection of such luxury goods as gold, jade and meat illustrates her religious orientation, and also reveals that Huiyuan’s household was quite wealthy even though her family was now living outside of the main capital Chang’an. The writer of Huiyuan’s biography seems to pay little attention to her education and scholastic achievements, while constantly emphasizing her virtue as a sister and daughter.

Originally when the great master had only reached eight years of age, she encountered the cruelty of losing her father; when she was twenty-six, she held the sorrow of losing her mother.\(^{356}\) [She and her siblings] all cried blood and

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\(^{355}\) The character 豁 literally means a pair of matching tokens or talismans used to prove authenticity. Later it is used verbally, meaning to fit or match, like a pair of such tokens.

\(^{356}\) The terms 夫 and 妻 literally mean the husband and the lady. In this case, they refer to the husband and the wife of the family, namely Huiyuan’s parents.
were choked with sadness; they stopped eating and became thin like fire wood.
Alas! As for the filial children in the ancient time, how are they worth mentioning [when compared to them]? Every time when the dew dropped under the autumn sky and the wind blew early in the withering forest, her thoughts of missing her parents would make her slim and weak as if she were still attending the funeral. This is not forgetting about filial piety. Going upward she could also guide her bigger brothers, and beside her she could teach her younger brothers and nephews. She could make her sisters' chambers to be harmonious and let it not be corrupted. Thus her [benevolent] nature in the family bonds surpassed [ordinary] people by several levels.

The loss of Huiyuan’s mother at the age of eight and father at the age of twenty-six showed that she was always a part of her secular family affairs even after ordination. At the death of her father, Huiyuan resumed the role of a filial daughter and responsible sister. In fact, Huiyuan never really shook off her duties with her family and was always in close contact with them. Instead of being scorned for violating monastic regulations, the author praises Huiyuan for constantly attending to her family affairs. This also reflects society’s expectation of Buddhist monks and nuns. Even though these people

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357. The term jixin 棘心 literally means the heart of thorns. The terms originated from the chapter Kaifeng 凱風 in the section of Beifeng 北風 of the Book of Songs: 凱風自南, 吹彼棘心 (The genial wind from the south Blows on the heart of that jujube tree) Because it was traditionally interpreted as a poem about young children missing their parents, the term has since been used to refer to people’s childhoods or children’s thoughts of missing their parents. See Gao Heng, 43.

358. The term guimen 門門 refers to the door of a lady’s room. In this case it probably refers to Huiyuan’s sisters.

359. Yan Yaozhong argues that while many hagiographies of Buddhist nuns record them to be strict adherers to monastic precepts, in actual practice many nuns of the Tang openly violated the vinaya without being ridiculed by the monastery or public. Therefore, by the Tang many Buddhist customs have become secularized and fused with Confucius values, especially allowance of Buddhist monks and nuns to associate and care for their secular family. This is not necessarily a negative transformation if we consider that by being “sinolized,” Buddhism was able to penetrate deeper into the daily life of the Chinese people without having contradictions such as in disagreement with leaving the household life as unfilial action. See Yan Yaozhong, 100; Yang Mei, “Tangdai nuseng yu shisu jiating de guanxi,” 91.
have left the household life, they are still expected to conform to certain social customs. This is also a realistic illustration of the fact that monks and nuns although vowing to be detached from family affairs and worldly attachment, are still quite emotionally affected. In Huiyuan’s case, she was unable to eat because of sadness due to her father’s death. Her response to melancholy garners her praises from the writer and perhaps from her relatives and society as well.

According to the vinaya, a monk or nun is not allowed to concern himself or herself with their own or other people’s family affairs. Therefore, Huiyuan helped to guide her siblings and teach her younger nephew during times of family crises, which confirms that monks and nuns do not totally sever contact with their secular family members. On the contrary, they become spiritual guides who are usually in close connection with their kinsman and do not reject their worldly responsibilities if circumstances demand. Therefore, while the secular family provides financial support to the monks and nuns, it expects in return to have personal consultation from the monastic members. In addition, it becomes obvious that the reason the author chose to record this story in Huiyuan’s inscription was to glorify her filial character. The conflict between the Confucius’ notion of filial piety formerly contradicted with Buddhist custom of shaving one’s hair and leaving the household life. Buddhist clerics have tried successfully to incorporate this notion of being filial to one’s parent as part of the Buddhist tradition. Under such circumstances monks and nuns who openly show their concern for secular family members are greatly admired as model clerics and receive respect by both the
monastic and secular communities such as in the case of the nun Zhijue 智覺 of Shengdaosi 聖道寺 who built a stūpa in honor of her deceased father.\textsuperscript{360}

Huiyuan’s entrance into the nunnery seems to have been a difficult task. At the age of twenty-one she was imperially approved to be ordained at Jidu nunnery, where her aunts formerly resided. However, the circumstances that led to her ordination and the year she was approved by the imperial decree demand some discussion.

Heaven detected her pure and bright wish and her sincerity moved those above her.\textsuperscript{361} When she was twenty-one years old she was imperially approved to be ordained as a bhikṣunī in the Jidu Nunnery and fulfilled her original wish. She received her precepts from the great and virtuous bhiksuni in the Heshang Nunnery\textsuperscript{362} and the way [of her spiritual life] was exalted. Her karmācārya was the vinaya master Baochen from the Taiyuan Monastery and the dharma was in good order.

Huiyuan’s intention to become a nun was unexpected by her elders and family members. Marriage arrangements must have been in the works for Huiyuan, however, for various reasons,\textsuperscript{363} she decided to lead an honorable religious life. Only after much persuasion and determination did her mother and other elderly members agree to grant her approval. Nevertheless, her late ordination may also have resulted from burdening

\begin{footnotes}
\item[360] See “Guda youposai jinzhou hongdongxian lingsun baiyue huishen taming” <故大優婆塞晉州洪洞縣令孫僧慧身塔銘>, \textit{Quan tang wen buyi}, 284-5.
\item[361] Perhaps this refers to the senior members of her family who eventually allowed her to become a nun?
\item[362] The \textit{QTW} version indicates that there are two places where characters may be missing in this line. One in between the characters shan 上 and si 寺, and another in between the characters ni 尼 and dao 道. Therefore, the exact name of the monastery and nun may not be accurate.
\item[363] Perhaps similar to Fadeng’s case where they could not find a match suitable in character and moral to her level, entering the monastery was the alternative and best solution.
\end{footnotes}
family responsibilities to help her mother raise her younger siblings. Contrary to her aunts, the reason Huiyuan needed to have imperial approval to be ordained and enter the Jidu nunnery may be because of the political change in the year of her ordination, 683. After months of sickness, Gaozong died (683) and left the government power in the hands of Empress Wu. This ordination registration could have been one of the many new national laws to control the expanding samgha population and purify the monastic community of immoral and insincere monks and nuns. This national registry did not become official until 729.\(^\text{364}\) This could also have been the doing of the Xiao family, who wanted to display their religious commitment to Buddhism openly to the imperial house, especially to Empress Wu, a well-known Buddhist supporter. This pious act on the part of Huiyuan subtly shows the Xiao family’s sentiment and support for the Empress, which resulted on her being granted residence at the famous Jidu Nunnery in Chang’ an.

In this passage, the writer made a slight mistake by stating that Huiyuan was ordained as a *biqiuni* at Jidu nunnery and later stating that she received her (bhiksuni) precepts from Master Baochen 薄勑 (?-687+) at 和上寺 Hesheng Nunnery. The logical sequence should begin with Huiyuan being ordained as a novice and receiving the ten *shamini* 沙彌尼 (Skt. *srāmaneri*) precepts at Jidu nunnery, and later taking part in a full-ordination ceremony at Hesheng Monastery to receive her *bhikṣuni* robes under the *vinaya* master Bochen\(^\text{365}\) as the *karmācārya*.\(^\text{366}\) Huiyuan’s need to travel to Hesheng

\(^{364}\) Kenneth Chen, 244-5.

\(^{365}\) Bochen was a famous *vinaya* master usually referred to as Chen lushi 高律師. He most well known as one of Fazang 法藏(643-712), the third patriarch of the *Avatāraka* tradition in China, teacher and friend. See Jinhua Chen, *Fazang*, 54, 81-83, 89-90, 93.
monastery to receive her precepts is not atypical in accordance to Buddhist tradition. According to the *vinaya*, in order to receive the full precepts the candidate must have at least ten monks and nuns as head masters and witnesses, twenty in total, to be able to perform the ritual. If the number of masters is not sufficient and the ceremony still proceeds, the disciples who partake in that ritual will not be considered fully ordained as a nun or *bhikṣunī*. Because this ceremony is quite complicated and demanding of human labor as well as financial resources, monasteries took turns holding it once or twice each year. Therefore, during the period in which Huiyuan is approved to take the full ordination, it is likely that the closet institution to organize this event was at the Hesheng Monastery. The author’s emphasis on making a detailed narration of Huiyuan’s ordination procedure could be explained by the writer’s own interest in the subject matter. Or, there may have been a great crisis over distinguishing the illegitimate from the state qualified ordained monks and nuns.

Huiyuan proved to be an ardent and intelligent student who had great interest in studying the *vinaya* and perfecting her moral character and actions.

She then extended [the teachings of] her masters, established witness [for the dharma], rose to the platform, and advanced on [her cultivation of] *vinaya*. Her days as a member of the *samgha* were pure during every year; her pearls of

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366 Short for 聖箤阿闍梨. 阿闍梨 is *karma* and 阿闍梨 is *ācārya* or teacher. *Karmācārya* is the teacher from whom one receives the *bhiksu* or *bhikṣuni* precepts, also unknown as juzu ‘aduli 具足阿闍梨 (Skt. *paripūrṇa-sīla*).

367 See *Sifen bīqium jieban*, T. 22: 1431.1038a05.

368 願 is sometimes used to translate the Sanskrit word sākyā, which means to witness or “to make with eyes.”

369 餘夏 means the number of summers or years that have passed since one became a monk or nun. By extension it may also refer to temples or monasteries.
precepts were bright like the sun. She humbly received the precepts, let them
revolve, and dared not let them drop. As for going inward, she demonstrated
the complete and all inclusive [way of getting rid of obsessions]; going outward she showed them
the expedients [to Buddhist truth]. Gradually she guided them to goodness and those who followed her to convert flowed like a river. [Her lecture] was also like the roaring of a lion, which severely destroyed the palace of Mara. It is to such extent that she could move and stimulate other people’s
goodness. As for her walking, living, sitting, and lying down, they all correspond
to [the principles of] emptiness. As for her compassion and her willingness to
contribute, [such actions were] done but were constantly silenced. Her yellow robe
contained great fortune and her pure manners were fine and harmonious. It is to
such extent that she could be a model for others.

Like her aunt, Huiyuan was literate and able to study Buddhist doctrines, and was
not afraid to share her understanding with other nuns and lay friends, an amicable
characteristic that would attract her many followers. Her skill at public speaking and
persuading others became an advantage when she conducted dharma sermons, and
attracted for her a large base of disciples who respected and trusted the master
wholeheartedly. However, she purportedly remained humble about her deeds and

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370 A Buddhist metaphor meaning that one’s life becomes as pure as pearls when he follows the precepts. It
may also refer to the Buddhist rosary.

371 This is probably a metaphorical image describing how closely she followed the precepts.

372 bing 炳 literally means bright. When used verbally it can mean to demonstrate something as clearly as
bright light.

373 The Chinese translation for the Sanskrit word upāya (Ch. fangbian 方便), meaning the expedient
approaches for preaching Buddhism. Such compromising methods are considered necessary since the
religion’s profound and difficult philosophy may be hard to understand or accept at first for some people.

374 A common metaphor in Buddhism for describing the lecture of the Buddha or other eminent monks.

375 This means she did not show off about her merits.

376 A turtle shell can be a tool for divination and a mirror can be a tool for determining beauty. Therefore, a
turtle and a mirror refer to a model or example from which people can learn a lesson.
achievements. Contrary to the belief that only lay people were able to make donations, Huiyuan is said to have frequently made offerings of gifts and coins to less recognized nuns in the monastery or to the poor people who came to her for financial help. This also refutes the myth that monks and nuns had no personal property or valuables; on the contrary, the more famous a monk or nun became, the more wealth and gifts he or she was able to accumulate.

Huiyuan was not only an active dharma master who earnestly tried to help others spiritually and materialistically, but she was also a fervent student who yearned to learn from eminent masters and was always open to productive criticism.

Later she encountered the eminent monk Yifu\textsuperscript{377} (658–736 CE.), with whom she often meditated under the pure dhyana. With Zhiguan\textsuperscript{378} he passed the enlightenment [to her] and the exceptional treatment of respect was acknowledged by all. There was also the bhikṣuni Cihe ( ?- ?),\textsuperscript{379} [who possessed] knowledge that could calculate [all affairs in] the world. She understood the subtle and was connected with the spiritual; when she saw the material world\textsuperscript{380} there is no obstruction [in her understanding of the truth]. People at the time called her Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. She once saw the great master in a big crowd of clergymen and said:

"The Sixteen Sramanera was the former title of our master Sakyamuni in the \textit{Lotus [Sutra].} If the great master’s mind is not the same as that of Tathagata, then how can she reach such extent [of cultivation] ?"

Afterwards [the great master] further continued her own inner cultivation\textsuperscript{381}

\textsuperscript{377} His biography is in the SGSZ 9, T: 50: 2061.760b08-c08.

\textsuperscript{378} Refers to \textit{Mohe zhiguan 摩訶止觀}, an important text in the Tiantai School 天台. Lectured by master Zhiyi 智顑 in 594 CE., and recorded by his disciple Guanding 灌頂. \textit{Zhi} 止 and \textit{guan} 観 are translations for the Sanskrit words \textit{samatha} and \textit{vipaśyanā} respectively. Although these two concepts are found in the Indian tradition, the specific contents of 摩訶止觀 seem to be the original creation of Zhiyi.

