

Essays on East Asian Religion and Culture

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Didactic Paintings between Power and Devotion

The Monastery Dashengcisi 大聖慈寺 in Chengdu (8th-10th c.)

Evelyne MESNIL

1. Introduction

In documents from the Tang (618-907), Five Dynasties (907-960) and Northern (960-1127) and Southern Song (1127-1279), the Monastery Dashengcisi 大聖慈寺, is a recurrent theme in relation to politics as well as religion and art history. Its tremendous scale and crucial role, not only in Shu 蜀 (modern Sichuan Province), the strategic region in which it is located, but throughout the Chinese Empire is clearly documented. Nevertheless, between the 13th and 15th centuries nearly all of its treasures vanished, and its restoration and study were long neglected. Only recently has awareness of its cultural value re-emerged and has it become the object of renewed interest and research. In 1981, its vestiges were classified as Protected Cultural Properties. Although its restoration and study of its cultural, political and religious significances were long neglected, a few researchers have begun to analyze its various aspects. The most extensive work of Wang Weiming's 王衛明 takes mainly a philological, iconographic and aesthetic approach to its Buddhist paintings. While working on my doctorate on Shu Kingdom painting, I became particularly interested in this monastery, because it was one of the most important depositories of that era. The present study analyzes the degree of involvement of three main protagonists; politicians, the Buddhist community and artists, focusing on the polyvalent overlapping function of the Dashengcisi and its paintings as well as on political instrument, and doctrinal support, the paintings being the interface.

2. Data

2.1. The Main Written Sources

Because of the attention given to the extensive period of time (from about 745 to approximately 1000), and the amount and variety of information covered, the *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 [Record of Famous Paintings in Yizhou (Shu)] is the most comprehensive text related to the Dashengcisi. It was written in three chapters by Huang Xiufu 黃休復 before 1006, as indicated in Li Tian's 李旼 preface. The author, born in Chengdu 成都, the prosperous capital of Shu, spent most of his life there. He had deep knowledge of local traditions and a keen sense of its cultural heritage. His experience of Shu's prosperity, its religious aura and artistic dynamism, which made it a kind of Firenze in medieval China, informed his writing the *Yizhou minghua lu*. Bearing witness to the political confusion when the Song conquered Shu in 965 and the subsequent destruction of monasteries, temples and paintings during the repressions of 994 and 1000 he wrote this document to testify to the existence of and to maintain the memory of paintings he considered major works he saw were being destroyed.¹

The *Yizhou minghua lu* is a systematic catalogue of more than 57 painters active in Shu over approximately a 250-year period, starting in the mid-8th and ending at the beginning of the 11th century. The painters are introduced individually in short biographies followed by lists and descriptions of their paintings. In the case of wall paintings, precise locations in Buddhist monasteries, Taoist temples, popular cult shrines, palaces, tombs, etc. are documented. Some 27 religious compounds and 22 official buildings are mentioned. Among the main Buddhists monasteries are the Baolisi 寶曆寺, Longxingsi 龍興寺, Jingzhongsi 淨衆寺, Shengshousi 聖壽寺 and Zhaojuesi 昭覺寺. The Dashengcisi, in which 39 painters executed wall paintings, is by far the most important. The originality of the *Yizhou minghua lu* lies in its system of classification of painters according to skill in four categories defined by the author as: *shen* 神 "divine," *miao* 妙 "marvelous," *neng* 能 "capable," with the new

¹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, preface by Li Tian : 1-3.

yi 逸 “untrammled” category in first position. At that time, a free style of ink painting was emerging. What makes this source valuable for the present study, however, is its historical overview related to the creation, restoration, preservation or destruction of the monasteries and their wall paintings because the author emphasizes the political events of those 250 years that influenced the destiny of the paintings and places in which they were executed.

A complementary source is the *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* 成都古寺名筆記 [Notes on Famous Paintings of Ancient Monasteries in Chengdu], written by Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193). A native of Wu 吳 (modern Jiangsu Province), he occupied various high positions in the Southern Song court. By 1175, his career led him to Chengdu where he became interested in the paintings of its monasteries and wrote this text.² In spite of its title and brief mention at the beginning of the existence of many monasteries and temples in Chengdu, its content deals exclusively with the paintings in the Dashengcisi. His presentation is opposite to that of the *Yizhou minghua lu*. Each entry begins with the location in the monastery of the painting, followed by its theme, then identification of the painter. Although very short (one chapter of five pages *recto verso*), the text provides information complementary to that of the *Yizhou minghua lu*, especially about the preservation of some paintings until the 12th century.

Li Zhichun’s 李之純 *Dashengcisi huaji* 大聖慈寺畫記 [Notes on Paintings in the Dashengcisi] is more succinct because only a part of the original remains. Huang Xiufu’s contemporary, the official Li Zhichun, who twice was sent to Chengdu at the end of the 10th century,³ became fascinated by the history of the Dashengcisi. Gathering archives from the Tang Dynasty, and the reigns of the Wang 王 (907-925) and Meng 孟 (925-965), his intent was to trace the dimensions of the monastery before its destruction at the beginning of the Northern Song. The documents he consulted appear to have been ignored by Huang Xiufu. In spite of its partial remains, the *Dashengcisi huaji* provides unique concrete data about the physical aspects and configuration of the monastery and the subject matter of its paintings.

² Biography in *Song shi*, 386: 11867-11871.

³ Biography in *Song shi*, 344: 10940-10941.

2.2. Situation, Construction and Configuration of the Monastery

Like the Zhangjingsi 章敬寺 built in 762 in the Tang capital of Chang'an, the Dashengcisi was of imperial origin, which determined its development and function. The first monastic compound was built in 756-757 at the eastern gate of Chengdu to express the Tang emperor Xuanzong's 玄宗 (r. 712-756) gratitude to the Shu people for their hospitality after he fled General An Lushan's 安祿山 rebellion. According to the *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, the project was suggested by the monk Yinggan 英幹 and the eunuch Gao Lishi 高力士 (684-762), a devout Buddhist, who organized the imperial exile. The emperor is said to have been the calligrapher of the four characters *Da sheng ci si* "Great Saint Compassion Monastery" that gave the name of the monastery on the entrance panel. To endow it with resources, the monastery also was given agricultural land of 1000 *mu* 畝 (about 61 hectares).⁴ Xuanzong, however, had returned to Chang'an and died before construction was completed in 757. From its foundation and over the centuries, the Dashengcisi received attention from chief abbots, governors and rulers who sponsored expansions in addition to numerous sculptures and painted decorations, as befitted an official monastery. Each improvement reflected political events as well as the evolution of the society, religion and art of that time. Because of its privileged situation, the history of the Dashengcisi cannot be dissociated from that of Shu history. It went through periods of prosperity and destruction. The two dramatic, stimulating episodes of emperors' exile, Xuanzong in 756 and Xizong 僖宗 (r. 874-888) in 881, and the foundation of the Shu Kingdom which lasted four reigns underscore the strategic position and prosperity of Shu. The destructive periods were the Buddhist persecutions of 845 throughout China, the 964 Song conquest and subsequent local persecutions of 994 and 1000.

Huang Xiufu's catalogue of paintings missing and remaining in Shu between 757 and 1000 included a description of the condition of the Dashengcisi before 1006. He mentioned 30 existing buildings, among which were three pavilions (*ge* 閣), one *stūpa* (*ta* 塔), about 20 sub-temples

⁴ *Fozu tongji*, 40: 375c-376a; 53: 464a. Gao Lishi's biography in *Jiu Tang shu*, 184: 4757-4759 and *Xin Tang shu*, 207: 5858-5861.

(*yuan* 院 [*ārāma*]), several assembly halls (*tang* 堂), and lecture halls (*dian* 殿) as well as galleries. Those constructions, although already very important, constituted only one third of those reported in the *Dashengcisi huaji*. According to Li Zhichun, the entire Buddhist compound had 96 *yuan* decorated with 8,524 wall paintings; double the figure for the contemporary official monastery in Chang'an, the Zhangjingsi, which had 48 *yuan* and 4,134 wall paintings.⁵ Based on this information, the Dashengcisi can be considered one of the largest monasteries, if not the largest, in China between the 8th and 10th centuries. The difference in Huang Xiufu's information, however, requires caution. It may be due to differences in the authors' perspectives and periods concerned. Li Zhichun focused on Tang archives and Huang Xiufu on the conditions of the paintings and their locations up to the beginning of the Northern Song. Those data indicate that the monastery's structures had decreased by half by 1006. The constructions cited by Huang Xiufu are equivalent to those cited in the *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* which named each architectural compound of the monastery and its paintings that existed in the second half of the 12th century. Fan Chengda recorded one *stūpa*, the principal monastery, 28 sub-temples, five pavilions, ten assembly halls, five *sūtra* lecture halls, and galleries. Some have names given those in the *Yizhou minghua lu*; the Prabhūtaratna Stūpa 多寶塔, Samantabhadra Pavilion 普賢閣, Mañjuśrī Pavilion 文殊閣 and Avatamsaka Pavilion 華嚴閣, Jile yuan 極樂院, Guanding yuan 灌頂院, Bhaiṣajyaguru yuan 藥師院 and the Six Patriarchs yuan 六祖院. Others differ slightly, indicative of architectural enlargement, such as the Destinies Hall 揭諦堂 and Great General Hall 大將堂 which became a sub-monastery complex. About twenty new names of sub-temples appear; the Xianyu yuan 鮮于院, Baibu yuan 百部院, Qianbu yuan 千部院, Yuan of the White Horse 白馬院, Chengtian yuan 承天院, Baofu yuan 保福院, Yuan of the Stone Statue(s) 石像院, Huiri yuan 慧日院, Ji'an yuan 吉安院, Shouning yuan 壽寧院, Yuan of the Great Merciful One of the West 西大悲院, Yuan of the Western Forest 西林院, Xingshan yuan 興善院, Baosheng yuan 寶勝院, Yuan of Maitreya 彌勒院, Jinjin yuan 錦津院, Donglü yuan 東律院, Yuan of Cintāmaṇicakra 如意輪院, Lengyan yuan 楞嚴院, Ganlusi 甘露寺 and Qiwu yuan 起悟院. If pre-existing

⁵ Cf. Nagahiro 1987: 42-46.

buildings were renamed, most probably would have been built between 1006 and the second half of the 12th century, evidence that the Dashengcisi was still developing under the Southern Song.⁶

Although briefly recorded in the anonymous *Shu minghua ji* 書名畫筆 under the Yuan (1271-1368), the monastic compound, renamed Dacisi 大慈寺, seems to have waned from the end of the 13th century because no significant texts mention it under the Ming (1368-1644). The only new events reported are its destruction by fire in 1435, partial restoration between 1438 and 1446, and last reconstruction on a modest scale in the Xunzhi years (1644-1661). That is how it appears in the illustration in the *Huayang xianzhi* 華陽縣志 and how it remains today. Located in Dongfeng Street 東風路 in a very dense area of southeast Chengdu, it is now the City Museum. In May 1981 the site was named a Protected Cultural Property and a major program of restoration initiated. A 4686 m² plot of land, out of an area 11530 m² between Dongda Road 東大街 in the south and Ningyun Road 慶雲街 in the north has been rehabilitated. The six remaining buildings and peripheral galleries have been restored.⁷

There is a problem in the use of the double names Dashengcisi and Dacisi. The first was common under the Tang, the second after the Song, but from the beginning sources mixed the two. The earliest example is Wei Gao's 韋臯 "Notes on the Restoration of the Gilt Bronze Statue of Samantabhadra in the Dashengcisi in Chengdu Prefecture," dated 801, which gave the full name in the title and the shorter one in the text.⁸ During the Song, either name was used depending on the text. Dashengcisi is more frequently seen in artistic sources such as the *Yizhou minghua lu*, *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* and *Dashengcisi huaji*, as well as the Buddhist source, *Fozu tongji*,⁹ but in the *Song gaoseng zhuàn* 宋高僧傳 and *Tubua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (1070) it is always called Dacisi.¹⁰ In the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties the shorter name became the common one.