\textsuperscript{379} It is regretful that there is no information on this nun.

\textsuperscript{380} Literally means “color.”

\textsuperscript{381} The term \textit{mixing 行} under the Mahayana context can refer to the personal practice of cultivating goodness within oneself, which is not supposed to be shown outwardly to others.
diligently and personally carried a glorious glow. Between several years more than ten years of time, she spread and expounded the teachings he/she left behind.\textsuperscript{382} In her later years, Huiyuan was fortunate to meet with famous Chan Master Yifu, also known as Zhida Chanshi (661-736),\textsuperscript{383} to learn in-depth meditation. Hearing the words from the great master Cihe \textsuperscript{384} allowed Huiyuan to reflect on the subtle sense of self-satisfaction. Yearning to study and better oneself through hard work and self-reflection is once again emphasized as a virtue worth praising. In a sense, while writing about Huiyuan, the author is also using her story as a didactic tool for later generations. Fascinating as her life proved to be, her death was no less extraordinary.

One day, the great master became tired of this world and manifested illness. On the second day of the ninth month in the autumn of the twenty-fifth year of the Kaiyuan reign (September 30\textsuperscript{th}, 737), she leisurely spoke to her disciples saying: “Life and death are the constant phenomena of heaven. After my life perishes, build an exposed cave at the plain of Shaoling for the migration of my spirit.” After her speech was finished, she lay down on her right armpit\textsuperscript{387} and peacefully she returned to silence. We then knew that an extremely

\textsuperscript{382} The term houshi 後事 is somewhat ambiguous. It could refer to the teachings left by the nun Cihe, but without knowing the year of her death I cannot be entirely sure. It could also refer to the teachings left by the Buddha, because the character 後 is sometimes used to describe what happened after the Buddha reached nirvana, as in the phrase hou wu hou sui (five-hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvana).

\textsuperscript{383} He is the disciple of Shenxiu 神秀 (606?-706), and is a renowned meditation master. He is also recorded in Princess Daiguo’s biography as giving her instructions on meditation. See Jinhua Chen, Fascang  266.

\textsuperscript{384} Her dates are unknown; however, she is recorded to have associated with Princess Daiguo and made a prediction of the princess’s rebirth in Tusita Heaven. See Jinhua Chen, Fascang, 266.

\textsuperscript{385} Literally means “way.”

\textsuperscript{386} Located in the southern part of today’s Chang-an County in the Shaanxi Province, northwest of the city Chang-an.

\textsuperscript{387} The position in which the Buddha lies down and rests.
[enlightened] person is not obstructed by materials. Alas! Such heavenly death! What would her disciples look up to [from then on]? What rules would they follow? At that time the great master was seventy and five years old. Then on the second day of the eleventh month [of that year (November, 28th, 737)] they had a funeral at an exposed cave and followed her principles and wishes. Being devoted to the virtue that had no boundary and raising the model that was not displayed, how are they not appropriate? The epitaph says: “Praise\textsuperscript{389} the enlightened ways [of the great master]; her footsteps will no longer return. The extremely [enlightened] person had left; she is freely on her own among heaven and earth.”

Contrary to the occasions of her aunts’ death and funeral rites, Huiyuan was able to give her last speech and voice her burial choice before death. Her death wish to be buried in an exposed cave would be expected of her character, a master of the \textit{vinaya} and Buddhist scriptures. However, Huiyuan’s burial preference is unique in the choosing of an exposed cave.\textsuperscript{389} Although she did not request for a cremation rite which would have been opposed by her family, to ask for an exposed cave burial was equally tabooed by Confucius scholars because it also exposes the corpse to wild animals and a gruesome decomposition for natural decomposition was comparably gruesome to the ancient Chinese mind. In addition, the exposed cave is also situated in the same location as Fayuan’s burial. Was it as coincidence that Fayuan and Huiyuan, the most well-known nuns of the Xiao family, were buried in the Shaolin plains, while Fale and Fadeng had...

\textsuperscript{388} The title \textit{Yi na} 為那 can either mean graceful or function as a phrase for beginning a praise. It is originated from a poem title \textit{Na} 那 in the chapter \textit{Shangsong} 商頌 Book of Songs: “猗與那與.” (How admirable.) See Gao Heng, 525.

\textsuperscript{389} \textit{kong} 空 or \textit{shenkong} 神空 is a special Buddhist burial in which the body is left in an exposed stone cave. The cave can be either naturally formed or manually dug on the wall of a cliff. The body is left there for wild animals to devour, after which the family will collect the remaining bones and either cremate or bury them. See Liu Shufen, “Shishi yiku: zhonggu fojiao lushi zangyanjiu,” 1-12.
their bones relocated to a burial ground in Yong prefecture? One possible explanation is that Fayuan and Huiyuan had ordained disciples to organize their funerals and maintain some influence over their masters' last resting place. In the absence of ordained disciples, Fale and Fadeng had to depend on their secular family to make funeral decisions. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a difference between the burial preferences of the lay relatives and monastic disciples.

The disciples decided to title her tombstone: the “Exposed Cave Epitaph with a Preface for the Great and Virtuous Late Bhikusuni and Eminent Nun”\textsuperscript{390} Huiyuan (662–737 CE.) of the Jidu Nunnery\textsuperscript{391} of Great Tang\textsuperscript{392}. Out of the four nuns, only Huiyuan was referred to as $dade$ 大德 and $heshang$ 和尚,\textsuperscript{393} which are prestigious titles only granted to monks of great virtue and contribution. Therefore, the fact that Huiyuan was given such honorific titles substantiates that women in Buddhism were treated relatively equal to male ordained disciples and with more respect based on spiritual cultivation, virtue and wisdom. In addition, this also shows that the advantage of a monk or nun’s family’s wealth and prominence could only influence so much his or her religious life and career. Ultimately, it was only the individual’s effort and accomplishment which could truly earn them respect and admiration.

\textsuperscript{390} $heshang$ 和上 is the same as $heshang$ 和尚 meaning an eminent monk or nun.

\textsuperscript{391} A famous monastery in Chang-an.

\textsuperscript{392} QTW, 396.19a4-10.

\textsuperscript{393} In Jinhua Chen’s “Family Ties,” he discusses that the usage of $hesheng$ was exclusively for monks while nuns were referred to as $ni$ $hesheng$. This does not apply to Huiyuan, which suggest that the author and her contemporaries did see her as a “female cleric” but as a respectable master. See Jinhua Chen, 66.
Concluding Remarks

The Xiao nuns lived during a time Buddhism had already infiltrated the social and spiritual lives of the Chinese people. This was also a period we see major changes and sinicization of traditional Buddhist customs which is most apparent in the daily lives and activities of monks and nuns. While it is prescribed in the *vinaya* that ordained members lead secluded lives, detached from all worldly affairs and associations, this orthodox custom faced opposition in the Confucius-influenced society that values family ties and social involvement. Compromises were made especially among the monastic community to uphold Buddhist customs while not violating Confucius values and creating public animosity; this is clearly seen in the lives of the Xiao nuns, their relationship and close association with their family before and after entering the monastery.

Leaving one’s parents and abandoning one filial responsibility was proscribed in the Confucius society, however, with the introduction of Buddhism this originally taboo practice became acceptable and even encouraged in pious Buddhist families such as the Xiao’s. It is undeniable that Xiao Yu daughters’ decisions to enter the *samgha* were directly related to their father’s pious attitude and religious inclination that influenced their upbringing and social acquaintance. Fale’s entrance into the monastery at the tender age of three, Fayuan’s frequent visits to the nunneries and Fadeng’s ordination after her father’s death was all directly or indirectly connected to the Xiao’s family religious custom and values dating back several centuries. In addition, Xiao Yu was not the only lay family member who associated with these nuns after they entered Jidusi. Relatives
from afar often prepared and held grand *zhai* feast for these nuns. This Buddhist feast was originally practiced to accumulate merit for the donor and his or her family; however, in the Xiao nuns’ case it holds underlying significances. During these gatherings, the secular family also donated gifts and money to Jidusi which indirectly benefited and ensured the well-beings and status of the Xiao nuns. In addition, these festivities also provided a good opportunity for the family (both lay and monastic) to gather and socialize without outwardly violating the monastic code. While the secular family provided financial support to their monastic family members, the Xiao nuns were instrumental to motivate their lay relatives to participate in such religious events.

The second example which illustrates the complex relationship between the lay and monastic members and shows the compromise between Buddhist customs and Confucius values is the funeral rites performed for these nuns. Contrary to the traditional cremation practice performed for a Buddhist monk or nun, the Xiao sisters’ funeral proceedings followed Confucius customs filled with taboo against inflicting pain and damage onto the dead corpse. In Fale and Fadeng’s cases, their bodies were placed in a coffin and temporarily buried in once place and at a later time had their remains relocated to the family’s private graveyard or ancestral hall. This complex rite was likely to have been the decision of the family who financially sponsored the whole event and therefore, had authority to decide the last resting place for the two nuns. Fayuan’s funeral rite while still different from the prescribed Buddhist tradition was a compromise between the secular family’s request and her disciples’ involvement. Her body was not cremated nor returned to the family private graveyard but placed in a coffin and buried in a public area. Huiquan’s burial rite and proceeding had more Buddhist flavor when compared to her
aunts'. Her body was placed in an exposed cave for natural decomposition. The fact that her disciples carried out this burial method in accordance to her last wil, suggests that the monastic community had authority over the organization of the whole event without being intervened (if there was, it was not successful) by the secular family members who would have thought this method gruesome and cruel. This is quite surprising given the fact that out of the four Xiao nuns, Huiquan kept the closest contact and continuously involved herself with family affairs. From the above examples, we can conclude that the close association between Buddhist nuns and their secular family members was a common and accepted phenomenon in Tang China.
Chapter 3

Eminent Monks of the Xiao Family

The Xiao family not only produced a fair quantity of nuns but an even larger number of monks. According to various sources such as the Quan tang wen, Xu gaoseng zhuang, and Song gaoseng zhuang we are able to trace the biographies of five monks of the Xiao clan and identify the name of a sixth monk whose background and religious career is obscure due to the lack of concrete information. Unlike the Xiao nuns who lived within a one hundred year span and were close relatives to Xiao Yu, most of these monks were distant relatives and some lived much later (or earlier) than Yu. They date approximately from the early Sui dynasty to the later Tang period. Based on the dates, Xiao Yu would only have been able to know the existence of four members: one son, one distant uncle, and two nephews. The last monk lived 150 years after Yu and probably only knew of his reputation. From analyzing the content of these five biographies and the fact that a possible sixth monk does not have one, it is obvious that their reputations and religious careers, with exception to Sengfeng, were less noticeable and distinguished compared to the Xiao nuns. Even if they did achieve extraordinary success, it was recorded in a very vague manner, sometimes neglecting to pinpoint precise dates and names such as dates of their ordination or the place and time of their death and burial. Information recorded in their biographies reveals that different issues are emphasized than that of a nun’s biography; for instance, while purity and adherence to the vinaya seems to be a key characteristic of worthy biquiuni, this virtue is hardly a concern for the monk. Rather, the monk is concerned with academic success such as composing poems, mastering
calligraphy and outwitting others in philosophical debates, which are mentioned in great detail.

By analyzing the contents of these biographies we are able to see the religious fervor of other lay members of the Xiao family, the intimate relationship and co-support between the ordained monks and secular relatives, as well as a visible connection between the Xiao family’s traditional practice of worshipping the Lotus Sūtra and the monks’ own daily cultivation exercises. Lastly, it is interesting to note that while all of the Xiao nuns were ordained and lived at the Jidu Monastery, only two Xiao male cousins lived in the same monastery, while the rest lived in different institutions in the capital Chang’an and cities in the southern Provinces. Even though the Xiao family was financially competent to built private monasteries for their monastic relatives, only Xiao Yu is recorded to be involved in the reconstruction of the Jinliang Monastery which, surprisingly, none of the monks were recorded to have ever lived in or even visited. Instead, they individually chose or were appointed by imperial decree to reside in public monasteries. Even with such a large number of male members entering the samgha, these monks never developed a heredity-abbot system or privatized a monastery.394 The section of this chapter will explore the lives and religious career of the Xiao monks in relation to Xiao Yu and in comparison to the success of the female monastic members from the same lineage. Similar to the preceding chapter, each monk will be examined independently according to seniority in three components: secular life before ordination, 

394 Phyllis Granoff’s talk on “Fathers and Sons: Some Remarks on the Ordination of Children in the Medieval Svetambara Monastic Community.” Second International Symposium on “Monasticism: Asian Perspectives,” UBC, February 21-22, 2003. Dr. Granoff’s explores the role of kinship ties beyond ordination, especially in the case of children ordained by their close relatives. She also points out the relationship between monks in a Jain monastery and patronage from their lay relatives of two major groups in Northwest India, the Kharataragaccha and the Tapagaccha.
motive and lifestyle after entering the samgha and religious and/or social contributions performed during his lifetime.

**Sengfeng 僧鳳 (ca. 554-630): Most Noteworthy and Influential Xiao Monk**

Recorded in the *Xu gaosheng zhuang*, 395 Shi Sengfeng’s great-great-grandfather Xiao Yi 蕭懿 is the elder brother of Yu’s great-great-great-grandfather Xiao Yan (Liang Wudi) which makes Sengfeng a distant uncle of Xiao Yu even though they were only twelve years apart in age. It is not recorded whether Yu knew of Sengfeng or if they ever met before he became a monk; also, the biography gives few details about Sengfeng’s life before the age of fifteen and his relation with other family members. Only the names of famous male ancestors are mentioned while the names of his mother, siblings, the area he resided and even his own secular name are omitted.

Shi Sengfeng has the surname Xiao. His great-great-grandfather was Gaozu of the Liang, his great-grandfather [Xiao] Yi 396 was the Director of the Chancellery, Prince Xuanwu of the Liang; his grandfather [Xiao] Gui 397 was General Mingwei 398 of the Liang and Marquis of Panyu 399; his deceased father [Xiao]

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395 XGSZ 13, 7: 50. 526b11-527.
396 Xiao Yi 蕭懿 (?-500) polite name Yuanda 元達, a native of Lanling and elder brother of Liang Wudi 梁武帝. Made great military contributions, was once advised by his younger brother Yan 隱 to rebel against the Ji but he refused. He was suspected of treason and died by being poisoned to death. He was granted the post-humus titles Changsha Junwang 長沙郡王 and Xuan Wu 宣武. After Yi’s death, his brother Xiao Yan revolted against Southern Qi and established Liang dynasty. See Nan qi shu 57: 995; Wei shu 98: 2170-1.
397 General of Northern Qi, does not a biography of his own but mentioned in various sources. See Nan qi shu 8: 248; Bei shi 89: 2931; Sui shu 26: 721-2.
398 The literal translation of Mingwei jiangjun 明威將軍 is The General of Brilliance and Power.
Chang was the General Zhaoyuan and Probationary of Xinchang of the Chen Dynasty.}<ref>释僧胤, 姓施氏. 梁高其族祖也. 曾祖.getFloat("str2str").toString())

As we can see, male members from Sengfeng’s side of the Xiao clan were also able to obtain high official positions and titles comparable to those from Yu’s branch. Sengfeng himself came from a wealthy and prestigious background and probably received a good academic education and upbringing. He became a distinguished scholar and had the potential to become a successful official.

Because of his glorious familial background and the prestige of its reputation, [Sengfeng had set up feelings that were broad, established traces [of conduct] that were lofty and austere. In the past, when he reached the age of “admiring scholarship” (zhixue, that is. When he was fifteen years old), he showed intelligence that was achieved in his previous lives. His literary composition already reflected a [strong] argument that surpassed [his colleagues] and [were quite] distinguish. The essays that he had composed [totaled] to more than one-hundred pieces. He distinguished himself from the men of letter, and [those] experts [in the field] all have read [his works]. He was thereby able to establish a good reputation at an early age, and his reputation was outstanding in the capital. 鳳以族資蓄華, 鳳望高遠, 置情恢廓, 立履標峻. 昔在志學, 聰慧夙成. 文翰曾映, 聲 辯超挺. 所製雜文, 百有餘首. 冠出儒林, 識者咸誇. 固得早登延譽, 令逸京華.

The author excluded information about Sengfeng’s immediate family background; therefore, we are unable to identify where his branch of the family resided. We can

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399 Located in the eastern region of the Ling Nan Circuit, present day Guangzhou.
400 Like his father, he does not have an official biography and is mentioned once in the Wenxin diaolong 9: 1719.
401 A city of the Ling Nan Circuit, present day Northern Vietnam.
402 The dynasty lasted from 557-589.
403 This is a reference from the chapter Weizheng of the Lunyu which states the preferred activity at a certain age: yu shiyouwu er zhi yu xue 苒十有五而志于學 (at the age of fifteen sui, I started to commit myself to scholarship.). See Lunyu 1.
speculate that if his father was the Probationary of Xinchang, the family probably lived in or near this city situated in present day North Vietnam. The above passage emphasizes Feng’s academic achievements and reputation as a gifted young scholar but excludes other important information such as whether he ever obtained a scholarly degree or held an official position as his talents proved he had the capabilities to do so. When he reached the age of nineteen, Feng had contact with Master Sengcan (529-613), the famous Buddhist exegete known as the third patriarch of the Chinese Chan tradition.

In the first year of the Kaihuang era (581 CE), Dharma Master Sengcan’s fame was [spread throughout] the five great cities, his learning completely covered “Eight Canons.” Therefore [Sengfeng] wholeheartedly consulted [Sengcan] on the Way, and took the lineage transmitted through [Sengcan] as his principle. [Sengceng] carefully examined his appearance and expression and commended his talent and skill. [After Feng] received the True Teachings, [he] opened the ten levels of [Bodhisattvas], and instructed using the mysterious arguments, and elucidated the position of the eight forces.

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404 Biography in XGSZ 9, T. 50:2060. 500a29. He seems to be have been close friend with famous exeget and Chan master Tanlun (a.k.a Wolun 臥輪, ca. 546-632) who like Sengfeng was invited to reside in the Chandingsi 神定寺 sometime in 603. See Jinhua Chen, Monks and Monarchs, 187, 198, 232.

405 They are Luoyang 洛陽, Handan 邯郸, Linzi 臨淄, Wan 宛, and the capital city 成都 (probably referring to Chang’an).

406 The teachings of the Buddha can be categorized into two sets of eight divisions. The first set consists of Taihuazang 泰化藏, Zhongyinzang 中隱藏, Moheyon fangdengzang 摩诃衍方等藏, Jieluzang 戒律藏, Shizhu Pusazang 十住菩薩藏, Zuzang 雜藏, Jingangzang 金剛藏 and Fozang 佛藏. Second set: Jingzang 經藏, which includes the four sections of the Gama-sutra 四阿含經, Luzang 律藏, which consists of the vinaya for the monastic and lay order; Lunzang or Sastras; Zhouzang or Mantra and Dharani; Jingzang 經藏 such as the Lotus Sutra and Avatamsaka-sūtra; Luzang 律藏 which are for the Bodhisattvas; Lunzang 論藏 such as the Nagarjuna’s Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra; Zhouzang 周藏 such as the Śūtadurgṣa-dhāraṇī.

407 The “ten stages” in the fifty-two sections of the development of a bodhisattva into a Buddha. There are variations to these ten stages among the major Buddhist schools. See Soothill, A Dictionary for Chinese Buddhist Terms, 47-8.

408 The definition of these eight forces is debatable. From the previous sentence which comments on Feng’s effort to change his appearance and habits in accordance to the teachings, we can assume that these eight forces may refer to the Eightfold Path, a fundamental Buddhist doctrine that outlines the “correct” way to think, speak, act and live.
It seems that after this contact with Master Sengcan, Sengfeng took tonsure under his guidance and entered the monastery. The precise date and place of his ordination is not mentioned. Yet, from a later passage which reveals Sengfeng’s residence in Chang’an, we can presume that he might have moved to the capital city as early as 581. From the context of the passage, it seems that Sengfeng’s motive to enter the monastery was purely religious, and greatly inspired by Sengcan. We have the impression that Sengfeng’s first contact with Buddhism was with Sengcan; however, this may not be the case because of the Xiao clan’s long tradition as faithful Buddhist supporters and beneficiaries. He probably entered the monastic order when he was in his late teens or early twenties, indicating that his decision was voluntarily since he was already a full grown adult. Such detail involving marriage status and reaction from the family after knowing of his religious endeavor is not recorded, in contrast to the case of the Xiao nuns whose details where explicitly discussed. After ordination, Sengfeng was an exceptional student; he not only mastered the teaching of the dhyāna tradition, but was also very learned in the philosophy of other Buddhist schools.

Feng was elegant and had the capacity for the profound, [he] comprehends [them] without any inaccuracy. He surpasses those around him, [because his] fate lies in the achievements from his former lives. At the time his colleagues all [faced] and say to each other: “Master excels in doing half the work but attaining double the results,409 I have heard this from people before. [Feng’s integrity] is pure and thick like ice, [and now we can] verify this today”.

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409 This refers to a passage in the thirteenth chapter on Scholarship (Xueji 學記) in the Book of Rites Liji: “The man who properly learns, will excel in doing half the work but attain double the results. Follow him and you will find that it is necessary. The man who does not properly study, will work double fold but only obtain half of the results. Follow him and you will find yourself in resentment.” 善學者，師逸而功倍，又從而餧之。不善學者，師勤而功半，又從而怨之。 See Liji, 71.
Feng, a cosmopolitan monk, was active in the religious community taking on leadership roles and becoming the intermediary between the court and samgha. He also participated in family gatherings, which will be discussed in a later section, and was fully involved in propagating Buddhism to the public. To some degree, we may even call him a wanderer who by official promotions and personal preference lived and visited multiple monasteries throughout his life. It is possible to speculate that the Xiao family’s tradition of reciting and writing commentaries on the *Lotus Sūtra* began with Sengfeng and lasted for at least two centuries to Xiao Yu’s nephew and the last Xiao monk, Huiquan.

Feng [had the] natural disposition of being humble and solemn, his charisma surpassed all the noblemen. The words he spoke were clear and understandable; his footsteps [would] take him [to many places] as needed. He takes the prajñā\(^{410}\) as the center of his heart, and places Nirvana as his goal. He has preached more than a hundred times the *Lotus Sūtra*. In terms of producing commentaries to expound the true meaning of the sūtra, he becomes one authority on the sūtra. As for the [explication of the other] sūstras and sāstras, he lectured on them in accordance with timing. In the beginning, when Feng went to West Mountain\(^{411}\), he then left behind some commentaries to narrate the great salvation [of the *Lotus Sūtra*].

This passage reemphasizes the fact that Sengfeng was well educated in the philosophical teachings of multiple schools and chose to use an intuitive approach to propagate the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* through conducting public sermons and

\(^{410}\) The transliteration of the Sanskrit prajñā (Ch. bōre 般若) means “wisdom.” This wisdom is based on a realization of dependent origination, no-self, emptiness, and helps extinguish afflictions and bring about enlightenment.

\(^{411}\) Located in You Prefecture 幽州 in the northern part of Hebei Circuit 河北道.
writing commentaries. Unfortunately, these works have been lost and we are not able to find duplicates or references to his work in other sources. Two reasons could explain this mishap: either Sengfeng was very conscious of his work and did not wish to publish it, which would seem doubtful given his social influence and outgoing personality, or these commentaries were considered unfavorable by the later monastic community and, therefore, were not preserved or recorded in Buddhist libraries. These writings may have only been known in the Xiao clan and passed down as a family heirloom.

Sengfeng’s influence was not only within the *samgha* community but reached the Court of the Sui emperors. Coming from an influential family and possessing great knowledge, Sengfeng was well respected by the Emperor and court officials. Multiple times, he was promoted to high positions at different public monasteries. Sengfeng’s role as a mediator between the court and religious community is most noticeable during one of the largest conflicts regarding Sui Yangdi’s (r. 604-617) discontent with the monastic regulation that excused monks from having to pay homage to secular emperor.

Just when Sui Yang [Di] was upholding the country, [he] experienced and inquired about the earth’s ecliptic movements. In the middle of the Daye reign (605-617), the Emperor temporarily stayed in the Southern outskirts, where the literary talents and culture were flourishing, a rare sight in a thousand years. [The emperor] wanted to use the strength of the army and the achievements of the imperial house to enliven the gods and spirits. Then up high he decorated [the army] with yellow banners, stupendously lining up the white feather flags. The frosty halberds illuminated the sky; the army tent overflowed the rivers. [Rows of] laymen and clergy men lined [in order] at the palace [hall].

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412 Sengfeng seem to have been acclaimed as a scholar-monk than Chan master, which explains why Daoxuan 造萱 (596–667), compiler of the *XGSZ*, placed his biography under the “exegetes” section.

413 This was a calculation of the days, months and years through ecliptic movements.

414 In the ancient times, the Commanding General would use a flag adorned with white feather to command his troops. Therefore, *baiyu 白羽* could also mean “the general commands his troops to stand in a line.”
[The emperor] issued an edict saying:
The army and state have their proper code of conduct (lit: appearance); regardless of being civilized or uncivilized this does not change.
[They need to] respect their ruler and obey their superior, then for a long time [the nation is able] to sustain [its] title and existence (lit: name and body).
To support the living and connect and maneuver the [resources], the principles must have proper standards.
The Three Primes are tied up to the teachings of Laozi; the Two Vehicles are established in the residence of Śākyamuni.
The rules and formats have been established long ago, why do [Buddhist priest two] refuse to pay homage to the throne?
The men and women who follow the Yellow Emperor and Laozi (i.e. Daoist priests and priestesses), upon hearing the emperor’s voice, [respectfully] bowed low. Only those under the single school of Buddhism, looked to each other, while standing upright. The śramaṇa Mingshan (559-628) was first to reply and this is all recorded in another biography [of his].

This confrontation between the monastic community and Yangdi regarding the issue whether Buddhist monks should bow before a secular ruler was also recorded in Mingshan’s biography; however, this record does not mention Sengfeng’s key role in resolving this matter. Sengfeng’s biography states that, after providing a sufficient explanation to Yangdi, he was, out of respect, later invited to live in Chanding 禪定

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415 *Sanda* 三大 could refer to the Way 道, Heaven 天 and Earth 地 or Emperor, Teacher and Father.

416 The two vehicles refer to the two Major schools in Buddhism: Mahayana and Hinayana.

Before investigating Sengfeng’s involvement with this confrontation, it is interesting to note several subtle details about the relationship between Buddhism and the imperial court during the later period of the Sui dynasty. According to the above passage, Sui Yangdi’s court was filled with both lay officials as well as cleric members (probably from both the Daoist and Buddhist orders). This suggests that during this period monks were already invited to take up governmental positions and the court was indirectly controlling the samgha’s administration and organization. It is obvious that Yangdi’s effort to involve the religious sector in politics was not purely out of his pious devotion to Buddhism, as scholars have described him in the past, but also in part as a strategic agenda to expand his control over the religious community through special promotion and inclusion of monks in his official cabinet. The second inquiry involves a minor difference between Mingshan’s description of the confrontation which claims that Yangdi was displeased with both the Daoist and Buddhist priests for not bowing to show their respect. However, in Sengfeng’s biography, the priest from the Daoist tradition seemed to have already bowed low to the emperor in court while it was only the Buddhist monk who persistently refused to comply with this secular rite. Both Mingshan and Sengfeng’s biographies only record the effort of Buddhist monks memorializing to the emperor for reconsideration. The Daoist community’s lack of agitation or participation in this matter proves that Sengfeng’s version is more accurate and that the main objective of this edict was the Buddhist monks.