⁶ *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*, in *Quan Shu yiwén zhi*, 42: 1a-5b.

⁷ Nagahiro 1987: 64-65; Wang 2005: 38.

⁸ *Quan Tang wen*, 453: 6b-8a.

⁹ *Fozu tongji*, 40: 376a; 53: 464a.

¹⁰ *Song gaoseng zhuàn*, 6: 763b; *Tubua jianwen zhi*, first mention, 2: 55.

2.3. Buddhist Iconography Synopsis

The poet Su Dongpo 蘇東波 (1036-1101) mentioned the Dashengcisi as the center of an innovative iconographical painting style.¹¹ It is mainly because of its mural paintings on Buddhist themes that this monastery remained renowned far and wide over the centuries. More than 32 artists who painted in the Dashengcisi are listed in the *Yizhou minghua lu*. Lu Lengjia's 盧楞伽 work coincided with the foundation of the monastery. He was succeeded by Zhao Gongyou 趙公祐, Fan Qiong 范瓊, Zhang Teng 張騰, Zhao Wenqi 趙溫奇, Xin Cheng 辛澄, Li Hongdu 李洪度, Zuo Quan 左全, Pu Shixun 蒲師訓, Zhang Nanben 張南本, Chang Zhongyin 常重胤, Li Sheng 李昇, Lü Yao 呂嶠, Zhu Qian 竹虔, Du Nigui 杜覲龜, Li Wencai 李文才, Ruan Zhihui 阮知誨, Zhang Mei 張玫, Du Cuo 杜措, Du Jing'an 杜敬安, and others. According to Li Zhichun, paintings production flourished. Themes of the 8,524 wall paintings included 1,215 *buddhas*, 10,488 *bodhisattvas*, 68 Indra and Bhrama, 1,785 *arhats* and monks, 262 *devarājas*, *vidyārajas* and various protective deities, and 158 illustrations of *sūtras* and narratives scenes.¹² Although less numerous, the iconographical themes catalogued by Huang Xiufu give precise details of content and location. Locations particularly are concentrated at three pavilions; the Avatainsaka (9 paintings and 2 statues), Mañjuśrī (8) and Samantabhadra (7). Of the seventeen named sub-temples, the Sanxue yuan 三學院 seems to have been the most important, having politicians' portrait galleries and the largest amount of Buddhist iconography which covered various subjects; the guardians of the four directions (*devarājas*), previous lives of the Buddha (*jātaka* tales) such as the Mahāsattva *Jātaka*, episodes in Śākyamuni's life (Victory over Mara), the Buddha Amitābha, transformation pictures (*bianxiang* 變相), and religious portraits. An overview of the variety of themes, even those by the same painters, shows that of the two hundred paintings executed by Fan Qiong together with Chen Hao 陳皓 and Peng Jian 彭堅 in five different monasteries in the years 836-840, those that remained in the Dashengcisi after the Song persecutions are detailed by Huang Xiufu as follows:

¹¹ *Su Shi wenji*, 12: 388-389, 408-409.

¹² *Dashengcisi huaji*, in *Sichuan tongzhi*, 38: 41a.

After the two fires set by the Song armies in the fifth year of Chunhua (994) and the third year of Xianping (1000), only a few traces of the brush remain in three monasteries. In the Dashengcisi “The *yakṣa* Generals” “The *Nāgarāja* Vāsuki,” “Hāriti” and “*Asparas*” remain on five walls of the base of the Southern Gallery, which set is named “The Seventeen Protective Deities”; “Two *Vajra* [Carriers]”, “The Two *Devarājas* of the East and West” on the gate of the *Ārāma* of the Stone *Sūtras* and the base of the North Gallery; “The Buddha Amitābha” and “The Four *Bodhisattvas*” on the gate of the *Ārāma* of the Great Merciful One in the central monastery; and “Avalokiteśvara” and “Baiṣajyaguru” on both sides of the *ārāma*. The “Seven *Buddhas*,” “Four *ṛṣi*” and a “Transformation Picture of the Great Merciful One” on steles of the Stone *Sūtras*; “The Two *devarājas* of the North and South” on both sides of the Generals’ Hall; “The *Devarāja* of the North” and “A *Devarāja* Transformation Picture” on the base of the Mañjuśrī Pavilion. Because many years have past from the Tang to now, the colors of these wall paintings have darkened, and four or five out of ten have been damaged by repainting.¹³

The general diversity of the painted themes and architectural sites within the Dashengcisi reveals the syncretism of Buddhist sects, particularly those that flourished under the Tang and Five Dynasties; the Huayan, Pure Land, Tiantai, Tantric, and Chan. Nevertheless, as at Dunhuang during the same period under strong Tibetan influence, Tantric Buddhism seems to have predominated with themes such as the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, the Kings of Sapiens (*vidyārājas*) and illustrations of the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. The spread of Chan Buddhism also is indicated by the existence of three sub-temples; the Chongzhen chanyuan 崇真禪院, Chongfu chanyuan 崇福禪院 and Yuan of the Six Patriarchs 六祖院.¹⁴

3. Political Function

3.1. Official Sponsorship of the Dashengcisi and its Icons

Although we know about the circumstances of the founding of the monastery in 757, two years after “Emperor Ming (Xuanzong) coming from the capital Bian 汴 stopped his palankeen in Shu”, as Huang Xiufu

¹³ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *shang*: 3-5.

¹⁴ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *shang*: 7-8; *zhong*: 32-33; *xia*: 59-60.

wrote, we have no details about the opening ceremony itself. But recalling this event are the first wall paintings portraying “eminent monks” executed in 759 by Lu Lengjia. Those paintings with Yan Zhenqing’s 顏真卿 poem of appreciation were considered treasures.¹⁵ Construction of the Hall of the Reverend Master Sengqie 僧伽和尚堂 in 780 in the south of the monastery¹⁶ constitutes the second step in its enlargement, which was to become a continuous process. Each administrator, emperor and king left his mark. Among the governors of the Sichuan region who had the care of the religious buildings and their icons under the Tang, Wei Gao, Imperial Commander of Jiannan 劍南 and Xichuan 西川, from 785 to 806, whose enduring memories is of a devout Buddhist and good administrator respected by all. In the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, he is presented as an exceptional man, whose birth, in mysterious conditions, had been predicted by a monk coming from Central Asia. In the biography of Shenhui 神會, a monk of the Jingzhongsi, Wei Gao is said to have been close to Chan monks.¹⁷ Numerous inscriptions in the *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 testify to his charitable actions in the restoration of the gilt bronze statue of Samantabhadra in the Dashengcisi in 801 and construction of the Baolisi Monastery and Yinwu reliquary pagoda 鸚鵡舍利塔 in 803.¹⁸ The *Zaixiu Chengdu fu Dashengcisi jintong Puxian pusa ji* 再修成都府大聖慈寺金銅普賢菩薩記 [Note about the Restoration of the Gilt Bronze Statue of Samantabhadra in the Dashengcisi], written by Wei Gao in 801, is the oldest dated document about that monastery. This short text gives detailed information about its political context and Buddhist contents. It provides evidence that the administrators in charge of the region were involved in the maintenance of the monastery. The particular attention paid to this statue indicates that it may have been a main icon. This *bodhisattva* of the Fundamental Law, patron of the *Lotus* and *Huayan Sūtras*, who usually is represented riding a white elephant, seems to have been particularly

¹⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 8-9. Huang Xiufu made a confusion between Bian (Kaifeng), the Song capital in his life time, and Chang’an, the Tang capital in the context of the event described.

¹⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 11-12.

¹⁷ *Song Gaosengzhuan*, 9: 764b; 19: 830 b.

¹⁸ *Quan Tang wen*, 453: 1a-b; 6b-8a; 8a-9b; 11b-13a.

worshipped in the region as it is one of the main statues in the monastery on the holy mountain Emei shan 峨眉山 in southern Sichuan.¹⁹

Some destructive periods gave rise to creative restoration programs. During the 845 persecution of Buddhism under Wuzong 武宗 when most monasteries throughout China, including those in Chengdu, were partially or totally destroyed, owing to its imperial origin the Dashengcisi was well protected. According to Huang Xiufu, only the paintings in the Dashengcisi had not been damaged. In the restoration of Buddhist monasteries under Xuanzong 宣宗 (847-860), more than 200 wall paintings were executed by Fan Qiong, Chen Hao and Peng Jian in five Chengdu monasteries, including the Dashengcisi, of *buddhas*, *devarājas*, eminent monks and all the Transformation pictures.²⁰ The Dashengcisi even became the safe repository of precious relics from other monasteries to prevent their destruction during the persecutions in which monks were forced to defrock and all bronze statues and bells were melted down into coins or weapons. In the biography of the monk Wuxiang 無相, it is said that the bell of the Jingzongsi was transported to the Dashengcisi and remained there until returned to its original site after the restoration.²¹

The two Tang emperors, Xuanzong exiled to Shu from 756-757 and Xizong exiled there from 880-885, successive governors in charge of the region, and the later Wang and Meng rulers not only sponsored the architectural and iconographic development of the Dashengcisi they participated in sumptuous ceremonies. One such ritual that honored the visit of the first king of Shu, Wang Jian 王建 (847-918), referred to as the Dragon, is described in a poem dated 903 composed by the famous monk, calligrapher and painter Guanxiu 貫休 (also called Chanyue dashi 禪月大師: 832-912), which shows how closely Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, popular cults and politics were linked.

Jade rhythm tablets and golden conches sound like thunder. The procession moves forward among buildings and residences, sparkling like mercury (...). *Sūtras* are harmoniously chanted (...). The King and the monks stop at a distance facing the mirror disposed in the center. (...) For one thousand *li* fragrances give a halo to the Dragon standing. (...) Calm, as

¹⁹ Cf. Wang 2005: 46.

²⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 2-5.

²¹ *Song Gaoseng zhuàn*, 19: 832c-833a. Cf. Wang 2005: 42.

when the Sun and the Moon appear after strong rain, elegant like the Four Peaks emerging from dust, he walks with high steps, exhaling a regular purple breath. The antique terrace is strewn with immortality flowers of the nine colors. (...) He climbs up the tower and enjoys [viewing] the golden cereals ready for harvest. He contemplates the kingdom (...) where, with his sword shining like a diamond, he exterminated the enemy. In the sound of the bell struck by a wooden clapper, happiness rains down from the sky. In the light of shining stars, the earth knows no disaster. One hundred thousand people hasten to listen to the *sūtra* recitations and meditate. Lastly, the Cereal Gods' power will again be manifested in the Empire.²²

3.2. Official Portraits as Political Propaganda

In addition to the construction, enlargement and restoration of its buildings, officials sponsored their own portraits in the Dashengcisi. Theirs were among the most numerous paintings in the monastery, even more than Buddhist themes and portraits of eminent monks. They had both a didactic and a political function as in the Confucianist tradition. They included portraits of governors, Tang emperors, and the four kings of Shu accompanied by relatives, ministers and officers. Under the Tang, prime ministers often combined their office with that of Shu governor, which accounts for the number of important politicians related to the history of Shu who were represented in portraits.

This custom of virtuous subjects' portraits being displayed in special galleries dates to ancient times. The Former Han emperor Xuandi 宣帝 (r. 74-49 B.C.) ordered the construction of the Qilin Pavilion 麒麟閣 in the Weiyang Palace 未央宮 and had it decorated with eleven portraits of exemplary subjects. The Later Han emperor Mingdi 明帝 (r. 57-75 C.E.) built the Guande Hall 光德殿 in Luoyang to enshrine the portraits of 32 brave generals.²³ This tradition was continued under the Tang emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 627-649) who, in 643, raised the Lingyan Pavilion 凌煙閣 to the east of the imperial palace in Chang'an and ordered Yan Liben 閻立本 to paint portraits of 24 meritorious persons; ministers, nobles and ordinary subjects.²⁴

²² *Chanyue ji*, 19: 1, quoted in Kobayashi 1974: 282.

²³ *Hanshu*, 54: 2459; *Hou Hanshu*, 24: 851-852. See Hou 1981: 37-58.

²⁴ *Lidai minghua ji*, 9: 269-277; Acker 1974: 212 sq.

As proof of their power, many governors had their portraits painted and placed in official buildings throughout Chengdu. Huang Xiufu catalogued 22 places in existence before 1006, mainly Buddhist monasteries, such as the Longxingsi 龍興寺, Shengshousi 聖壽寺, Fugansi 福感寺, Zhongxingsi 中興寺, Zifusi 資福寺, and Sitianwangsi 四天王寺 but also Taoist shrines such as the Longxing guan 龍興觀. The most sites were in the Dashengcisi. Each figure painted was identified. Names and titles were precise. Of the 12 prime ministers, many were represented accompanied by officers of their governments. Six artists' signatures remained.²⁵ The position of imperial commander, *jiedushi* 節度使, reflects the geostrategic situation of that time. In Western Sichuan, the *jiedushi*'s mission was to contain incursions by Tibetans in the west and the Nanzhao 南詔 Kingdom in the south (modern Yunnan Province). This mission was considered so crucial for the preservation of peace in the Tang Empire that the officials in charge were particularly honored, and the position of *jiedushi* of Sichuan therefore was considered a priority, placed at the top of the hierarchy and often combined with the office of prime minister.²⁶ Those paintings were valuable assets that reflected local and imperial history for more than three centuries. The oldest portrait in the Dashengcisi was that of Prime Minister Du Hongjian 杜鴻漸 (ca. 750-779). According to his biographies in the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, he was named *jiedushi* of Western Sichuan in 766, twenty years after An Lushan's rebellion and Xuanzong's exile to Shu. A devout Buddhist, he is said to have converted the emperor. During his service in Chengdu he contributed to many Buddhist charities.²⁷ Not all the *jiedushi* in Sichuan were as virtuous, but all had extreme power. The last Tang prime minister's portrait mentioned is Wei Zhaodu's 韋昭度 (ca. 880-904). He followed Xizong into exile in Shu and was made *jiedushi* of Western Sichuan in 888.²⁸

²⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *zhong*: 48-50.

²⁶ See Tietze 1980: 32-53.

²⁷ *Jiu Tang shu*, 108: 3282-3285; *Xin Tang shu*, 126: 4422-4424.

²⁸ *Jiu Tang shu*, 179: 4653-4654; *Xin Tang Shu*, 185: 5410-5411. See Nagahiro 1989: 50-55.

3.3. Commemorative Portraits of the Tang Emperors and their Governors

The other official portrait category is that of imperial and royal persons. The second exile from the Tang court in Chengdu was Xizong who escaped Huang Chao's 黃巢 rebellion. On the citizens' initiative his was the first imperial portrait enshrined in the Dashengcisi. It indicates the role of the monastery as a memorial to a political event and the involvement of Shu in it. When, after four years of exile in Shu, Xizong was ready to return to Chang'an, the people requested that his portrait be kept in the Dashengcisi. A painters' competition was held, which Chang Zhongyin 常重胤, son of the portraitist Chang Can 常粲, won. According to Huang Xiufu's description of the portrait located in the Zhonghe yuan 中和院, the emperor was shown accompanied by his two ministers; Chen Jingxuan 陳敬瑄 in front and Tian Lingzi 田令孜 in back. They were surrounded by all their high civilian and military officers; totally more than 100 figures, each named, and their respective functions and titles given.²⁹ The composition of this huge painting reveals the power and responsibilities of the two ministers during the earlier political chaos. Xizong, an immature emperor, who died when only 27, had been manipulated by his eunuchs. Tian Lingzi, a native of Shu, exerted strong influence on Xizong and kept the emperor away from political matters. Although Tian Lingzi achieved high positions, he was unable to prevent the crisis that ensued with Huang Chao's revolt.³⁰ Chen Jingxuan, Tian Lingzi's half brother, originally managed an inn in Chengdu. Owing to his relative's influence, he became commander of Western Sichuan (881 to 891) to the surprise of the Chengdu populace. When the emperor returned to the capital, the two brothers refused to leave and occupied Chengdu. After three years of siege, they surrendered and Wang Jian founded the Kingdom of Shu in 916.³¹ The new ruler was aware of the city's artistic heritage, and had great respect for the quality of the paintings irrespective of who was represented. As Huang Xiufu

²⁹ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 18-21.

³⁰ Cf. *Jiu Tang shu*, 184: 4771-4772; *Xin Tang shu*, 208: 5884-5889. See Somers 1979: 714-762.

³¹ Cf. *Xin Tang shu*, 224 *xia*: 6406-6409; *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 6: 986-988.

noted, after his victory, when Wang Jian went to pay his respects to the imperial portrait, he noticed that Chen and Tian's portraits were missing. When it was explained that they had been painted over because of their insubordination, he ordered that their portraits be restored.

The Dashengcisi gradually gained other galleries dedicated to imperial or royal portrait collections. Probably to legitimate his reign by linking it to the Tang lineage, Wang Jian asked Song Yi 宋藝, an official painter of the academy, to execute portraits of the 21 Tang emperors on the walls of a particular place reserved for that use, the Ārāma of Imperial Portraits, the Yurong yuan 御容院. The painter added three other portraits, two of religious figures and one of a politician; Ye Fashan 葉法善; an alchemist Taoist priest in Ruizong's 睿宗 court (r. 710-712),³² the Buddhist monk Yixing 一行 (683-727) and Gao Lishi the faithful eunuch who guarded Emperor Xuanzong's security and organized his escape to Shu.³³ All held major roles under the Tang. In the Yongping era (911-915), a statue of the emperor Xuanzong in the Taoist form of a Celestial Venerable, was transferred from a Taoist shrine, the Xingsheng guan 興聖觀, to the Yurong yuan in the Dashengcisi and joined the other pictures there,³⁴ evidence that the Buddhist function of this monastery and its paintings overlapped the two Chinese religions of Confucianism and Taoism, and reflected the political events of the era.

3.4. Royal Portraits to the Glory of the Shu Kingdom

Wang Jian, the first king of Shu exploited the tradition of portraiture as a symbol of power and recognition of his legitimacy by the Tang. In the period 898-901, while still alive, he received the supreme honor, authorization to build his own Ancestor Hall, from Zhaozong 昭宗 Emperor. Two painters, Gao Daoxing 高道興 and Zhao Deqi 趙德齊, were entrusted with decorating this monument. Gao painted the king's portrait entitled, "The King Pacifier of the West," complete with his emblems,

³² Cf. *Jiu Tangshu*, 191: 5107; *Xin Tang shu*, 204: 5805; *Quan Tang shi*, 860: 9717; *Quan Tang wen*, 923: 2b.

³³ *Yizhou minghua lu*, xia: 58.

³⁴ *Yizhou minghua lu*, xia: 51.

chariots, banners, ceremonial garments and honorific symbols, as well as painting “the royal aunts and parents, wives and concubines, musicians and dancers” on more than 100 walls in the Audience Hall, the Chaozhen dian 朝真殿. After Wang Jian’s death in 918, Gao Daoxing together with Zhao Deqi painted more than 100 pannels in the shrine attached to the royal tumulus with “deities and demons, horsemen and soldiers in armor, princesses with their honorary emblems, palaces and apartments, as well as concubines and servants.”³⁵

Wang Jian also turned his attention to the Dashengcisi. To reinforce its political function, he ordered construction of the sub-temple Sanxue yuan 三學院, also called Sanxue yanxiang zhi yuan 三學延祥院. Built in 894, it became the primary symbol of the Wang and Meng regimes. Because the new building replaced the East Gallery, Lu Lengjia’s wall paintings of “Eminent Monks Transmitting the Dharma,” executed there at the founding of the monastery in 757, were transferred to other places.³⁶ Following the tradition of praising rulers’ power, virtuous subjects’ merits and eminent monks’ wisdom; again mixing politics and religion but more from a Confucian than a Buddhist perspective, the four rulers of the Wang and Meng regimes ordered portraits painted of their officials. The choice of portrait and time of execution provides much information about the political situation during the Five Dynasties and the use made of the paintings and the temples in which they were deposited and worshipped. Ten painters, who worked in the Sanxue yuan during the Five Dynasties, are mentioned by Huang Xiufu; some specialized exclusively in portraits.