418 It is built in 603, to commemorate Empress Wenxian’s contribution to the Sui dynasty and honor her spirit, Emperor Wendi established the Chandingsi 神定寺 in the Yongyang Quarter 永陽坊 in the southwestern part of Chang’an. Jinhua Chen, Monks and Monarch, p. 181.

419 For general description about the recruitment of monks into official position, see Kenneth Chen, Buddhism in China, 235-4.
However, the edict was rushing repeatedly, [asking] why [these Buddhist monks are] not [willing to] bow [to the Emperor]. [As] Feng was then the abbot of Chongjing Monastery according to the custom he was asked to handle the situation. He then skipped [the indirect procedure] and memorialized the emperor straightforwardly, citing examples from the sutras and commentaries, and explained the reason for the custom of [the monastery] not bowing [to the secular rulers]. In fully investigating the manners by which [Ming]shan and [Seng]feng protested the imperial orders, [we find that they] can be compared to how chrysanthemum and cymbidium each exuberate their blossom in different ways, and how bamboo and cypress display their determined chastity with each other that can not be weaken.\footnote{Located in the Jingan 靖安坊 Ward in Chang’an. It was established by Sui Wendi. However, no specific year was given. It was abandoned during the reign period of Daye (605-617). In the second year of reign period Longshuo 龍朔 of the Tang Dynasty (662), it was re-opened as a nunnery adopting the same name.}

Although the author mentions that both monks were involved in this confrontation, we are not given the details of their memorials. Whether these men ever met and cooperated or sent individual memorials to the emperor is ambiguous. Sengfeng, as the abbot of the Chongjing 崇敬 Monastery,\footnote{Located in the Jingan 靖安坊 Ward in Chang’an. It was established by Sui Wendi. However, no specific year was given. It was abandoned during the reign period of Daye (605-617). In the second year of reign period Longshuo 龍朔 of the Tang Dynasty (662), it was re-opened as a nunnery adopting the same name.} (he was in his mid-forties when this incident occurred), was “asked to handle” the situation “according to custom.” The author does not explain according to what custom he is referring to and who did the requesting. Was it elders in the samgha community or monks from the Chongjing Monastery? If it were monks from the Chongjing Monastery, what roles and responsibility does the institution have in relation to the government? Although with little evidence, it seems that Chongjing Monastery was quite famous and acted as the centre of Buddhist activities in Chang’an during the Sui. Therefore, as the head monk, Sengfeng was requested to resolve this conflict. This then begs the question when did Sengfeng become the abbot of Chongjing monastery? Was the abbotship transmitted to him by the former abbot or was he appointed the position through imperial decree? Answers to these questions remain
obscure. However, we do know that Sengfeng once lived in the Chanding monastery after its construction in 603 C.E and took part in a grand religious project on behalf of Wendi’s deceased imperial consort, Empress Wenxian\footnote{Empress Wenxian 文獻 was Sui Wendi’s 隋文帝 imperial consort also known as Empress Dugu 鄭昭容后 (553-602) who died at the age of fifty at her palace, the Yonggang 安宮 in Chang’an.} before residing in Chongjingsi.\footnote{Chandingsi seems to have been designated as the headquarters of a national system of meditation centres by imperial decree. According to Dr. Jinhua Chen’s Monks and Monarchs, there is a record of 26 (19 meditation masters) who were recruited to the monastery between 603-7. For a detailed study of these monks see Jinhua Chen, Monks and Monarchs, 181-211.}

Lastly, we must note that Feng was able to directly have an audience with Sui Yangdi which accentuates the fact that he was greatly respected by the Emperor to have access and authority to enter the court without going through cumbersome procedures.

When Empress Xian died, the Chandingsi (Monastery of Meditation) was established. An imperial decree was issued to summon [Buddhist monks], to come and gather at the monastery. All together, they engaged in lecturing and expounding [the Buddhist texts], until they aged. [Sengfang was] good at summarizing, extracting, and implementing the important and mysterious [elements of the Buddha’s teachings]. When a difficult question arose and people lost their train of thought, he would reveal to them where the ultimate of śāstra resided. 献后云崩. 禅定斯構. 下詔辟召, 來萃道場, 相從 請解. 迨於暮齿. 善綜 引安機要. 難問失緒, 顯論攸歸.

Sengfeng’s whereabouts are unclear until 603 when he, along with many other famous meditation masters, was summoned to live in Changding monastery \footnote{For a detail explanation of its construction see Jinhua Chen’s Monks and Monarchs, Kinship and Kingship, p. 188-9.} after its complete construction. Categorized on the same level with reputable monks who were invited to Changding monastery shows that Sengfeng himself was already quite influential and well-known before being appointed abbot (for the Chongjing Monastery). According to sources, these masters lived and performed religious activities at the Changding Monastery until they died or were appointed to another monastery by the
emperor such as in the case of Sengfeng. The passage again shows us that administration of the samgha organization was very much in the hand of the ruling emperor. Monks such as Mingshan and Sengfeng had to make great efforts to prevent the supremacy of secular laws from overriding monastic customs and regulations. With the end of the Sui dynasty and rise of the Tang, Sengfeng’s reputation did not seem to diminish.

During the Zhenguang reign era (626-649), Buddhism was once again prosperous. The green field is populated by the overgrowing weeds, and the gray hair grows from the head of a young man. If one let the samgha uncontrolled and unregulated, there will be no way to glorify and protect it. The scholar of the secretariat, Du Zhenglin, issued an imperial edict ordering that [Sengfeng] take charge of the overall and detailed [monastic] affairs. [Sengfeng] was ordered to supervise the submitting of the memorials [from the samgha] and the summoning of the monks [to the courts], and he was appointed as the abbot of the Puji monastery.

During the Tang dynasty, Buddhism was able to reach great heights; however, the royal court was not always tolerant of its influence. The Tang emperors were conscious of this religion’s power and with a growing number of monks taking advantage of the tonsure for personal benefits became visibly a burden to the court. Therefore, the early Tang rulers wish to have control over this religious order and censor its influence by

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424 Emperor Taizong in 629 had seven stupas and shrines constructed on battlefields in memory of those who had been killed and in 628 ordered temples in the capital and main cities to observe seven days of fasting, to hold services of consolation for the dead heroes, recite the Renwang jing Sutra for the years harvest and the Dayun jing for the empire’s stability. In 645, he appeared to have become genuinely interested in Buddhism through the influence of the Tripitaka Master Xuanzang after his return in 645. See Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China*, 216-7.

425 This refers to such a pair of sentence in a memorial that Daoxuan, the author of the XGSZ, submitted to the court in 662. The lines qinglian you hui, baishou si xing 春田有穗，白首斯興 is used as a metaphor for the bad effect caused to the samgha by some of its corrupt members. "僧道皆等著，自三寶憫將六百餘年，四俗立歸戒之因。五眾開福田之務。百王承至道之化萬载屬[3]者聖之風。故得環海知歸生靈迴向，然以慧日既臨千載有餘。正行雖登嚴科易犯。遂有稀罕涉青田之穀。少壯懷白首之徵。徃列前題闐于視聴。See *Jishmen yuying baisudengsh* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 3, 7: 52: 2108.456a8-13.

426 See Ch.1.41.
placing it under the control of the Court of State Ceremonials where the activities of all monasteries were overseen by government officials and the internal administration (of every monastey and nunnery) would be appointed by the court. Sengfeng, already in his sixties, was once again moved and appointed abbot of the Puji Monastery\textsuperscript{427} in Chang'an and resumed his role as intermediary between the samgha and the government. A couple of years later, almost seventy, Sengfeng was assigned to manage two (Puji and Dingshui) monasteries simultaneously. It is quite illogical to say that Chang'an lacked other famous master to take up these positions, which lead us to question why the court chose Sengfeng, an elderly monk, to manage two institutions. We wonder if this was the court's sign of respect to Sengfeng or was the decision indirectly influenced by Xiao Yu, Sengfeng's distant nephew and respected advisor and Prime Minister of Gaozu, the first emperor of the Tang dynasty. While this is a possibility, it seems that both men did not have contact while residing in the same city (Chang'an).

In a short while he was promoted to be the Senior (shangzuo)\textsuperscript{428} at the Dingshui Temple\textsuperscript{429}. He adeptly managed these two temples, and under his leadership no one violated the six ways of harmonization. His marvelous character reached the heart of everyone; [therefore] the people were happy and admired him. When he

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  \item \textsuperscript{427} The Puji monastery is located in Chang'an was established in Kaihuang 7 of Sui dynasty (588). Originally the residence of Xianyu Zunyi (dates unknown), which he later donated it to the monastic community.
  \item \textsuperscript{428} \textit{Shangzuo} one of the three principle positions in a monastery: \textit{shangzuo} abbot or superior, svthavira; \textit{zhushi} director, viharāsvāmi; and \textit{jiemoteuna} superintendent, karmadāna.
  \item \textsuperscript{429} Located in north of the Western Gate inside of Chang'an city. Established in the 10\textsuperscript{th} year of the Kaihuang reign period of Sui Dynasty (591) by the consort Yang of Duke Shangming donated her private land to be rebuilt into a monastery dedicated to the Sixth Chan patriarch, Master Huineng (638-713). This seems to be illogical because Huineng had not yet been born. See \textit{Liangjingxinji}, chapter 3 and Ono Katsustoshi's \textit{Chugoku Zui To Choan jiin shiryo shusei}, p. 184.
\end{itemize}
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was sixty-nine years old\textsuperscript{430}, he further renewed his sincere faith. He was attached to the secular world, [but his heart] has escaped into the mountains and forest. [When] one met and spoke with him, [he generously] chatted with them, and that is how he lived his days. 他更右遙定水上座．紓耳二寺，無越六和．妙達眾心，欣其仰止．年及從心，更新誠致．鳴維塵境，放曠山林．言晤相誼，終事畢矣．

Sengfeng was a capable abbot and successfully managed the two monasteries even in his later years; yet, he became less active in governmental affairs and finally chose to distance himself from responsibilities in Chang’an for a quiet life in the Longgong 龍宮 Monastery.\textsuperscript{431} The court approved his request and did not force him to stay in Chang’an.

Once the Longgong Monastery of West Mountain in Qi Prefecture, [sent a messenger] from afar to came to invite [Feng] to give a sermon, [Feng] was deeply glad about their sincerity. Because [this monastery’s] back is faced against layers of cliffs, in the south it overlooks the Wei river, the stone mirrors reflect the sunlight, the pines and vines emerge and fill up the empty space; he was at ease and enjoyed the monastery’s secluded atmosphere and [decided] to immediately move there [to live] permanently. He greatly opened the contemplation of dharma, guided people to the way of wisdom. He then caused the monastic and laypeople to come and relieved their sufferings, something unheard of before.他更右遙定水上座．紓耳二寺，無越六和．妙達眾心，欣其仰止．年及從心，更新誠致．鳴維塵境，放�旷山林．言晤相誼，終事畢矣．

Sengfeng chose a monastery of his preference to reside in and continued to perform religious services until his death in 638 C.E.

\textsuperscript{430} Reference to the \textit{Lunyu} 論語, Chapter on \textit{Weizhen} 位貞 which states: \textit{qishi er congxin suoyu, bu yuj} (at the age of seventy \textit{sui} or 69 years old, one is able to do as one wishes, without overstepping the regulations).

\textsuperscript{431} It is located within the borders of Fengxiang County in present day Shaanxi Province.

\textsuperscript{432} \textit{Laisu} 來蘇 refers to the expedition by Shang Tang known as \textit{Shantangzhengfa} 謡湯征伐, who used some kind of herbal medicine that can cure a hundred kinds of sickness and even revive the dead.
Since it was a long night, [he was even more] saddened, [however, he] constantly remembered the words of former [masters]. Regret was further added to the valley of sadness. [his followers] were filled with thoughts of reminiscence. On the twenty-third day of the last month of that year, because of sickness, [Feng] died in the [Longgong] monastery, he was seventy-six years old. When the sickness began to reach its critical point, [Feng] lay in a bow-shape on the bed, but he was still intent on promoting the dharma. His [composure and] spirit did not change, and with great effort he rose up and said: The *Saddharmapundarika sutra*\(^{433}\), will be the last of my parting words to you. In the end, I still need to give one last explanation and use it to connect all the thoughts”. He then started to preach to the crowd and everyone below was sitting in a tranquil manner.

Sengfeng’s death was caused by sickness and he died at the age of seventy-six in the Longgong monastery. The author portrays Sengfeng as an emotional character who was melancholic over his own departure, but who rose to the platform to give his last sermon. Interestingly, while Feng is well-known as a meditation master, his last words were about the *Lotus Sūtra* instead of an explanation on *dhyāna* exercises. The burial ceremony and the commemoration *stūpa* built for Sengfeng seems quite grand even though the author gave few details about the full procedure.

Suddenly, he died at the Longgong Monastery of Chencang County in the Qi Prefecture. The scholars, lay devotees, officials and ordinary civilians, [all] were broken hearted and were in tremendous grief, [crying and] grieving over their ‘father’.\(^{434}\) Feeling sorrow [when reminiscing his] past deeds, and solemnly how could they bear to look [back at his life]. Then they moved his spirit [tablet] to the northern plain of the sub-prefecture’s outskirts, and dug an exposed cave and placed [his coffin] there. [And later the people] thus, built a white *stūpa*, that was tall and lofty by which they wished to commemorate [him].