In the Qiande years (919-924), Ruan Zhihui 阮知誨 painted the portrait of the young, newly crowned king, Wang Yan 王衍 (r. 918-924) on the base of the *Sūtra* Pavilion in the Sanxue yuan.³⁷ This portrait had been ordered by Wang Yan himself, whose reign lasted only five years and who left few enduring accomplishments. His physical description in the *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 is not flattering: a big mouth, angular cheeks, and squinting eyes. During his reign, Wang Yan was interested in travel and luxury more than politics. He was famous for

³⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 14-15.

³⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 8-9.

³⁷ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 38-39.

wearing extravagant clothes and hats that made the people of Chengdu laugh.³⁸ Nevertheless, he was active culturally in city planning. He built, arranged and decorated many official buildings in Chengdu. The list of his interests included parks, halls, palaces, pavilions, kiosks and gates. Probably under the strong influence of his preceptor, Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933), the great Taoist Master of the Tang and Wang courts, he became personally involved in Taoist practices; for example, going with his court to the holy mountain Qingcheng shan 青城山 on pilgrimage. Because of his inclination for Taoism rather than Buddhism, he installed portrait galleries in Taoist shrines, and attempted to link his ancestors to Taoist deities.³⁹ He transformed the Shangqing gong 上清宮 and added an Ancestor Hall, for which he ordered a statue of Wang Zijin 王子晉, an Immortal of the Zhou Dynasty (571-544 B.C.).⁴⁰ On the four walls of the Ancestor Hall, he had Du Nigui 杜覲龜 paint the 21 Tang emperors' portraits.⁴¹ In addition, Du Nigui painted Wang Jian's portrait and those of his wife and his favorite concubine (Wang Yan's mother and aunt) in the Jinhua gong 金華宮 on Mount Qingcheng. Thereafter, he was made a member of the Hanlin Academy and received the symbols of the Golden Fish and Purple Robe. All the sources on Wang Yan confirm that he paid very little attention to the Buddhist Dashengcisi, but he did not forget to add his own portrait to its gallery.

When Meng Zhixiang 孟知祥 (874-934) took power in 925, he renewed and reinforced the Confucian tradition of portrait galleries in the Dashengcisi. During the Mingde era (934-937), he had a Portrait Hall built, the *Zhentang* 眞堂, "Hall of [the] Real [Representation]," in the Sanxue yuan of the Dashengcisi.⁴² As the name indicates, its original purpose was the worship of the king's own portrait painted in what was considered realistic style. According to Huang Xiufu, Zhang Mei 張

³⁸ *Xin Wudai shi*, 63: 791-793. About his reign, see *Jiu Wudai shi*, 136: 1819-1822. See also Yang 1986: 80-81.

³⁹ See Verellen 1989: 59-78; Mesnil 1996-1997: 131-158.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, Kaltenmark (trad.) [1953] 1987: 109-114.

⁴¹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *zhong*: 29. According to the *Xin Wudai shi* (64: 792), those portraits were molded statues.

⁴² *Yizhou minghua lu*, *zhong*: 37-38.

玫 painted the deceased Great General of the armies of Xichuan, Dong Zhang's 董璋 portrait in this hall.⁴³ On whose initiative he painted it is not clear, probably Dong Zhang's while still alive. It obviously had not been Meng Zhixiang's wish because he became angry when he saw only Dong's portrait there and not his own. This anecdote reflects the political rivalry in the Later Shu kingdom from which the Meng regime emerged. Dong Zhang and Meng Zhixiang shared the position of imperial commander in Sichuan; the former in the east, the latter in the west. They became allied and proclaimed Shu independence from the Later Tang. Dong broke the alliance hoping to gain ascendancy but was defeated by Meng who proclaimed himself King of Later Shu.⁴⁴ This is why he commissioned Ruan Zhihui to paint his portrait, whereas civilian and military officials were painted by Zhang Mei. Huang Xiufu recorded that none of those paintings was extant in 1006.

Wang Jian's portrait by Ruan Zhihui was added to the Portrait Hall of the Sanxue yuan.⁴⁵ Sponsorship of the portrait of the first Shu dynasty king shows that Meng Zhixiang was eager to legitimate his reign as being in continuity with the Shu founder. The only remaining Shu royal portrait, also the only sculpture, is Wang Jian's statue found when his tomb was excavated in 1939. It provides a view of the realistic portrait style of the period and a glimpse of what Wang Jian actually looked like. The statue is two-thirds natural scale and shows the king seated in the "western way" on a semi-circular throne. He wears a large belt of jade plates, exactly like the jade belt found in his coffin. Traces of nails indicate that the statue once was sheltered by a wooden canopy. Light traces of white, red and green pigments show that originally it probably had been painted in bright colors.⁴⁶ Its realistic austere style emphasizes the military virtue of the first king of Shu and portrays him as he is described in the *Xin Wudai shi*—with thick eyebrows, deep set eyes, a straight nose, thin lips and large ears.⁴⁷

⁴³ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 39.

⁴⁴ *Xin Wudai shi*, 64: 800-801.

⁴⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 38-39.

⁴⁶ Cf. Sullivan 1947-1948: 17-26; Cheng Te-k'un 1949: 1-11. See also the excavation reports, Feng 1964: 20-24.

⁴⁷ *Xin wudai shi*, 63: 783.

In addition, Ruan Zhihui painted portraits of the two Princesses Fuqing 福慶 and Yuqing 玉清 in the private apartments of the palace.⁴⁸ Not only were these illustrations of his family, they indicated Meng Zhixiang's 孟知祥 connection to other rulers and his matrimonial policies. Fuqing was the daughter of the Jin 晉 King, Li Keyong 李克用 (856-908) and the sister of the Later Tang Dynasty founder, Li Cunzi 李存勗 (885-926). She married Meng Zhixiang in 912 when he was a high officer under the Jin. She died in 932 and her ashes were transferred in 934 to Meng Zhixiang's tomb. This is a rare case of a couple being buried in the same tomb during that period. The tumulus, excavated in 1971, was declared a Protected Site in 1980.⁴⁹

At the end of the Guangzheng era (938-966), just before the conquest of Shu by the Song, King Meng Chang 孟昶 (r. 934-965) built his own portrait hall behind the Huayan Pavilion in the Dashengcisi. He ordered Li Wencai 李文才, a local painter skilled in portraiture, to paint him and portraits of his princes, ministers and officers. For this work, Li received various honorary titles and was made a member of the Hanlin Academy and awarded the Purse with the Fish symbol and the Scarlet Robe. Too closely related to the regime of that last Meng king defeated by the Song, the paintings were destroyed about 964.⁵⁰ During his long reign of thirty-one years, Meng Chang continued the major restoration of popular cult shrines begun under Meng Zhixiang and built his father's tomb which, as recorded in the *Yizhou minghua lu*, was decorated with sculpted reliefs and parade scenes by Pu Shixun.⁵¹ Meng Chang contributed more to the development of popular religion than to the official one; for example, in the Dashengcisi. This is evidence that religion and art liberated from the official frame found new popular expression.

⁴⁸ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 38-39.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Xin Wudai shi*, 64: 797 and 802. About the funerary inscription in the tomb which gives a slightly different biography, see Zhong in *Wenwu*, 1982, 3: 5-20.

⁵⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 37-38.

⁵¹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 30-31.

4. Buddhist Aspects

4.1. Buddhist Patrons and Portraits

Although sponsoring magnificent official and religious buildings was first part of the duties of the Tang governors then of the kings of Shu, that charge also fell to religious dignitaries, both Taoist and Buddhist. Besides their regular religious activities, chief abbots and even ordinary monks often had major roles in the politics and uses of the monasteries of Shu. They themselves sponsored many paintings, the choice of theme being determined not only by the type of religious tradition and teaching but by personal aesthetics that reflected new genre such as landscape paintings and new ink techniques.

Of the religious dignitaries active in Shu, State Master Wuda Guoshi 悟達國師 (monk's name: Zhixuan 知玄) is the most eminent. He had his portrait enshrined in a special Portrait Hall in the Dashengcisi. Chang Can, who came from the Tang capital to Shu in the Xiantong era (860-874) and specialized in portraiture, was entrusted with this work. Because of his high official position, Wuda's portrait can be classified as an official one from a quasi-Confucian perspective, but it also is in the Buddhist tradition of venerating representations of eminent monks. Wuda divided his time between official functions at court and local religious activities. According to his biography in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, he was a native of Mei Prefecture 眉州 South of Chengdu. His deep knowledge of Buddhist texts, his wisdom and his sense of aesthetics gained him fame and respect throughout China. Specializing in the Pure Land and Chan Buddhist schools, he wrote a variety of treatises.⁵² He spoke the dialect of Shu, which caused misadventures. In the Xiantong years (860-873) he was made director of the Religious Affairs Bureau and given the management of the official monastery, Anguosi in Chang'an. At that time, he received the highest honorary title, State Master Wuda. He seems to have been very influential and associated with important Buddhist activities, and even to have had a diplomatic role in sensitive regions along the border of the Chinese empire. A discussion between him and the ambassador of the

⁵² In T. 45, no. 1910 and T. 85, no. 2854, 2855 and 2856.

Dali 大理 Kingdom (modern Yunnan) is recorded on a scroll entitled *Qike yizhuang* 七科義狀. But when he was teaching in the Zishengsi 資聖寺 in the capital, he was laughed at by all the attendant monks and dignitaries because of his dialect. Vexed, he returned to Shu and went to Mount Xiang'er 象耳山 in Mei Prefecture, his native region. This holy mountain was famous for the manifestation of the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara. One night he is said to have seen a monk in a dream who cut out his own tongue and exchanged it with Wuda's. The following day, he could speak fluent Mandarin Chinese.⁵³ This anecdote indicates the importance at that time in that region of the cult of the thousand-armed *bodhisattva*, to which Wuda was devoted. It was probably under Wuda's sponsorship that Li Sheng 李昇 painted the scroll of "The Great Merciful One of Mount Xiang'er" catalogued in the Song imperial collection.⁵⁴

Wuda later settled in the Shengshousi in Chengdu where he freely expressed his deep sense of aesthetics. He admired Li Sheng's skill and invited him to live in his quarters in the main *ārāma* of the monastery, which Li did for several years. During this time, Li Sheng painted "Gorges [of the Yangzi]" and "Mountains in Fog" on two walls of the Assembly Hall. Shortly thereafter, he painted two Shu landscapes on walls of the Portrait Hall in the Dashengcisi which expressed Wuda's attachment to his native land; "Mount Sanxue 三學山 of Han Prefecture 漢州" located in north of Chengdu, and "Mount Zhide 至德山 in Peng Prefecture 彭州". Huang Xiufu explained that, those two landscapes, together with Wuda's portrait painted by Chang Can 常粲, and the eulogy composed by Li Shangyin 李商隱 with calligraphy by the monk Daoying 道盈, were particularly cherished as the four treasures of Wuda's Portrait Hall and were still in existence before 1000.⁵⁵ All this indicates that portraits halls were not exclusively for official portraits. Besides Buddhist portraits, they held paintings with lay themes, such as landscapes, valued purely for their aesthetic aspects.

⁵³ Biography in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 6: 743b-745a; Scroll *Qike yizhuang* quoted in the *Yiwen zhi*, in *Xin Tang shu*, 59: 1530.

⁵⁴ *Xuanbe hua pu*, 3: 102-104. See Kobayashi 1982: 85-87.

⁵⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *zhong*: 27-28.

4.2. Portraits of Lineages of Eminent Monks, Patriarchs and *Arbats*

Besides local eminent monks' portrait such as Wuda's one, portraits or figurative paintings in the Dashengcisi included disciples of the Buddha, *arbats*, patriarchs and numerous eminent monks. About sixty eminent unnamed monks and nine named ones are cited in the *Yizhou minghua lu*. Li Wencai 李文才 and Song Yi 宋藝 are among the painters who portrayed several identified Buddhist subjects.⁵⁶ Those portraits were placed in three significant buildings; the Sūtra Pavilion Library, Huayan Pavilion and Ārāma of the Imperial Portraits, clearly indicative of those subjects' respective fields. Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) and State Master Dinghui's 定惠國師 portraits by Li Wencai were displayed in the library, the first was renowned for his study of texts and development of the doctrine. Xuanzang, also called Master of the Buddhist Canon, Sanzang Fashi 三藏法師, is most representative of pilgrims monks who went to India in search of Buddhist sources and brought back many *sūtras* and commentaries which, for generations, stimulated translation from Sanskrit into Chinese. Besides the political portraits of the 21 Tang emperors by Song Yi, portraits of the Taoist priest of the court, Ye Fashan, and of the Buddhist monks Yixing 一行 and Haihui 海會 were displayed. Yixing (683-727), a famous monk of esoteric Buddhism, was known not only as a translator and writer of numerous doctrinal texts but as an eminent mathematician and astrologer who held an important court post.⁵⁷

Without implicit political connections, but directly related to the history of the spread and adaptation of Buddhism in China, were portraits of the generic category "eminent monks." Each school had its lineage of venerated patriarchs whose portraits had a didactic function showing the generation and transmission of the doctrine. They were also objects of respect and worship at regular rituals. The portraits of eminent monks painted by Lu Lengjia and Gao Daoxing were particularly remarkable because their themes clearly were related to the teaching of Buddhism, and the exact dates of their execution and locations in the monastery were

⁵⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 37-38; xia: 58.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Jiu Tang shu*, 191: 5111; *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 5: 732c-733c. See also *Répertoire du canon bouddhique sino-japonais*: 257; Needham 1974-1983, III: 37-38.

recorded, as well as their style, preservation and numbers. Lu Lengjia's paintings of unidentified "Eminent Monks Transmitting the Dharma" comprised several murals executed in the East and West galleries in 758, just a year after the monastery's foundation. They were so valued that when the Sanxue yuan was built in 894 on the site of the East Gallery, they were moved to three other places; the North and South gates and the Hall of Avalokiteśvara. They were still in good condition in 1006 but had disappeared before 1175, as they were not included in Lu Lengjia's works cited in the *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*.⁵⁸ His paintings of two other monks in the West Gallery were clearly identified. The first was of Aśvaghōṣa.⁵⁹ The second was of Āryadeva.⁶⁰ The display of their portraits in the Dashengcisi was intended to refer to the authors of original Indian texts translated into Chinese and to establish a link between Chinese Chan Buddhism and the Indian tradition of *dhyaṇa*. Lu Lengjia was a very active painter of Buddhist themes who worked in other regions, including the Tang capital. This explains the numerous painted scrolls attributed to him, which were indexed in such later sources as the catalogue of the Song imperial collection.⁶¹ Of the eight preserved today, the "Six Venerables," painted scrolls representing eminent monks in the collection of the Palace

⁵⁸ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 8-9; *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*, in *Quan Shu yiwen zhi*, 42: 3a-4a.

⁵⁹ An Indian Brahman of Varanasi, named Ashifujusha or Maming in Chinese, who lived under the Kuṣāna king, Kaniṣka (2nd c.) and converted to Buddhism. He is considered the 12th patriarch in the Indian lineage. Among the attributed treatises, is the *Mabāyānaśraddhotpāda-śāstra* (*Dacheng qixin lun*), translated into Chinese by Paramārtha (554 A.D.) and by Śikṣānanda (695-700), in T. 32, no. 1666-1667.

⁶⁰ A native of Sri Lanka, named Tipo or Tipoluo in Chinese, who lived during the 2nd to 3rd centuries in Kośala and Pātaliputra. Nāgārjuna's disciple, he is considered the 14th patriarch in the Indian lineage. Several attributed treatises are the *Sata-śāstra* (*Bai lun*), the *Catuṣṣataka-śātra-kārikā* (*Guangbai lun*) translated into Chinese by Xuanzang (602-664) and the *Akṣaraśataka* (*Baizi lun*). See the twenty-eight patriarchs in Yampolski 1967: 8-9.

⁶¹ *Xuanbe hua pu*, 2: 75-76; *Qingbe shubua fang*, 1: 14; *Peiwen zhai shubua pu*, 97: 4a.

Museum in Beijing, are considered the oldest copies and the nearest to Lu Lengjia's style as described in the sources.⁶²

A second important painter of Buddhist figures in the Dashengcisi is Gao Daoxing, considered in his time particularly skilled in Buddhist paintings and portraits of eminent monks. He became well known for his royal portraits kept in the Ancestor Hall of Wang Jian, in the Audience Hall of the shrine attached to the royal tumulus. Gao Daoxing's work seems always to have been done in numerous series or on a monumental scale. In the Dashengcisi he painted more than 60 portraits of eminent monks that were in existence before 1006.⁶³ The dates of execution are not clear, but the fact that he started to work for Wang Jian about 898 provides a reference. Like the eminent monks by Lu Lengjia, his portraits were located in the two galleries, indicative that those galleries held a concentration of religious portraits. Huang Xiufu's contradictory indications, however, raise a question. As stated earlier, Lu Lengjia's "Eminent Monks," originally in the East Gallery, were transferred to three other places when the Sanxue yuan was built in 894 at that site, evidence that the East Gallery had been destroyed. How then could Gao Daoxing's 16 portraits of "Eminent Monks" still be displayed in the east and west galleries in 1006 if the Eastern Gallery had been demolished? There are two hypotheses: The original Eastern Gallery was only partially destroyed where Lu Lengjia's eminent monks formerly were displayed, or a new gallery was built after construction of the Sanxue yuan, in which Gao Daoxing may have painted. There is no evidence for either hypothesis. Nevertheless, the function of those galleries to display numerous "Eminent Monks" portraits is clear. The lengths of the galleries were ideally suited to the display of long lineages.

Like *sūtras*, portraits of eminent monks executed on scrolls could be transported over long distances. In 806, the Japanese monk Kūkai 空海 returned from China with painted portraits of the patriarchs of

⁶² Reproduced in *Zhongguo lidai buibua*, 1: 58-69. About other paintings, see Cahill 1980: 16.

⁶³ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 14-15; *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 2: 81; *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*, in *Quan Shu yiwen zhi*, 42: 2b.

esoteric Buddhism, now kept in the Tōji 東寺 in Kyoto. Amoghavajra's representation by Li Zhen, a painter active in the 8th century, is a very rare remaining example of a monk's portrait done in the meticulous manner of that period.⁶⁴ The "Six Patriarchs," like those painted by Zhang Nanben in the Zhuxi yuan and those by the monk Linzong 僧令宗 in the Destinies Hall beside the "Pond to Release [creatures] to Life" in the Dashengcisi,⁶⁵ generally included the founders of Chan Buddhism since Bodhidharma. The term "six patriarch(s)" sometimes refers only to the Sixth Patriarch who, depending on the tradition, is identified as Shenxiu 神秀 (606-706) or Huineng 慧能 (638-713). The Dashengcisi had a special Hall of the Six/Sixth patriarch(s) in its main compound⁶⁶ whose portraits not only served to justify a lineage related to the transmission of the doctrine, but were assimilated and became significant worshipped relics that gradually were substituted for the reliquary *stūpas* of venerated holy monks of the Sixth Dynasties (222-589). The enshrining of portraits of patriarchs and eminent monks is explained by the transition from physical remains to commemorative images which, like portraits, were considered the "Real Essence" *Zhen* 真.⁶⁷ Under the Tang, special halls appeared in which to display and worship them. Many have been documented in the Dashengcisi. The place devoted to State Master Wuda Guoshi's portrait mentioned above, referred to as the "Hall of the Real" *Zhen tang* 真堂, and Ārāma of the Six Patriarchs 六祖院, or the Chongzhen chanyuan 崇真禪院, literally translated the "Sub-temple of Chan Buddhism for Commemorative Real [Portraits]" clearly reflects this function. In fact, more than the lineage of direct transmission from master to disciple, such portraits often indicate the doctrinal and historical affiliation of a monastery (in the absence of clear affiliation with a specific Buddhist school), which may have varied and been syncretized over the centuries, as at the Dashengcisi. The worship of patriarchs and eminent monks also incorporated the Confucian cult of ancestors. The disposition and ritual functions of halls containing patriarchs' and eminent monks' portraits

⁶⁴ Cf. *Tōji kokuhō ten*, 1995, n° 34.