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\(^{433}\) This is the Sanskrit term for the popular *Lotus Sūtra*.

\(^{434}\) *Suotian* 所天 refers to the person that one can rely upon, e.g. a father or mother; which in this cases means that they look upon him as their spiritual father.
Sengfeng’s burial ceremony reflects the procedures similar to those of the Xiao nuns. From the description above, his tablet was moved to the northern plains of an (unidentified) sub-prefecture (probably Chencang County), which suggests that his body was probably buried temporarily in one area and at a later period, moved to a second permanent burial ground. Interestingly, the ceremony does not seem to have taken place on temple grounds but presumably, at a private graveyard owned by the Xiao family. Feng’s death was probably organized by his monastic disciples who had chosen to place his body in an exposed cave, the second preferred method of burial often used for Buddhist monks and nuns as a replacement for the proper cremation custom.\footnote{Li Shufeng 刘淑芬. “Shishi yiku: zhonggu fojiao lushi zang yanjiu,” 3-4.}

Sengfeng was among the only two Xiao monastic members who had a stūpa built by lay and ordained disciples in commemoration of his life and achievements. The building of stūpas and worshipping relics is in accordance to the Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra which details the last funeral ritual that was performed to worship the remains of the Buddha.\footnote{Da nieban jing 大般涅槃經 3, T. 01: 7.199c21-200b3; T.12: 374.435b23- 436b4.} His body was cremated and the remaining relics were distributed and enshrined in stūpas for worship. In later generations, in reverence to their master’s body, disciples often enshrined their master’s whole corpse or his or her’s ashes. It is evident that Sengfeng was an exceptional monk that had great support from wealthy followers and devoted disciples. Regrettably the author does not mention whether his remains were enshrined in the stūpa or where this structure was built. Lastly it is interesting to note that Feng’s stūpa and stone tablet seem to be located in different places.

\footnote{Li Shufeng 刘淑芬. “Shishi yiku: zhonggu fojiao lushi zang yanjiu,” 3-4.}

\footnote{Da nieban jing 大般涅槃經 3, T. 01: 7.199c21-200b3; T.12: 374.435b23- 436b4.}
[Those from] afar and near gathered to [show their] respects, every one was in tears. He has a disciple [named] Fawei (d.u.), who had long been famous for his scholarship. His actions and conducts [lit: his speech and meeting with others] were pure and far. Because it is difficult to reinforce the teaching of those deceased and the person's brilliant words easily turn to dust, if we do not rely on the display and glorification, how are we able to keep his example [greatness]? Therefore, at the Dingshui Monastery, [Fawei] erected a stone tablet that would record his capacity for all eternity. Its composition was written by Left Vice-Director of the Civil Service, Duke Yan.

From the passage it seems that Sengfeng only had one noteworthy disciple who was given the task to erect his tombstone. We are not sure whether it was Fawei's own decision or with Sengfeng's approval that Fawei chose Dingshui monastery, a place he had no connection with, to erect the stone tablet and ask Duke Yan to write the composition. It is interesting to note that this stone's erection did not take place immediately after Sengfeng's death but was conducted about fifty years later as indicated by the dates when Zhang Yue was active. According to Zhang Yue's biography recorded in Xin tang shu, he (Zhang Yue) was born thirty years after Sengfeng's death in 667 CE. Why Fawei postponed this task for such a long period is unexplainable. Lack of financial support or opposition from the government could not have been the reason for this delay because of Sengfeng's wealthy family background and reputation as a

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437 Zhang Yue 張說 (667-731) served as poet scholar who served in court in 690 by passing an examination supervised by Empress Wu. He had great interest in both Buddhist and Daoist practice and has also written an epitaph for the eminent monk Shenxiu (606?-731). See Jinhua Chen, Monks and Monarchs, 138-9, 210; for a detail study on this official see Chen Zuyan 陳祖言, Zhang Yue nianpu 張說年譜, 1984. He was also involved in many translation projects. See Jinhua Chen, Fazang, 422n, 423-4, 426n, 432.

438 It is traditional that the close disciple of a deceased master would prepare a document listing the facts of his master's life, then approach a well-known literary figure, in this case Zhang Yue, to compose the stupa inscription. Sometime the name of the famous calligrapher is mentioned which indirectly enhance the prestige of the subject and value of the inscription. See Shinohara, Monks and Magicians, 125.

439 Biography in Xin tang shu 125: 4404-10.
respected Chan master who acted as the liaison between the government and the *samgha* throughout most of his life. Concluding the biography, the author includes a *gāthā* supposedly composed by Sengfeng before his death:

Bonded by the remaining karmic connections, he by chance arrived at that monastery and never returned. He was content with his life and knew about his fate, what more could we add to this? Therefore, after his remaining composition there is a *gāthā* saying:
Suffering Oh! Is the Goddess of Wastefulness. Happiness! Is the Goddess of Merit.
The wise one does not accept [either of them], the foolish one would adopt both sides.
I serve the teaching of the Śākyamuni Buddha, and convert my faith [to the dharma] in front the Maitreya Buddha.
I wish to expound the Mahāyāna teachings, and have great achievements like Nārāyaṇa.

累以餘緣, 恰達彼寺, 因而不返. 業天知命, 何以加之. 故其遺文後偈云:
苦哉黑闇女, 業矣功德天
智者俱不受, 愚夫納二邊
我奉能仁 教, 歸依彌勒前
願闊摩訶衍, 成就那羅延.

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440 In *juan* 12 of the *Da Banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, states that here are two heavenly sisters who will never part each other; the beautiful elder sister who bestows fortune to people is called *gongde tiannu* 功德天女 (*Lakṣmī*), while the uglier second sister called *hei’an nu* 黑闇女 (*Kālarāri*) imparts misfortune on to others. See 7. 12: 374. 435b23-436b4.

441 This is the phonetic translation of Mahāyāna摩訶衍那.

442 Nārāyaṇa is a powerful god adopted into Buddhism from the Hindu tradition who is usually depicted in Buddhist text as a *vajra-pāṇi* 金剛力士; therefore, it entails the meaning of “indestructible”. The name also is the Buddhist name of the Founding emperor of the Sui dynasty, 隋文帝 (581-604) whose Chinese name Jian 堅 means “hard” and “solid”. However, in this context, it is more like he is refereeing to the vajira warrior.
Huiquan 慧銓 (d.u.): the Calligrapher Monk

Huiquan’s biography⁴⁴³ is one of the most least detailed compositions and leaves out many important details such as specific dates of important events, only providing a general summary of major events in his life. According to the biography, Huiquan was the son of Xiao Yu’s fifth eldest brother, Xiao Xun 蕭琨 (d.u.), a modest and generous man, who served as the Duke of Liang during the Sui dynasty. Because his aunt was made imperial consort to Emperor Yangdi, Huiquan was allowed to reside in the palace and grew up to become a gifted scholar.

Shi Huiquan, [his] surname is Xiao. He was the nephew of Yu, the specially promoted [State] Duke of Song of the present day. His father served Sui as the [State] Duke of Liang.⁴⁴⁴ His grandfather was Emperor Ming of Liang. [His father’s] personality and manner were generous yet modest; his will was used to pursue (lit. to rush for) the pure. His aunt was the Empress of [Emperor] Yang of Sui. Since childhood until adulthood, he always resided in the palace, [yet] he admired the joy [of enlightenment] and transcended the secular world; he achieved this by himself without any [external] cause. After he reached adulthood, the emperor [Sui Yangdi] then made the daughter of the Prince Xiao of Qin⁴⁴⁵ to be his wife, [this] was against [Huiquan’s] own wishes. He was unable to stop this arrangement and they became a married couple at the time. After his wife passed away he was then able to pursue his old wish.

As a small child, Huiquan was already noted to have “admired” the Dharma and “transcended the secular world”, showing signs of his destiny to become a monk. The

⁴⁴³ XGSZ 28, 7. 50: 2060.689c20- 690a16.
⁴⁴⁴ Xiao Xun 蕭琨 the fourth son of Xiao Kui 蕭鸞 (541-585).
⁴⁴⁵ This is Yang Jun 楊俊, Yang Guang’s 楊廣 (Sui Yangdi) younger brother.
author emphasizes that this religious fervor was innate and not through influence or pressure from his family. They even seem to have been unaware of Huiquan’s aspirations or were aware but did not accept Huiquan’s rejection of marriage. A marriage, arranged by Emperor Yangdi between his wife’s nephew and his own niece, a noble lady, was preceded without the consent of Huiquan, unlike Fayuan’s case in which Xiao Yu heeded his daughter’s wish and allowed her to enter the monastery. On the contrary, Huiquan was forced into this marriage suggesting that during the medieval period not only were daughters coerced into prearranged marriages but sons, due to family pressure and social values under Confucian notion of filial piety, also shared comparable circumstances. Upon the early death of his wife and without a child to care for, the royal family and in-laws accepted Huiquan’s decision to leave the household life and enter the monastery.

As a preparation for [his ordination] he shaved his head in the Eastern Capital of the Zheng Clan. He then returned to the capital and lived in Zhuangyan Monastery in the first year of the Wude reign period (618). He widely listened to all the schools and made the Shelun [Mahāyāna-samparigraha-śāstra] the centre [of his study]. He possessed quite a lot of [talent for] poetry, his outstanding capability is in calligraphy [literally the Script of Cao and Script of Li]. Even what he wrote as he was scribbling can be used as models for others. Therefore, the titles [he wrote] for the sutras and the plaques [he wrote] for the monasteries were all praised and admired.

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446 According to the Li ji, “marriage is the boding of two different surnames for serving the ancestral temples and continuing the family line [with or without the consent of the bride and groom].” 禮者，將合二姓之好，上以事宗廟，而下以繼後世也. See Li ji 127.
447 In the fourth month of 619, Wang Shichong having total control of Luoyang, set himself up as emperor and proclaimed a new dynasty called Zheng, which was later defeated by Li Shimin in 621. See Ch. 1.11.
448 See Ch.2.25.
449 pian and shi are units by which the poems in the Book of Poetry are divided into chapters, later the terms refers to poetry in general.
450 This is a cursive, rapid style of writing, marked by tendency to join strokes and economy of lines.
451 This is the bafen shu, a script used during the Qin dynasty. Legend has that the famous calligrapher Wang Cizhong (d.u.) developed this style of writing.
Huiquan’s ordination and life after becoming a monk were quite different than those of other Xiao monks and nuns. According to the biography, he “shaved his head in the Eastern Capital of the “Zheng clan” which, when Huiquan arrived sometime before 619, was still called Luoyang. However, it is probable that the period when the author wrote Huiquan’s biography, Wang Shichong was still in control of Luoyang and proclaimed it the capital of the short-lived Zheng regime (619-621). If this fact is accurate, it would mean that Huiquan died before 621 in order for the author of his biography to refer to Luoyang as the Eastern Capital; however, this is only an assumption because the author neglects to give precise dates for his death. We are also not certain which temple or under which master Huiquan’s took his tonsure and precept. It is only mentioned that some time after his ordination in the first year of Wude (618), Huiquan left Luoyang and ventured to Chang’an to take residence in the Zhuangyan Monastery.\footnote{Situated in Chang’an, this temple was formerly called Chandingsi 禅定寺 however, in Wude 武德 1 (618) it was renamed Da Zhuangyansi 大莊嚴寺 because of its connection with Empress Wenxian, whose posthumous title was Zhuangyan 莊嚴 (literally, “elegance”). See Jinhua Chen, Monks and Monarchs, 184.}

Huiquan was a learned exegete in the philosophy of many Buddhist schools. Unlike other Xiao ordained members, he chose to focus on the \textit{Mahāyāna-samparigraha-śāstra} and not the \textit{Lotus Sūtra} or Chan practices. Rather than being known as a mediation master or charismatic lecturer, he is famed for his talent in calligraphy. Huiquan used this writing skill to perform religious work and earned praise as a calligrapher, a profession
usually perform by lay scholars rather than monks.\textsuperscript{453} It should be noted that throughout Huiquan’s biography the author does not specify any dates for events before his ordination. We are unsure at which age Huiquan got married or which date his wife died. We question why the author seems so casual about such details or did he believe that for a monk’s biography such events and their dates were insignificant and intentionally did not record them? It is also surprising that while Huiquan resided in Chang’an (sometime around 618) the author does not mention whether he had any contact with the senior Xiao ordained family members such as Sengfeng and Fale or the newly ordained Fayuan. However, he did keep in contact with his elder brother Xiao Jun 蕭鈞(d.u.).

[Huiquan’s] older brother Jun was the secretariat drafter\textsuperscript{454} of the Eastern Palace.\textsuperscript{455} The exceptionality of his literary talent belongs to the court. Every year during the spring and autumn, he would travel [with his brothers] to the mountains (lit: cliffs and caves). When his inspiration was triggered he would write a poem, and for several lines they would be in the same rhyme. It is uncommon to be able to be such good brothers.兄鈞任東宮中舍.文才之舉,朝廷攸屬.每歲春秋,相攜巖岫,觸興題篇,連句同韻.時以爲難兄弟也.

The interaction between Huiquan and his brother Jun is another example of the close contact Buddhist monks maintained with their secular families. Even more significant is the fact that Huiquan, after receiving the tonsure, was still able to pursue secular activities such as traveling for leisure and composing poetry with his brother without being reprimanded for violating monastic code. On the contrary, he was praised

\textsuperscript{453} As noted in John Kieschnick’s \textit{The Eminent Monk}, the monk-scholar was most respected among the literati circle not only for their knowledge of religious scriptures but also were expected to master a “secular” art such as memorization of the Chinese Classics, great poet or calligrapher. They found sensibility in these “secular” skills by infusing Chan practice and mentality into their work. See Kieschnick, 112-7.