⁶⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu, xia*: 59.

⁶⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 32-33.

⁶⁷ See Nishiwaki 1990: 195-222; Foulk and Sharf 1993-1994: 149-219.

appear to have been very similar to those of the halls with imperial or royal ancestors and portrait galleries with meritorious subjects.

4.3. Popular Cults and Magical Uses of Buddhist Portraits

Because of strong belief that the magical powers of original paintings were the most powerful, portraits of some eminent monks were particularly worshipped and frequently copied as scrolls that circulated widely. This is the case of Sengqie's 僧伽 portrait, an example of what can be considered the officialization of a popular cult. Its execution in the Dashengcisi was a noteworthy event. In the first year of Jianzhong (780), a hall dedicated to Reverend Master Sengqie 僧伽和尚堂 was built in the southern part of the monastery. This thaumaturge monk, also called the monk from Sizhou 泗州, probably came from Central Asia and lived in the Puguangwang Monastery 普光王寺 in Sizhou (modern Anhui) between 657 and 710, where he died at age 83. Famous for his miracles, his cult spread quickly among the people and an imperial edict ordered worship hermitages to be built at important religious sites throughout the Tang empire. From that time, his portrait was reproduced and circulated everywhere, including Shu.⁶⁸ According to Huang Xiufu, when the painter Xin Cheng 辛澄 was asked to paint in the hermitage hall, a foreigner came and showed him what, he said, was the original portrait from Sizhou. Xin Cheng, deeply impressed by the extraordinary painting, decided to copy it on the wall beside his *sūtra* illustrations. The painting had just been finished when ladies and gentlemen came to venerate it. The room became so crowded that they could hardly keep their feet on the ground. Carrying incense and oil lamps, they had to push each other aside to pray.⁶⁹

Arbat paintings constituted another category of Buddhist portraiture, a particularly popular fashion from the Tang period onward. For various reasons, such paintings were related in terms of representation, style

⁶⁸ Biography in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 18: 822a-823a; *Sheng seng zhuan*, 7: 992a-c. On his cult and his portrait, see Makita 1981: 321-323. 1957: 1-30. About examples in the Dunhuang grottos, see Sun 1982: 236-237. A banner from Dunhuang is in the collection of the National Library in Paris; Cf. Wang Toutain 1994: 65-66.

⁶⁹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *shang*: 11-12.

and, above all, magical powers. Originally Śākyamuni's disciples, the *arhats* became models of exceptional humans of boundless merit and were particularly venerated in Chan rites. Rarely represented individually, they were grouped in codified series of sixteen. Following the development of their cult, sixteen *arhats* paintings became extremely popular and frequently were reproduced. In the Dashengcisi their place of worship was the "Hall of the Arhats" 羅漢堂 in the Guangdingyuan. The paintings there were by Zhang Xuan 張玄, a local Shu painter whose skill in painting *arhats* was so renowned that he was called "Zhang the Arhat."⁷⁰ Huang Xiufu mentioned only two other places in the Dashengcisi that had wall paintings of *arhats*. Paintings by Zhao Deqi were in the Chongfu chanyuan 崇福禪院, and "Sixty *Arhats* Protecting the Dharma" by Zuo Quan 左全 in the North Gallery.⁷¹ Fan Chengda, however, recorded 12 places in the Dashengcisi with *arhat* paintings executed between the 8th and the 10th centuries. This means that although the theme developed, most attributions were either ignored by Huang Xiufu or were later ones, which is more probable as no series of *arhats*, only Ananda and Kaśyapa direct disciples of the Buddha, are present in wall paintings done at Dunhuang during the same period. In Lu Lengjia's case, for example, Huang Xiufu recorded only his "Eminent Monks Transmitting the Dharma" as appearing in the Dashengcisi; whereas, Fan Chengda catalogued at least six sets of paintings by this artist in different places in the monastery, among which were two complete sets of *arhats*.⁷² No *arhats* by Lu Lengjia are mentioned in the oldest sources, whereas they are in later ones. In the catalogue of the Song imperial collection, besides such Buddhist themes as eminent monks, there are several series of *arhats*. The catalogues of the Ming and Qing Dynasties mention only Lu Lengjia's paintings of *arhats*, evidence that he definitely was associated with *arhat* paintings even though there is no proof he actually portrayed any. This attribution seems to be the result of the incorporation of his paintings of eminent monks to the fashion of depicting *arhats*.

Two painters active in Shu appear to have been unrivaled in the development and dissemination of *arhat* paintings throughout China.

⁷⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 28.

⁷¹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 7-8 and 12-13.

⁷² *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*, in *Quan Shu yiwu zhi*, 42: 1a-5b.

Zhang Xuan and Guanxiu 貫休 (835-912) painted only *arhats*. In addition to the fame of his series of wall paintings in the Arhat Hall of the Dashengcisi, Zhang Xuan's scrolls were so greatly appreciated that people came from as far away as the lower Yangzi region to buy them at expensive prices.⁷³ Eighty-eight scrolls of *arhats* by Zhang Xuan are catalogued in the *Xuanbe huapu* where it is said that his detailed style and faithful treatment of the faces of his figures reflect the human world.⁷⁴ As Guo Ruoxu reported, Zhang Xuan probably contributed to the development of this fashion by the transmission of his pleasant "realistic style."⁷⁵ This was combined with the spread of Guanxiu's *arhats* of "grotesque" style, described as having dented faces like rhinoceros. Although, Guanxiu painted his entire life, as far as is known, only two *arhat* series were done on silk scrolls; one in Xinzhou 信州 (Jiangsu), one in Shu. The number of paintings attributed to this artist, however, was a major phenomenon and increased exponentially over the centuries. More than the holiness of the *arhats* themselves, the reason lay in the magical powers attributed to the artist's paintings that were believed to bring rain if people prayed in front of them. He was greatly appreciated by King Wang Jian who felt honored to receive this famous monk in Shu in the period 901-907. Moreover, he was respected for his knowledge of Buddhist texts, his poetry, cursive calligraphy and originality of his painting. Guanxiu, however, was eager to remain independent of official commands and recognition and did not paint in the Dashengcisi. Nevertheless, the fame of his *arhat* paintings lent a special aura to all the *arhat* paintings and contributed to their reproduction in his style.⁷⁶

4.4. Educational Role in Editing and Diffusing Sūtras

As part of its educative function, the Dashengcisi had a major role in the editing and diffusion of texts, mainly Buddhist but also classical ones. Shu was well known for the production of fine quality materials for written

⁷³ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 28.

⁷⁴ *Xuanbe hua pu*, 3: 107-108.

⁷⁵ *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 2: 88.

⁷⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu*, xia: 55-57; *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 2: 95; *Xuanbe hua pu*, 3: 115-116. Biography in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 30:897a-b. More details in Kobayashi 1974: 333-363; Mesnil 1999: 66-84.

and painted scrolls. Under the Tang, the region provided hemp paper to the court for copying documents for imperial collections.⁷⁷ This tradition continued under the Northern Song. In a poem about cursive calligraphy, Lu You expressed his admiration for the excellent quality of the silk and paper from Shu so greatly appreciated by scholars.⁷⁸ In the 8th century, editions of *sūtras* and classics were a special output of Chengdu monasteries, particularly the Dashengcisi. The *Baoying ji* 報應記 mentions a set of 500 scrolls of the Buddhist Canon (*Tripitaka*) copied there, the commissioning of which was considered to confer merit.⁷⁹ Many patrons spent large amounts of money for a luxurious edition with golden characters. The *Fozu tongji* mentions a copy of the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Jingang jing* 金剛經) executed in gold and silver characters in Yizhou (Shu) in 963.⁸⁰ Orders arrived from afar, as indicated by the following story. A monk of the Longxingsi 龍興寺 in Jiangling 江陵 was sent by his governor to Western Sichuan to get a copy of the Tripitaka canon and was provided silver coins and silk for payment.⁸¹ Manuscripts found at Dunhuang also testify that the diffusion of *sūtras* copied in Chengdu extended as far as Gansu Province.

Although not directly on a Silk Road route, the region had integrated trade and cultural exchanges. There was trade in specific products such as the famous Shu brocades, fragments of Six Dynasties' textiles having been found in Turfan in Central Asia and as far away as the collections of the Hōryūji 法隆寺 in Japan;⁸² proof of intercultural religious and artistic exchanges from ancient times between Shu and far away countries. There are many mentions of monks from Central Asia, even India, who journeyed through the Pamir Mountains and Khotan to visit Chengdu. One was Sanmanduo 三滿多 (Samanta) who had heard of the fame of the "Sainted Enlightened Master of the Great Shu Kingdom" (Wang Jian). In the opposite direction, monks from Sichuan visited Dunhuang

⁷⁷ *Jiu Tang shu*, 47: 2082. See Drège 1991: 65.

⁷⁸ *Lu You ji*, 14: 409.

⁷⁹ Quoted in *Taiping guangji* 108: 734.

⁸⁰ *Fozu tongji*, 43: 395b.

⁸¹ *Taiping guangji* 116: 814.

⁸² *Wenwu*, 1984, 6: 70-80; *Nihon no bijutsu meihin ten* 1990: 128 and 136; Matsumoto 1990: 32.

on their way to India.⁸³ Those pilgrims also contributed to the diffusion of Buddhist texts. The most famous, the Tripiṭaka Master Xuanzang, became a popular hero for his dissemination of Buddhism, and his portrait was painted on the base of the Sūtra Pavilion of the Sanxue yuan in the Dashengcisi.⁸⁴ Many painted banners from Dunhuang represent traveling monks burdened with luggage that included statues and scrolls.⁸⁵ Of the manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang some had been copied from a Chengdu original. A *Ten Kings Sūtra* (*Shiwang jing* 十王經) carries the inscription, “Written by the śramaṇa Zangchuan 藏川 of the Dashengcisi in Chengdu Prefecture”. Some of those *sūtras* are illustrated.⁸⁶ Also copied were the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (*Jingang banruo boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經), more frequently called the *Diamond Sūtra*,⁸⁷ and the *Vimalakīrti nirdeśa sūtra* (*Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經).⁸⁸

Copies of the *Diamond* and *Ten Kings Sūtras* seem to have been the most numerous. Most of the latter from Dunhuang were copied between 905 and 943 from a *sūtra* printed by a certain Guo 過 in western Sichuan. This is the case of a *Diamond Sūtra* (manuscript Pelliot 2876), a small album illustrated with eight vajra carriers. According to the inscription at the bottom, dated 906, the text had been copied from a printed Guo version by an old man, aged 83, said to have written it with his blood.

⁸³ Cf. Du Guangting, *Guangcheng ji*, 2: 13b-14a; 3: 1a-2a. Makita 1971: 26. Dunhuang manuscript P. 2703.

⁸⁴ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 37-38.

⁸⁵ See one illustrated example in the Stein collection in the British Museum, two in the Pelliot collection in the Guimet Museum, and one in the collection of Tenri Central Library, reproduced in *Sanzō hōshi no michi*, 1999: nos. 200-203.

⁸⁶ Manuscripts P. 3304 vo., P. 2003, P. 2870, S. 3961, P. 3761 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris); 2744 (Leningrad). See Teiser 1994; also see *Sérinde, Terre de Buddha* 1995: 333-339.

⁸⁷ First translation by Kumārajīva (350-409), in T. 8, no. 235-239. Manuscripts P. 2876 illustrated and dated 3rd year Tianyou (906); P. 3398 dated 8th year Tianfu (908); P. 3493; P. 2094 ro.; S. 5544 vo.; S. 5451. See Makita 1971: 7, 14, 93.

⁸⁸ First translation by Zhi Qian (active in China in 220-252), in T. 14, no. 474-475. Manuscripts P. 2292 f.2 dated 10th year Guangzheng (948) and copied in the Jingzhenxiang yuan 靜真祥院 in Sichuan; Manuscript Beijing 62 from the Shanxing dasi 善興大寺. See Makita 1971: 136.

Such details also are given in Stein manuscript 5451.⁸⁹ A text in golden characters or one written with ink mixed with blood constituted a donation for the accumulation of merit; both as wealth for the Buddhist community and as a gift of part of one's own body.

Editing improved with the xylographic printing of the Nine Classics in Chengdu between 944 and 951 then of the Buddhist Canon. According to the *Fozu tongji*, in 971 the eunuch Zhang Congxin 張從信 was commissioned by the Northern Song emperor, Taizu 太祖, to travel to Chengdu and carve wood blocks of the Tripiṭaka. In 983 the first wood block-print edition of the Buddhist canon, 5,048 chapters on 130,000 blocks, was presented to the throne.⁹⁰

4.5. Doctrinal and Ritual Support for “Transformation Pictures”

A significant phenomenon which incorporated many iconographical aspects⁹¹ was the increase in the number of *bianxiang*, literally translated “Transformation Tableaux” by Victor Mair. The complexity of this term has aroused controversy among scholars. Two opinions prevail. One, defended by Victor Mair, sees a narrative mode of mainly Buddhist themes, the expansion of which coincided with a type of text of popular stories of marvellous events called “Transformations Texts” (*bianwen* 變文). The story of Mulian's 目蓮 descent into the realms of hell to look for his mother was among the most popular. Likewise, the most famous examples of transformation pictures are “Scenes of Hells” painted by Wu Daozi 吳道子 in the Jinggongsi 景公寺 in Chang'an. Those paintings clearly were instructional. They were said to be so impressive that people of the capital who came to see them were frightened into repenting their bad actions and caused to do good. Butchers of the two markets sold nothing for months.⁹² The paintings even became a model in Shu and

⁸⁹ Jao 1978: 22.

⁹⁰ *Fozu tongji*, 43: 396a. See Pelliot 1953: 89.

⁹¹ Some aspects such as the representations of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, of the Paradise of the Pure Land of the West and the Ten Kings of Hells are analyzed in Wang 2005: 169-191.

⁹² This anecdote is mentioned in many sources: *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 12-13. The monastery where Wu Daozi painted is named Jingyunsì 景雲寺 in the

were copied by Zuo Quan on the base of the *stūpa* in the Dashengcisi, anticipating Zhuqian's same project. According to Huang Xiufu the "Bianxiang of Hells" by Zuo Quan had been damaged by unskillful repainting under the Wang. Only the general composition remained, but the paintings were extant under the Song and Yuan because they were catalogued in the *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* and *Shu minghua ji*.⁹³

The *bianwen* often were recited by traveling bards who used illustrated scrolls as visual support. Both texts and transformation pictures had a didactic religious function. Victor Mair sees no evidence of links between wall paintings sponsored by political or religious elites and texts that had their roots in the populace.⁹⁴ In the context of the wall paintings in the Dunhuang caves, Wu Hung's hypothesis is even more clearly related to the *bianxiang* pictural mode seen in wall paintings with a liturgical function that were reserved for the monastic community, the only group able to comprehend their textual initiating functions. Donors, often painted at the entrances to caves or at the bottom of banners, mainly were from the local aristocracy; whereas, those mentioned in inscriptions seem to have come from various social origins. All, however, had the same purpose, devotion and the accumulation of merit for themselves in this life or for their ancestors. Refuting the function of *bianxiang* as representations of popular texts, Wu Hung considers that their merit was more the result of creation of the icon itself than the viewing of it. Instead of a narrative mode in successive sequences, he considers *bianxiang* to be a concentrated way of representing another world, one suggested in the *sūtras*.⁹⁵

The two theses are, in fact, complementary. Both aspects were present in the wall paintings of Shu monasteries. What first appears in all the sources about paintings of the Tang and Five Dynasties, such as the *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記, *Sita ji* 寺塔記, *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄 and *Tubua jianwen zhi* is the huge number of Buddhist paintings classified as *bianxiang* and the variety of themes. Of the artists who painted

Lidai minghua ji (Acker 1974: 236). See also *Su Shi wenji*, 12: 385-386; 22: 644-645. Cf. Teiser 1988: 193-194.

⁹³ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 12-13; *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*, in *Quan Shu yiwen zhi*, 42: 1a et 2b; *Shu minghua ji*, in *Quan Shu yiwen zhi*, 42: 5b.

⁹⁴ Cf. Mair 1986: 3-43; 1989: 152-170.

⁹⁵ Cf. Wu 1992: 111-192.

bianxiang in the Dashengcisi; Fan Qiong, Zuo Quan, Zhang Nanben, Zhao Dexuan, Zhao Zhongyi, Zhu Qian and Yang Yuanzhen 楊元真, most were classified by Huang Xiufu at the top of his scale, indicative of the importance of *bianxiang* representations as commissions were given only to those considered the best artists. Five *bianxiang* were identified among the two hundred Buddhist paintings of various themes executed by Fan Qiong from 847-860 during restoration of the Chengdu monasteries after the Buddhist persecution. Two treated the Great Merciful One, two the Paradise of the West and one *devarājas*. They were done in the Dashengcisi between 825 and 860.⁹⁶ The peak is represented by Zuo Quan's paintings in eight places in the monastery during the Baoli years (825-827). His subjects included at least eight *bianxiang* as noted in this citation by Huang Xiufu:

Zuo Quan was a native of Shu. It is said that his work received influence from famous masters. In the Baoli era his fame reached the court. His paintings executed in the Dashengcisi are the "*Bianxiang* of Vimalakīrti," "King of Sri Lanka," "*Bianxiang* of a *bodhisattva*" in the central hall; "*Bianxiang* of the Gradual Practice of the Three Paths," "*Bianxiang* of the Demons' Submission" on the Sanxue yuan gate; *Bianxiang* of "Avalokiteśvara [in contemplation of the reflection of] the Moon [in] the Water" and of "The Great Merciful One with a Thousand Arms and Eyes" on the east wall of the Mañjuśrī Pavilion; "Two *vajradharas*" on the Jile yuan gate, "Examples of efficacy (*jingyan*) of the *Diamond Sūtra*" and some "*Bianxiang* of the *Golden Radiance Sūtra*" on the base of the Western Gallery; "The Twenty-eight Patriarchs Transmitting the Dharma" on the base of the South Gallery in the front monastery and more than sixty "*Arhats* Protecting the Dharma" on the base of the North Gallery. Also, on the base of the *stūpa*, he copied "The *Bianxiang* of the Hells" painted by Wu Daozi in the Jinggongsi in Chang'an.⁹⁷

Bianxiang themes can be divided into two classes. The first, apparently of the narrative type, includes *sūtra* illustrations with mention of the title of the text but not of the scene (the *Golden Radiance Sūtra*, *Diamond Sūtra* and *Bhaiṣajyaguru Sūtra*) as well as detailed scenes related to *sūtras* or edifying

⁹⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 3-5.

⁹⁷ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 12-13.

episodes in the lives of the Buddha or eminent figures; the Paradise of the West (also represented in sculpture in Dazu 大足); the Gradual Practice of the Three Paths; Submission of Mara; Scenes of Hells and History of the Transmission of the Dharma to the East. The detailed description given by Huang Xiufu of the “*Bianxiang* of Vimalakīrti” painted by Zuo Quan about 847 in the Great Hall of the Shengshousi, another Chengdu monastery, typifies this narrative style. “Pavilions, trees, rocks, flowers and birds, as well as figures wearing Chinese and Tibetan costumes and crowns, were all painted in an exquisite way.”⁹⁸ Like the *sūtra* content itself, the paintings expressed in their details the transfer of Indian stories, supposed to have happened at the time of Śākyamuni, to the Chinese context of the Tang geopolitical milieu. In the lists of Zuo Quan’s and Fan Qiong’s works the term *jingyan* 經驗 appears which translated literally is “example of efficacy” or “accumulate knowledge.” Although occurring less often, it can be considered a concept complementary to that of “Image of Transformation.” As attributed to illustrations of *sūtras* or eminent monks’ experiences, it explicitly evokes a narrative mode.

The second group of *bianxiang* is comprised of individual figures: *devanājas*, *arhats*, Vimalakīrti, or *bodhisattvas*. Of these the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, “the Great Merciful One”, is most often represented. In fact, it is difficult to consider any of those figures in isolation as they themselves are related to *sūtras*. In China the cult of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara developed under the Tang in conjunction with the *Pure Land Sūtra*, which focuses on the concept of rebirth in the Paradise of Amitābha, the Buddha of the West. The representation of Avalokiteśvara with eight or eleven heads or a thousand arms with eyes underscores the *bodhisattva*’s compassion of seeing and saving by various means all suffering beings. A special compound dedicated to the Great Merciful One 大悲院 was located in the main temple of the Dashengcisi.⁹⁹ The iconographical diversity of all the *bianxiang* demonstrate the preceding two theses. The only aspect I do not agree with is their exclusive elitist use. Even if their commission, like that of other kinds of paintings, was mostly under official sponsorship, they

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 13 ; See Dunhuang cave no. 159, painting dated mid-Tang: Vimalakīrti surrounded by figures wearing Chinese and Tibetan costumes.