\textsuperscript{454} A common abbreviation for \textit{zhongshu sheren} 中書舍人, the Secretariat Drafter.

\textsuperscript{455} This refers to the crown prince’s palace.
for sustaining his fraternal relationship with Jun. Similar to the nun Huiyuan who was praised for her filial piety towards her parents and close contact with her siblings, Huiquan also held strong ties with his brother. This emphasis on secular contact in both biographies implies that Buddhist monks and nuns were praised and encouraged to maintain close ties with their secular family members. It also seemed favorable to display such close connection to show that while monks and nuns “leave” household life they do not abandon or ignore their family especially in times of crisis.456 These biographies try to display the fact that monks and nuns do not relinquish important values such as filial piety or fraternal love but rather are able to truly understand and fully manifest these characteristics by leading a simple monastic life. The date of Huiquan’s death is not recorded nor facts regarding the performed funeral rites and burial procedure. The author casually concludes Huiquan’s biography by inserting information on his younger cousin Shi Zhizheng who also lived with him (at perhaps the Zhuangyan Monastery). The insertion of Zhizheng’s biography into Huiquan’s could be because both cousins died at relatively the same time and place, therefore, for convenience both men’s lives were narrated in one biography.

456 This is in accordance to the Buddhist, “bushe shijian, buli zhongsheng de jingshen.” 不舍世間, 不離眾生的精神 [The spirit of not departing from the secular world, not leaving behind the sentient beings] See Yang Mei, “Tangdai nuseng yu shisu jiating de guanxi,” 22.
Zhizheng 智證 (d.u.): the Younger Nephew

Zhizheng is the son of Xiao Yu’s fourth eldest brother Xiao Jing 湘琛 (d.u.)\(^{457}\) and the second nephew who took the tonsure. It seems that Zhizheng had a comparably inactive career; therefore, information on his life is minimal.

[Huiquan] also had a younger cousin Zhizheng, who became a monk and lived together with him; he was the son of the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues, the older brother of the [State] Duke of Song. He ignored the enjoyment of [secular] glory and [government] positions and gladly accepted Buddhist training.\(^{458}\) Diligently he motivated himself [in his cultivation] regardless of night or day. Zheng and his younger brother Quan, died one after another. 出家同住, 即宋公之兄, 太府卿之子也. 略榮位之好, 欣懷道業. 勤勤自課, 無擇昏曉. 證與兄銓, 相次而卒.

Again, we are not given any specific dates when Zhizheng was born or died and given less information on his religious career. However, we can infer some facts from the above passage. Zhizheng’s father, a devout Buddhist, served in Palace Revenue during the Sui dynasty;\(^{459}\) therefore, Zhizheng had a comfortable life and probably received a good education. From his family’s religious influence, especially his father, Zhizheng

\(^{457}\) Xiao Jing 湘琛 (d.u.), also known as Nanhai Wang 南海王, is second eldest brother of Xiao Yu 湘瑀.

\(^{458}\) Daoye 道業 refers to the karma of religion which leads to Buddhahood.

\(^{459}\) A passage from Huiquan’s biography illustrates Xiao Jing’s religious piety.

The personality of the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues likes to treat the reading and chanting [of the sutra] as his priority. From birth to death, he had chanted it more than ten thousands times. As for the manual copies that he hired people to write, there were a thousand sets in total. Everyday when he went to court, he always sent a servant holding a sutra in the front. When there was a small break from his official affairs, he would immediately turn and read [the sutra]. Those in the court admired and followed him and considered him to be one of a kind. 太府情好 讀誦為先. 故生至終, 諳盡萬遍, 義人抄寫, 總有千部. 每日朝參, 必使儀者, 奴經在前, 至於公事微隙, 便就轉讀. 朝伍仰屬, 以爲絕倫.
refused to take an official position and rejected all marriage prospects to take ordination in the Zhuangyan monastery, where his older cousin Huiquan resided. Like Huiquan, Zhizheng lived a simple and virtuous monastic life without becoming involved in much religious or social activity. He and his older cousin died one after the other in an unspecified year.

In the last section of Huiquan’s biography, Daoxuan included a passage discussing the Xiao family’s Buddhist customs and legacy which reveal important information on the relationship between the monastic and secular family members.

Because their family’s belief and patronage leaned towards glorifying the *Lotus Sūtra*, both the higher and lower members of the clan chanted [this text]. Therefore, the *Lotus Sūtra* of the Xiao clan was said to be rich in every aspect (lit: both black and white). They selected the best and finest [details] of the ten [previously written] commentaries [on the Lotus Sutra] and blended them [with their own ideas] to compile [an eleventh] commentary to make a special presentation to the emperor. They were constantly spreading and promoting the several scrolls [of texts] they had written. This passage reveals that the Xiao family was a major supporter and propagator of the *Lotus Sūtra* and this long standing tradition filtered into the lives and religious practice of every Xiao family member. In Xiao Yu’s biography and the tales which surround his life, he is mentioned as a fervent practitioner who chants, writes and composes treatises for this one sutra. Sengfeng’s the first Xiao monk, lectured on the *Lotus Sūtra* and possibly the first to write commentaries on this sutra. Xiao Yu’s second daughter, Fayuan’s daily exercise includes the recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* as well as

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460. This may refer to the Xiao family having produce many great officials (white) and successful monks and nuns (black).
copying the text to accumulate merit. However, the Xiao family commentaries on this sūtra seem to have been lost. We are unable to locate them in any public or private catalogue to this date. This tradition which has influenced the religious fervor of the secular members and the daily practice of the monastic exegetes is one of the factors that have connected the family belonging to two seemingly separate worlds together.

Sometimes they summoned the eminent monks in the capital [and asked them to] point out the flaws and defects. At other times they gathered the monks and nuns that were their relatives, and their number almost reached twenty. They presented offerings according to the occasions and never neglected the Four Accommodations. Therefore, as for their lay relatives’ enfeoffment and official salaries, they only kept [what was needed to] help the monastic community. Since the teaching of the Śākyamuni passed to the east, its flowing essence has traveled far, but as for the upholding, acceptance, reading and chanting [of the sūtra], few in this world can be like those people. The household of the Xiao clan can be an example for all under heaven. 時召京華名僧，指摘瑕累。或集親屬僧尼，數將二十，給惠以時，四事無怠。故封祿所及，惟存通濟。自釋化東傳，流味彌遠，承受讃誦，世罕伊人。陳氏一門，可為天下楷模矣。

The gathering of the twenty ordained members at the capital Chang’an (the name of the monastery or residence is unclear) to perform offerings, which is probably some form of the zhai 齋 ritual, emphasizes the close ties of monks and nuns with their secular relatives. Although the motivation for such a gathering may not be purely religious (primarily a family gathering occasion) it is certain that the Xiao family were quite wealthy to supply the means for transportation to all their family members as well as afford to make offerings to almost twenty monks and nuns. In addition, the Xiao

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461 The Four Accommodations can either refer to clothing, diet, beds and cushions and medication (yifu 衣服, yinshi 飲食, woju 臥具, tangyao 湯藥); or the dwelling, clothing, diet, and medication (fangshe 房舍, yifu 衣服, yinshi 飲食, tangyao 湯藥).

462 The zhai 齋 ritual is popular religious activity among elite families to organize a vegetarian feast to show “gratitude for hospitality rendered, benefits received, recovery from illness... or as a welcome or farewell party for visiting monks.” See Kenneth Chen, 283-4.
family was greatly influential in the capital to be able summon eminent monks from afar to the capital for private lectures and sermons. It is also apparent that the secular members had a large role in providing financial and material needs for the monastic members. The success of the Xiao nuns and monks as well as the legacy left behind by Xiao Yu is intertwined and reveals valuable information of the interaction between the monastic members and their secular relatives. Lastly, while the passage notes that there were almost twenty monks and nuns from the Xiao family, I was only able to successfully gather biographies of four nuns and five monks and identify the existence of another monk who does not have an official biography.

**Lingyun 靈運 (?-729): the Chan Master**

Shi Lingyun, the third Xiao male to take the tonsure, dated approximately 80 years after Xiao Yu’s death. His biography is longer than the other Xiao monks; yet, the author’s emphasis on elaborate language and rhetorical expressions provides few historical facts. Similar to Huiyuan’s biography, the writer of Lingyun’s also begins with a philosophical discussion of the Buddhist concept of emptiness and Lingyun’s achievements and experience in past lives.

In substance, it is emptiness, which is broad and great; in function, it demonstrated itself as wisdom, which is round and penetrating. It solidifies but does not materialize, clear like so, it is forever silent. It transcends both the cultivation and the testament; it is neither the color/physical form nor the heart/mind. [It is] Experiencing the Fine Dust Kalpa, traveling through the

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463 *QTW* 303.18a7- 20a1.

464 The term *weichen* 微塵 (Skt. *paramāṇu*) in traditional Indian philosophy is defined as infinitesimal bodies of matter that combine to form perceivable matter. In the Abhidharma philosophy these matter are
Realm of the Sands of Ganges. The numerous lands are all peaceful and pure; the boundless shadows are all bright and clear. Who is able to obtain this? I heard that they [were obtained] by our Honorable Man. 

According to the text, Lingyun is a descendent of the Xiao clan and the eighth generation grandson of Xiao Yi, the eldest brother of Xiao Yan 蒲衍 (464-549 CE.). This would make Lingyun a distant younger relative under a different southern Xiao family branch than that of Xiao Yu.

The Honorable Man’s taboo name is Lingyun, surname Xiao and a native of Lanling. He is the descendent of Emperor Wu of Liang. His deceased father Zhu was the District Defender of Hengnong County of Guo Prefecture. Like a vinaya pearl he was conceived in his mother’s womb. Like still water his childhood nature/temper was pure. His knowledge of Buddhism was planted as if it were predestined, while the knowledge of secular philosophies was inborn. The white cloud concealed his great will, the luminous water heighten his unchanging fortitude. The general public, at that time did not know of this.

regarded as the components of the physical reality and called dharmas. The world, which is formed from these physical and perceivable matter is called weichenjie 微塵劫.

Abbreviation from the term henghesha 恆河沙 (Skt. gaṅgā-nadi-vāluka) which is a figurative term used to describe an unperceivable large number which could only be compared to the sand in the Ganges 恆河.

Throughout the text, Lingyun is often refer to as Shangren (上人 Honorable Man), a respectable title for Buddhist monks.

Xiao Zhu 蕭繇 does not seem to have a biography of his own nor is he mentioned in any other sources.

This is located south of Shanxi 山西 Province, in present day Lingbao 灵宝 County.
Lingyun lived several decades after Xiao Yu and his daughters in the later part of the Tang dynasty. Beginning with Huiquan, we find that the authors of later Xiao monks' biography do not elaborate on their backgrounds or connections to famous royal ancestors as in the case of the Xiao nuns. His father was a government official of Guo Prefecture. Lingyun probably was born and grew up in this area. It seems that, as a child, Lingyun was well educated in both Confucian and Buddhist texts. While he had aspirations to leave the household life, his family and friends were unaware or did not expect him to become a monk. Nevertheless, it seems that there was no opposition and he was able to take up the tonsure without difficulty. Again, the author does not provide a specific date of his birth or the secular name he used before entering the monastery.

He always believed that the delusional world is illusory; our foam-like body is unreal. The five colors make people delusional, the five sounds make people unable to hear, and the five aromas make people commit mistakes.\textsuperscript{469} Alas! The wheel of birth and death never has a moment of rest. I want to return to my roots,\textsuperscript{470} and to recover the proper [order].\textsuperscript{471} Therefore, he traveled to Mount Song\textsuperscript{472} and went to Shaolin Monastery, and had the intention of spending his life there. It happened to be the time when his maternal uncle was an official at Gaoping\textsuperscript{473} and the Great Man fulfilled [his wish] to enter the monastic order at this prefecture. 常為幻境非實，泡身是妄，五色令人昏，五音令人聾，五味令人昏。

\textsuperscript{469} This refers to the passage from chapter twelve \textit{Jianyu} 棟敿: “The five colors causes man to be blind, the five sounds causes man to become deaf, the five flavors causes man to become deprive of taste.” 五色令人目盲，五音令人聾，五味令人昏. \textit{See Daodejing} 45.

\textsuperscript{470} This refers to a passage in chapter sixteen \textit{Guigen} 歸根: “Returning to the roots is what is called stillness, stillness is what it means to fulfill their fate, resuming their fate is called regular, knowing the regular is to be intelligent.” 歸根曰靜，靜曰復命，復命曰常，知常曰明. \textit{See Daodejing} 66.

\textsuperscript{471} The author uses “1” (wu 吾) which usually represents the author, however, in this context, it is Lingyun’s speech.

\textsuperscript{472} This was part of the Duji 都畿 Circuit which is located in present day Henan Province.

\textsuperscript{473} Gaoping 高平 is a city in the Ze Prefecture 淄州 located in the Hedong Circuit 河東道. Today it is called Jincheng 順城 in Shanxi Province.
We are unsure at what age Lingyun decided to enter the monastery, but by the mere fact that he was able to travel (probably by himself) to Shaolin Monastery\textsuperscript{474} in Mount Song shows that Lingyun at the time of ordination should already be an adult. After ordination, he then traveled and stayed (probably at a monastery) in Gaoping, today located in Henan Province where his maternal uncle\textsuperscript{475} served as an official. It is interesting that according to the author the reason Lingyun left the Shaolin Monastery to reside in an unspecified monastery in Gaoping was due to his maternal family relation or in other words due to his secular relative’s influence he was able to reside in (probably a famous) monastery. Indirectly this also shows that Lingyun kept in contact and was greatly helped by his lay relatives, in this case from his maternal side. Therefore, although he lived during the same decade as Huiyuan 惠源, a distant female cousin from his paternal family, it seems that they were not in contact.

The image of a jade standing among the common rocks is not sufficient to feature his brightness, and that of the sun illuminating the many stars fails as a metaphor for his brilliance. In the end he moved and belonged to this temple, where it suited his dream. Not long after he studied the dhyāna techniques Great Master [Yuan]gui of Pangwu.\textsuperscript{476} Secretly he obtained the hidden truth/knowledge, used the real [teaching] to connect the true principle. Shining upon the ten directions

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\textsuperscript{474} According to the \textit{Wei shu}, Shaolin Monastery was built on the north side of Shaoshi, the western peak of Mount Song in 495 CE by Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty for the monk Indian dhyana master Buddhhabhadra (Bātuō 跌陀). See \textit{Wei shu} 114: 3039-40.

\textsuperscript{475} We do not have information on his dates and background.

\textsuperscript{476} Master Yuangui 元珪 (644-716), surname Li, a native of Yique 伊闕 present day Jiangnan. He entered the monastery when he was a child and later met the Preceptor of the State [Master] Hui’an 慈安國師 (582-709). He was famed for strict adherence and study on the \textit{Vinaya}. See \textit{SGSZ} 19, T. 50:2061. 828b23-829b16.
with his own emptiness, he detached himself from the bondage of the "three realms." The eyes of wisdom are pure, and so is the physical body. He thus realized that outside the mind there was no dharma, what we acquire are all imaginary images and illusions. Thereafter, in contemplating the great earth, the soil and trees, he found that all are the Buddha's realm. As the empty mountain [stays] green, throughout the years he sat silently. The ape faced his teacup, and a bird dwelt on top of his dhyāna hut. Those clouds of mountain ranges have no heart, and they were his heart; those water valleys [beneath it] have no inherent quality, and they were his nature.

Be it as it may, how one can judge him by the standard of commonness and saintliness? Therefore, I am living in a created [world] that is similar to a dream.

According to the biography, Lingyun moved to a third monastery, again the name or place unspecified, and later studied under the famous dhyāna master Yuangui 元珪 (644-716), who once lived in Shaolin Monastery. We can assume that Lingyun returned to Shaolin monastery from Gaoping to study dhyāna under Master Yuangui. Because Lingyun seemed to have been far from his paternal family it is not surprising that he did not inherit the Xiao family’s admiration for the Lotus Sūtra but instead choose to

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477 The term zikong 自空 is a metaphor for Buddhist truths/wisdom.

478 The three realms of samsāra; also sanyou 三有. This is the Buddhist metaphysical equivalent for the Brahmanic cosmological bhuvanatraya, or Triple world. It consists of: the desire realm 欲界 (kāma-dhātu), where one is preoccupied by desires for physical gratification; the form realm 色界 (rupa-dhātu), where one is free from the desires for physical gratification and experiences subtle form; and the formless realm 无色界 (arūpya-dhātu) is the most subtle realm of samsāra. It is of pure spirit, where there are no bodies, places, things to which human terms would apply, but where the mind dwells in mystic contemplation; its extent is indefinable, but it is conceived of in four stages, where one is free from material existence. See Soothill, p. 70.

479 This comparison describes Lingyun’s heart as without emotions which no external event can perplex or influence his mind dingxin 定心.

480 Wuxing 無性 (Skt. nihsvabhāvatva, is also interchangeable with the term emptiness śīnyatā). Having no inherent quality is one of the basic tenants of the Mādhyamika School. This passage shows that Lingyun is aware of the impermanence of the world and of his own existence.
concentrate on Chan practices although it seems he was not a well-known meditation master. Neither was he involved with the government or held any important position in the Shaolin Monastery: Lingyun lead a quiet and inactive life.

Then it was on the twenty-second day of the fifth summer month, in the seventeenth year of the Kaiyuan reign era (June 22nd, 729), that [Lingyun], without showing any signs of sickness, died in a tranquil state. Bitter fog [became] hazy and yellow between the heaven and earth, the melancholic wind wept sorrowfully between the grass and trees. Alas! The collapse of my dhyāna mountain, the drainage of my Dharma ocean, the disappearance of my world. His death has left hundreds of those with consciousnesses and the myriad sentient beings to suffer in this world like eating bitter food and being burned by fire - how can one exhaustively describe [the sufferings]? Therefore his disciple Jianshun (d.u.) alone built one single numinous stūpa on this mountain, to carry out his remaining teaching. Well, as the highly virtuous ones greatly initiated, there was none that could surpass the generation and [detect the truth] beforehand and yet there emerged this Foreigner, how were they able to pass us the dharma seal, and lit a million of lamps with one lamp? Lingyun died in the summer of 729 C.E, though the biography does not specify his age or the place of his death. The burial place and rites are not recorded; however, we are only told that his ordained disciple Jianshun built a stūpa to commemorate Lingyun on “this mountain,” which possibly refers to Mount Song. Therefore, we can assume that

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481 Jianshun 堅順 dates are unknown, however, he must have been Lingyun’s top disciple.

482 The term yizhe 夷者 refers to the Buddha whose teaching was known as barbaric by the Confucian scholars especially mentioned in Han Yu’s memorial against Buddhism in 819. See Kenneth Chen, Buddhism in China, 225-6.

483 The term fa’an 法印(Skt. dharma-mudrā) is the seal of Buddha-truth, expressing its reality and immutability, also its universality and its authentic transmission from one Buddha or patriarch to another.
Lingyun’s burial service and place of burial were on this mountain. The biography ends with the writer’s lament on Lingyun’s death in a gāthā of ten lines.

That Honorable Man, who transcendently stood up high, takes dhyāna and wisdom as his treasure and Nirvana as his mountain. He was flawless and penetrating in the unfixed realm, appearing and disappearing in the realm of unlimited boundaries. Therefore, he came at a good time and left smoothly. Now [his life] has ended, and how are we able to venerate [him]? Well, as events passed away their traces would change; as the years changed the matters would alternate. Let alone the fact that the dharma and the transformation are constant, and that thoughts accumulate as they follow the mind. How can I let the loftiness of the great man be forgotten without recording his deeds? Carved on a rock, [I] honored [him] with these refined words. The inscription says: The Honorable Man wherefore, did you transmit to me the dharma seal? His body is tranquil, while his actions are smooth. Profusely [moving] are the waves of ideas, The Mi [River] holds the dreams and emotions. Without a glow [from the sun] there cannot be any dawn, without [the water] settling it cannot be clear. Acting as the Great Lord of Healing, and being The Great Dhyāna Master. He stood like a mountain and lasted as long as a pine tree; as green as a lotus flower and as white as the moon. In the morning [his body] transformed and disappeared, the [people in the] six directions are sad and forlorn. The world is [engulfed in the] rustling sounds of emptiness, the cloudy mountain suddenly cleared up. The physical body withering, ah! [but] the Dharma body survives, the Buddhist land is saddened, ah!, Cakravāda Mountain has become darkened. Alas! What I can keep, is only my heart.

The term mi refers to Miluo River. The origin of the river comes from two main water sources: Xiushui County of Jiangxi and Yueyang County of Hunan and meet at Xiangyin County in Hunan. Legends claim that during the Three Warring States Period Qu Yuan (d. ca.343) drowned himself in this river.

This term yiwang refers to the Buddha or Bodhisattva in the sense that they are able to heal the sufferings of others.

The term fāti is the Embodiment of the Law or a general term for “things”, which could have two explanations: the elements in which the universe is divided into or another term to refer to a monk. The latter definition seems most fitting in this context.

Yunshan is a short rendering of the term Tiewei Shan (Ring of Iron Mountain, Skt. Cakravāda). In the Buddhist myth, the iron enclosing mountains is supposed to encircle the earth, forming the periphery of a world. Mount Meru is the centre and between it and the Iron mountains are the seven metal-mountains and the eight seas.
Lingtuan 靈叡 (ca.755-829): the Last Xiao Monk

Lingtuan, the fifth Xiao monk recorded in the monastic biography, is a far relative who lived almost two hundred years after Xiao Yu. It is not clear from which of the Xiao branch Lingtuan’s family came from. It seems that he may also have been of the southern branch since his father lived around the Hunan region.

Also in the Yongtai Monastery, there was a monk name Shi Lingtuan, with the surname Xiao, a native of Lanling Prefecture. As for his clan’s descendents, when the Later Liang was destroyed by [Northern] Zhou, its members scattered like stars. Tuan’s father lived in Changsha and became a registered civilian. When Tuan was born he seems to have an oath to leave the secular lifestyle. Having an opportunity to visit these various meditation ceremonies, rarely does he not go to these famous sites; he stops at a lake, ponders over the greenery with great leisure and feels satisfied about himself. In the first year of the Changqing reign era (821), he went and stayed in the Baijia Yan Monastery. Soon after, he moved and went to Jiangling. The Grand Protector, Wang Qian invited [him] to reside in the

488 The Yongtai Monastery, the first Buddhist nunnery in China was previously named Mingliansi when it was built in the second year of the Zhengguan reign period (521) of Emperor Xiaoming (515-528) of the Northern Wei dynasty for his little sister, Princess Yongtai when she decided to become a nun.

489 Jingzhou was part of the Shannan North Circuit, present day Jiangling County.

490 Also known as the Southern Liang dynasty.

491 Ancient time part of Tan Prefecture within Jiangnan West Circuit, Inside present day Hunan Province.

492 Bianhu is a sub-official functionaries under the Hukou an Census Section.

493 Jiangling is the capital city of Jing Prefecture.
Yongtai Temple In the twenty-third day of the sixth month of the third year of the Taihe reign era (July 27th, 829), [he] died in the temple, aged seventy-four years old. A stūpa was constructed in the northern region of the prefecture, to preserve [his legacy] there.

Similar to Zhizheng, Lingtuan does not have a proper detailed biography but information of his life and religious career was inserted into the biography of a more prominent monk.\(^495\) The biography is very obscure regarding his secular name, birth place and childhood life. Although we can presume that because his father was a “registered civilian” in Changsha, Lingtuan was born in this area and, unlike the previous Xiao members, he lead a humble life because neither his father nor male ancestors became prominent officials. At what age Lingtuan entered the monastery is not recorded either; however, it seems that he liked to travel (as a young monk or lay student) to many religious sites and monasteries. At the age of sixty-six, Lingtuan finally decided to settle down at the Baijia Yan 百家巖 Monastery\(^496\) in Henan Province. Not too long after, he moved again, this time to Jiangling 江陵 (for what reason and in which monastery he resided in is not mentioned). His spiritual practice and reputation are not emphasized; yet, since he was later invited to stay at the Yongtai Monastery by the Grand Protector Wang

\(^{494}\) Wang Qian 王濬 (d.u.). According the Jiu tang shu, in the twenty-fifth day of the eight month in 815, Wang Qian became the Regional Inspector of Jing Prefecture (澤州刺史), he also held the position of Military Commissioner of the Beiting in Jing Plain (北庭恆原節度使) for four times. See JTS 15:453-4.

\(^{495}\) SGSZ 11, 7: 50: 2061.774 a26-b6.

\(^{496}\) This monastery is located in Xiuwu 修武 county of Henan Province. The date of construction is unclear, however, today the Baijiayansi 百家岩寺塔 stūpa stands on the ruin remains of the destroyed monastery.
Qian (d.u.), we can assume that he was quite well-known in the southern regions.

Lingtuan died at the age of seventy-four in the Yongtai Monastery. The funeral services and place of burial are not recorded; however, a stupa (probably where his stone inscription was erected) was built to commemorate him in an (unspecified) northern region (most likely the author is referring to Henan Province).

**Xiao Kai 蕭鐃 (d.u.): the Obscure Monk**

The last male member of the Xiao family who is speculated to have also entered the *samgha* is Xiao Kai, the sixth son of Xiao Yu. We are unable to trace his biography because he either did not have one or it was lost, which would most likely be the case when we consider all of his three elder sisters who have very detailed biographies preserved in the *Quan tang wen*. According to the official record in the *Xin tang shu*, Xiao Yu had five sons and Kai was the second eldest. His dates are obscure however he is known to have obtained the title of Director of Forestry and Crafts (*Yubu langzhong* 儀部郎中) before becoming a monk. Although there is no biography or concrete fact recorded about Kai in any official documents found so far, my assumption that he did take the tonsure was conjectured from two sources: the first is a passage from the nun Fadeng’s biography which emphasized that four siblings (consisting of male and female) of the Xiao family entered the monastery. This would include her elder sisters Fale, 

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497 *XTS* 71a:2286.

498 Fadeng’s biography: *Along with her siblings, all four of them left the three realms*. 姊弟四人, 同出三界. See Ch.2. 37.
Fayuan and herself, Fadeng; however, the fourth member’s identity, which in this case must be a male, is obscure. It may be the case that Fadeng refers to Huiquan the son of her uncle Xiao Xun 蕭珣; yet, that would be illogical since she left out Zhizheng who was the son of her fourth eldest uncle Xiao Jing 蕭槑, and lived in the same monastery with Huiquan. In addition, from Huiquan and Zhizheng’s biography it does not seem that they were in close contact with their female cousins; therefore, this hypothesis does not stand. The last source to confirm my suspicion is from a chart constructed by Dr. Li Yuzhen’s in her book *Tangdai de biqiuni* (Nuns of the Tang Dynasty 唐代的比丘尼). The family tree of the Xiao sisters on page 42 which notes that Kai was born after Fadeng and also left the household life (chujia 出家). Although she does not annotate the source of her findings and its authenticity is doubtful, this revelation does suggest that Kai is the brother and fourth member referred to in Fadeng’s biography.499

**Concluding Remarks**

Information on the lives of the Xiao monks is scarce therefore, reconstructing their relationship to one another and as members of the southern Xiao family branch is challenging. Detail on their background and religious career gives us the impression that most of the Xiao monks, excluding Sengfeng, were less well-known than the Xiao nuns and led quiet and inactive lives. There are only two lose similarities and connections between these monks and nuns. The first is with regards to their inspiration for ordination.

499 After contacting Dr. Li Yuzheng, she confirms that her information was from epitaph inscriptions of these nuns reserved in the Academia Sinca in Taiwan.
Although their motivation is not specifically stated, we can infer that the Xiao family’s religious inclination was also the main factor that influenced these six monks to take up the tonsure. The biographies of the Xiao monks also reveal that they shared a close relationship with their secular family members, on a lesser scale and in different circumstances than the Xiao nuns. Huiquan, one of Xiao Yu’s nephews often goes on expedition with his elder brother, identified as Jun; while Lingyun traveled and stayed at Gaoping due to his maternal uncle holding an official post in the area. Because little detail is recorded regarding their funeral rites, we are uncertain whether secular family members had any influence or were involved in this important event. The fact that most of the monks had stūpas built in their honor, following the traditional custom to respect the body of a Buddhist cleric, suggests that their monastic disciples and colleagues actively participated and organized the funeral proceedings rather than the secular family members. Huiquan’s biography also reconfirms the fact that secular family members frequently sponsor zhai rituals and donate various gifts and money to the Xiao clerics.

While not providing much information on these monks’ religious life and career, rhetorical passages in the biographies reflects values highly praised in society and reveals the attitude and expectation the public have towards the monastic community. For a monk to achieve fame and respect he had to rely on one or more of these five attributes: prestigious family background, active involvement in the government or religious and social activities, profound wisdom and knowledge of the Buddhist canon and secular learning, skill and charisma as a preacher, and sincere and diligent cultivation which enables him to perform miracles. While Xiao Yu, a lay family member was associated with many miracle stories, none of the Xiao monks were recorded to have any
supernatural ability. They were depicted as either exegetes (Sengfeng) or diligent *dhyāna* practitioners mainly concerned with their own cultivation, fitting the stereotypical scholar-monk image. A faithful picture of these monks' personality and activities can be incurred from descriptive facts relating their interaction with the secular family; unfortunately the writers of these epitaphs and the compilers of the hagiographies have omitted or neglected to pay attention to such details.
Final Reflections

The study on the relationship between monastic and lay communities by analyzing monastic biographies, and epigraphs allows scholars to accurately understand and reconstruct how these two groups were interdependent and co-developed Tang China’s complex yet dynamic society. In the first section of this thesis, I have focused on Xiao Yu, one of the most important lay members of the southern Xiao clan sub-branch, who directly and indirectly influenced the lives and religious aspiration of other family members including his daughters, nephews and granddaughter. Details regarding Xiao Yu’s political career and secular achievements recorded in the official history reveal his sincerity as a capable minister and respected advisor in both the late Sui and early Tang dynasties. Taught and surrounded by Confucius values and ideas, he was able to pursue and maintain his political ambition and career while embracing the Buddhist faith and customs. He is depicted as the ideal Buddhist lay-official in many canonical sources and is often the protagonist of many miraculous stories that narrate the interference and assistance of supernatural beings due to his sincere practice. The stereotypical and idolized description of Xiao Yu’s life and religious practice, although may have been fabricated from the imagination of writers, allows us to understand popular notions and ideals of the Buddhist layman in Tang China.

The biographies four nuns and five monks discussed in chapters two and three reveal interesting contrasts and similarities in respect to their length and content emphasized. Before analyzing the differences, it is essential to pinpoint the similarities between the nine biographies. While only their taboo dharma names $hui$ are mentioned
along side their surname *xing* 姓, all biographies exclude the secular name of the respective monk or nun. This may have been an ancient taboo that after a monk or nun has left the household it is forbidden to use his/her former secular name while they are alive or on their tombstone inscription after death. Greatly emphasized in all biographies is the connection the respective individual has with the Xiao ancestors especially Liang Wudi. However, while the Xiao nuns’ biographies go to great lengths to retrace the many generations and names of important famous male ancestors, the background section in the Xiao monks’ biographies are comparably short and less detailed. The second similarity is apparent when we compare the cultivation practices and studies undertaken by the monks and nuns. Surprisingly, while the Xiao family is famous for upholding the *Lotus Sutra* tradition, only one monk (Sengfeng) and one nun (Fayuan) is recorded to have any association with this practice. Both groups have at least one member who is interested in doctrinal studies (both Fayuan and Huiquan studied the 擇大乘論 or *Mahāyāna-samparīgraha-śāstra*) while the rest were dhyāna practitioners which is not surprising considering that the Chan school began to become prominent during the Tang dynasty and thereafter.

The most obvious difference between the monks and nuns’ biographies are in their length. While the four Xiao nuns’ biographies are detailed narratives, the monks’ biography are summaries paying little attention to detail; the shortest nun biography consists of no fewer than 390 characters while the shortest monk biography (Zhizheng) consists of no fewer than 390 characters while the shortest monk biography (Zhizheng)

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500 It is interesting to note that Daoxuan categorized Sengfeng in the exegetes (*yijie* 義解) section, and Huiquan and Zhizheng in the reciters (*dusong*) section. Only Lingtuan is categorized in the meditation masters (*xichan*) section in Zanning’s *SGSZ*. 
only consist fewer than 50 characters. In addition, while the Xiao nuns’ biographies all conclude with a gāthā or short poem from their epitaphs, only the monks Sengfeng’s and Lingyun’s biography end with a gāthā. The reason for this deviation could either result from the damage on the tombstones therefore, information was lost or compilers of the GSZ intentionally left out the rhetorical passages and recorded only the historical facts (in the composition section) to be in accordance with the zhuan’s format. Interestingly, the content of gāthā in both the monk and nun biographies compared their cultivation and wisdom as reaching the level of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Thus illustrating that while it is taboo in the scriptures to equate women with Buddahood, this comparison is often used to praise not only eminent monks but also virtuous nuns.

The second difference is the meticulousness of dates and events recorded in the nuns’ biography as compared to the abridged narrative of the monks’ biographies. Therefore, while we are able to precisely identify the birth and death year of every Xiao nun, only Sengfeng’s and Lingtuan’s dates are known. For the rest of the Xiao monks, we can only propose rough estimates, (Lingyun’s death date is recorded) for when they lived and died. Accordingly since the biographies of the nuns are much lengthier there was much information regarding their childhood development and life before entering the monastery (some nuns are known to have acquired a good academic education and refined artistic skills). In the nuns’ biographies, we find that the writers emphasized the nuns’ physical appearance and chaste nature, leisure activities and interaction with family members during their childhood and special events and encounters which lead them to leave the household life. In most cases, the details regarding age as well as the names of

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monastery and master from where they took ordination are clearly stated. Also included was information about their burial services as well as an outline of a mixture of Buddhist customs and Confucian taboos. In the biographies of the Xiao monks, we see the writers place great importance solely on their academic achievements before entering the samgha and neglect other details such as date and place of birth and death, the monastery and master from which they received ordination and the religious work performed during their lifetime. Regarding the emphasis on “secular” achievements in monks’ biography, Professor Kieschnick’s believes that it is a result of the monk-scholar archetype. The author of the stūpa’s inscription, usually an official who values traditional Confucian learning, would subconsciously reflect his own ideals in the composition and glorify certain aspects of the monk’s life.\(^{502}\)

The third dissimilarity is in regards to the emphasis on the concept of “chastity” and “adhering to the vinaya” for the Buddhist nun. According to Wendi Adamek the theme of “disciplining the body” is almost always subtly emphasized in Chinese nuns’ biography.\(^{503}\) She argues that the act of subjugating the body through meditation or in this case, precepts visibly in the case of Fayuan who refused to meet visitors, is the influence of the Chinese patriarchal cultured values coated under a religious guise. The authors of the nuns’ biography take great care to emphasize their great discipline of both the body and mind before and after ordination. This single virtue would make them worthy of respect and admiration even though they had talents in many other areas. Some scholars question the reliability of the nuns’ biography. While the biographies of monks were written by monks, the biographies of nuns were written by monks or laymen. Therefore,\(^{502}\) See Kieschnick, 113.

“chastity” may have been a major concern for these male writers, but it may not have been the case for the nuns. Nevertheless, we are able to understand the general perception and expectation of society towards the ordained nun.

Most of the Xiao nuns are praised as eminent preachers who were able to attract large crowds from the lay and monastic circles, this seems to be the sole religious activities these nuns performed in public which introduces the fourth discrepancy between the monks and nuns are their religious activities. With the lengthier and well written biographies, it is expected that the Xiao nuns would have a dynamic and socially involved religious career; however, it seems that the monks were more active despite what little information is recorded. The most active Xiao monk would be Sengfeng who was not only famous for being a charismatic preacher but a respectable and audacious monk who was not afraid to confront the Emperor in defending Buddhist customs. Huiquan obtained his name through his calligraphy skills which he used to write titles for sutras and monasteries’ plaques.

The fifth difference is the mobility monks have compared to nuns. While all three sisters and one niece lived and died in the Jidu Monastery, most of the monks traveled and lived in more than two places for various reasons such as invitation by laity, imperial decrees or for study or family purposes. In the case of Sengfeng, he was appointed by imperial decree to take up the abbacy position in two monasteries, temporarily stayed in one for a religious gathering sponsored by the Emperor and died in another. Lingtuan resided in Baijia Yan Monastery however, later accepted the invitation from an official to reside in the Yongtai Monastery. Huiquan was ordained in Luoyang but later returned to live in Zhuangyan Monastery in Chang’an while Lingyun, ordained at the Shaolin
Monastery, due to his maternal uncle traveled and resided in an unspecified monastery in Guo Prefecture.

The last difference is the secular family’s reaction, acceptance and influence on the lives of the monk or nun. For the Xiao nuns, it is obvious that their father, Xiao Yu was a major factor in introducing them to and immersing them in Buddhist customs and belief. In the case of Fale who was brought into the monastery at the age of three, it is obvious that without Xiao Yu’s approval, she would not have been sent at such an early age. Learning of Fayuan’s wish to enter the monastery, Xiao Yu who initially planned to betroth her to a prominent family, withdrew his decision and allowed his favorite daughter to follow her own religious path. Events following their ordination such as family gatherings (under religious themes) and financial support given to the Jidu Monastery prove that the Xiao family members and society greatly encouraged their daughters to enter the samgha and perform religious work. The family’s greatest influence could be seen at the nuns’ funeral rites and complex burial procedures. Choosing to adopt a more Confucian-influenced burial custom (burial at a private graveyard or placing the body in an exposed cave rather than cremation) reveals that the secular members were consistently a part of the nuns’ lives before and after their death. In the case of the Xiao monks, while the secular family members do keep contact with the monks, they initially do not seem to be very supportive. The most obvious example is Huiquan, who was forced into a marriage even though the family members (especially his parents) knew of his wish to become a monk. And only when his wife died could Huiquan enter the monastery. Another example is Lingtuan whose religious aspiration went unnoticed by “the public”—which means that his family member and friends did
not expect Lingtuan to seriously contemplate to become a monk or Lingtuan was wary of their reaction and did not reveal his decision until necessary. However, it seems that after accepting that one of their sons wishes to become a monk, the secular family becomes supportive and constantly keeps in contact. Such is the case of Huiquan who maintained a close relationship with his brother Jun and Lingyun who traveled to Gaoping with the help of his maternal uncle. A final aspect which marks the difference between the monks and nuns in regards to their relation to the secular family is associated with Xiao Yu and their preference of residence. As we know, Xiao Yu throughout his life only built the Jinliang Monastery in Yong Prefecture and invited monks to take residence. Therefore, when his daughters became nuns they could not reside in the Jinliang Monastery and chose to live in the famous Jidu Nunnery. However, when the male members (especially Xiao Yu’s nephew Huiquan and Zhizheng) of the Xiao family entered the monastery, none of them took up residence in the Jinliang Monastery. It is possible that they were not invited or solely not close to the family members on their paternal side.

To faithfully reconstruct the lives of Buddhist monks and nuns as members of Tang China’s vibrant society and as products of a Sinicized Buddhist religion; scholars will face the challenge of selecting reliable sources and distilling descriptive facts from prescriptive details. This task is especially tricky when epigraphical genre literature such as hagiographies; and canonical texts are often filled with spiritual paradigms and are produced with ideological intentions. Students of religious biographical studies must be aware that while it is important to different between facts and fictions, they should not disregards any supernatural legends and events that seem irrational to common sense.
As I have previously stated, while “hard core” facts allow us to accurately reconstruct historical events, in our case, the Xiao ordained family members’ lives, religious career and social activities; and provide a holistic picture of the living conditions and activities in the samgha, the “fictitious” facts conjured by the writers reveal social value, popular customs and ideas shared among the literati and common citizens. Although it is complicated to distill and differentiaed idealized details from factual informations, there are several suggestions which may be of use to future scholars who will attempt this daunting task. To identify the authenticity of events recorded in the biographies, it is essential to analyze and identify background informations on all historical figures and places related; and their relevance to other famous figures or events in history. It is also important to collect the different versions of a person’s biography, or historical event. The discrepancies between the various accounts will display the conjured elements while the similarities will reveal the factual information. Lastly, I hope that this in-dept research on the relationship between the prestigious Xiao clan and their devotion and support to Buddhism as well as the interaction and close ties between the monastic and lay members will help reconstruct a realistic picture of the religious and social scenes during Tang China and help enrich religious and sociopolitical studies in Sinological scholarship.
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# Abbreviations Used in the Bibliography and Footnotes

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<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>HDGSZ</td>
<td><em>Haidong gaoseng zhuang</em> 海東高僧傳</td>
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<td>JTS</td>
<td><em>Jiu Tang shu</em> 舊唐書</td>
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