⁹⁹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *shang*: 3-5.

would not necessarily have been solely for the elite. We can assume that like Taoist paintings, Buddhist ones evolved by adapting to the progressive syncretization of popular faith and official religion. This explains the development of *bianxiang* as an intermediate, instructional category. Wall paintings therefore were treated not only as moral examples but as pictorial models. Many examples show a connection between the mural paintings of monasteries and scrolls produced for popular use. Either might become the model for the other. Proliferation of the monk Sengjia's portrait, as described above, is one example. Guanxiu's paintings of *arhats* is another—firm evidence of the connectedness of murals, steles and scrolls. In each case, exponential multiplication of these paintings was the result of popular faith and devotion.

A few examples of sculptured *bianxiang* reliefs from the same period that remain in Sichuan represent the Buddha Amitābha in the paradise of the Pure Land of the West, as described in the “*Sūtra of Contemplation of the Buddha Amitāyus*,” the *Guan wuliang shou fo jing* 觀無量壽佛經.¹⁰⁰ One of the best preserved, in cave 245 in Dazu, dates from the end of the 8th century.¹⁰¹ Treatment of the scene is identical to that in paintings of the same theme found in Dunhuang which are considered to be among the oldest known.¹⁰² The Amitābha triad appears in the center of an assembly of *bodhisattvas*. In front of them is a pond with lotus flowers where souls are said to be reborn. It is surrounded by terraces and foot-bridges with balustrades where musicians and dancers are performing. In the background, an architectural complex includes a luxurious palace and pavilions with curved roofs supported on each side by pillars. The top shows clouds in the sky. On the right are episodes of the story of Queen Vaidehī, she who tried in vain to save her husband, Bimbisāra, who had been imprisoned without food by Ajātaśatru their rebel son. To the queen, a prisoner herself, the Buddha taught the sixteen contemplative visualizations depicted on the left. Besides representing a revealing Buddhist story, as well as the main theme of the Pure Land Buddhism,

¹⁰⁰ Preserved in T. 12, no. 365. A few commentaries in T. 37, no. 1749- 1753.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Dazu shike* 1981: 11.

¹⁰² See Illustration of the *Guanjing*, Painting on silk, 1st half of the 9th c., Musée Guimet (EO. 1128), Paris. Cf. Giès et al. 1995: I: 317-319 and pl. 16.

this kind of *bianxiang* shows in detail the style of the architecture and pastimes of the aristocracy in 8th century China. Similarly, in Japan where the Jōdō sect, the Japanese version of the Pure Land Buddhism, developed, it became a style of painting known as the Taima mandala, named for the Taima temple 當麻寺 in Nara Prefecture.¹⁰³

5. Painters Involvement

5.1. A Pole of Attraction for Artists

The majority of the wall paintings in Dunhuang's Mogao caves are anonymous; whereas, closely related to the local community, the names of artists, mostly lay and official ones, who painted in the Dashengcisi were catalogued in detail by Huang Xiufu. Their biographies and lists of works tell of their origins, social ranks and specialities. What readily is apparent is a double migration of people in general and artists in particular between the Tang capital of Chang'an and Shu in Sichuan. Most painters active at the Dashengcisi in Chengdu fall into two groups; primary artists, already recognized as official painters, who followed the two Tang emperors into exile in 755-856 and 881-885, and artists whose careers and promotions came under the Wang and Meng regimes between 907 and 965. The first group migrated as the result of political upheaval; whereas, the second group were attracted by the prosperity and artistic creativity in Shu.

In the first category, Lu Lengjia, who came from Chang'an and started work in Shu during Xuanzong's exile, immediately became associated with the foundation of the Dashengcisi and painted its very first murals, "Eminent Monks Transmitting the Dharma." Lü Yao, who painted portraits and deities at the top of the monastery's Huayan Pavilion and who had followed Emperor Xizong into exile in Shu, was a member of the Tang Hanlin Academy. Some migrations were intentional. Artists chose to move to Chengdu motivated by word of the fame of the Dashengcisi that reached the Tang capital and by the artistic competition it engendered. This was Zhu Qian's case. He wished to reproduce

¹⁰³ See Okazaki 1969: 23-42.

Wu Daozi's Scenes of Hells. When, however, he arrived in Emperor Xizong's vanguard, those scenes had already been copied by the local artist, Zuo Quan, along the base of the Prabhūtaratna Stūpa. Zhu Qian therefore painted only auspicious symbols and celestial flowers.¹⁰⁴ This example shows that Shu native artists and official ones who migrated with the imperial court from the Tang Capital were occasionally brought into competition. In contrast, some painters native to Shu, who were particularly active in the Dashengcisi, became famous locally and throughout the empire. According to Huang Xiufu, Zuo Quan who painted many *bianxiang* in the monastery was very famous at court in the period 825-827.¹⁰⁵

The second wave of immigration occurred because painters were attracted by the prosperity of Shu under the Wang and Meng regimes. When Meng Zhixiang proclaimed the Later Shu Kingdom, the painters Diao Guangyin 刁光胤 and Zhao Dexuan, the latter "carrying his son Zhongyi on his back", left the capital and faced the long dangerous journey to Chengdu to become a part of this developing cultural crossroads. Diao Guangyin is said to have remained thirty years in Shu and to have died there at age 80. Therefore, he must have left the capital between 936 and 944, which would have been when he was about fifty years old and at the height of his career.¹⁰⁶ Other immigrant painters also chose not to return to Chang'an, remaining in Shu to the end of their lives. Some founded lines of local painters that lasted three generations, surviving major political events and gradually integrating Shu society. Economic prosperity and the amount of painting to be done in palaces, tombs, temples and monasteries constituted the main reason for remaining. The Dashengcisi absorbed their major artistic activities. Because of their numbers and large scale, finishing the monastery's mural paintings required long periods of time. Three generations of the Zhao family worked in the Dashengcisi, using inherited familial techniques

¹⁰⁴ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 40; *Tubui baojian*, 2:20.

¹⁰⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 12-13.

¹⁰⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 29-30; *Tubua jianwen zhi*, 2: 62. His work in the Dashengcisi did not remain under the Song as it is not mentioned in the *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji*.

on ever more diversified iconography. Their careers reflect not only the doctrinal development of the monastery but their own rise in Shu society in the course of three generations.

Zhao Gongyou came from Chang'an to Chengdu circa 825-827. Specializing in figures, in particular *buddhas*, *devarājas*, deities and demons, he painted in various monasteries between 827 and 846. Although most of his work was destroyed during the Buddhist persecution of 841-846, his paintings in the Dashengcisi in its Mañjuśrī Pavilion, Hall of the Master [Sengqie], and in the Bhaiṣajyaguru and Stone *Sūtra* compounds were preserved. Enthusiastic in his appreciation of Zhao Gongyou's skill, Huang Xiufu cited the huge dimensions of his paintings. "When his brush expressed itself on a wall as high as several *ren* 仞,¹⁰⁷ his skill was in proportion [to the size] of the wall". After Zhao Gongyou's death, his son, Zhao Wenqi, took over the work in the Dashengcisi. Like his father, Wenqi painted many *devarājas*, but Bhramā and Indra seem to have been preferred themes as he painted them in three different places; the Mañjuśrī Pavilion, Hall of the Great Generals and the Avamsaka Pavilion. Zhao Deqi, Wenqi's son, who was active under King Wang Jian, became closely associated with the events of that reign through his art. When Wang Jian added to the Dashengcisi the sub-temple Sanxue [yanxiang] yuan, Deqi was asked to paint the "*Devarājas* of the North and South" on two walls of the main entrance. Before architectural enlargement could occur, the painter had to carefully remove and transfer Lu Lengjia's "Six Eminent Monks Transmitting the Dharma" for preservation elsewhere. His other catalogued works in the Dashengcisi included "Śākyamuni's Ten disciples" and "Sixteen *Arhats*" in the Zhixi yuan; "Indra" and "*Arhats*" in the Chongfu chanyuan; "Bhramā and Indra" in the Chongzhen chanyuan and "Mañjuśrī and Samatabhadra" in the Arhat Hall. Among those, appears the theme of *arhats* that Deqi added to the iconographical *devarāja* tradition of his grandfather and the Bhrama and Indra of his father. The *arhat* Painting became particularly popular with the development of Chan Buddhism in the 10th century. Beside his Buddhist paintings, his portraits of Wang Jian with all his victorious royal symbols and portraits of the

¹⁰⁷ A unit of equivalent to 2.5 m. The wall paintings probably were more than 10 m high.

royal family, executed in the Ancestor Hall, plus the one hundred murals done in collaboration with Gao Daoxing in the royal tumulus after Wang Jian's death in 918, made Zhao Deqi one of the most productive official painters of the Wang regime. He was named to the Hanlin Academy and honored with its highest symbols, the Purse of the Golden Fish and Purple Robe.¹⁰⁸

5.2. Official Painters Under the Ruler's Command

Painters such as those of the Zhao family who were active in the Dashengcisi, are classed in the categories "divine" and "marvellous" in the first chapter of the *Yizhou minghua lu*; i.e. at the top of Huang Xiufu's evaluation scale. This shows that commissions were given to those painters considered the best of that time. Some were made members of the Hanlin Academy in recognition of their skills, which meant subordination to the ruling power. The term *hanlin daizhao* 翰林待詔, which denotes such a position, translates literally as "Waiting for [the Ruler's] Orders in the Brush Forest." To be at the emperor or king's service left artists little freedom as to the conditions of their work and personal lives. In exchange, official painters received honors and various types of compensation, which provided access to respectable social rank. Some became, or already were, close to politicians or religious dignitaries. Circa 860-874, for example, the portraitist Chang Can 常粲 was the guest of Lu Yan 路巖, the Minister of Justice and Governor of Western Sichuan.¹⁰⁹ Zhang Xun 張詢, in spite of his failure to pass the imperial examination, became a member of Emperor Xizong's court in exile owing to his connection to the abbot of the Zhaojuesi in Chengdu.¹¹⁰

Approximately twenty painters received the title *hanlin daizhao* under the Wang and Meng; an average of three or four nominations per year as compared to the one or two annual nominations made under the Tang. Under the Han, the term *hanlin* "Forest of the Brush" originally

¹⁰⁸ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *shang*: 2-3, 6-8.

¹⁰⁹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *shang*: 17-18; *Xin Tang shu*, 184: 5396-5397.

¹¹⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu*, *xia*: 57-58; *Tubua jianwen zhi*, 2: 58-59; *Xuanbe huapu*, 10: 265-267.

designated a “literary society.” Under the Tang, it denoted the Hanlin yuan 翰林院 where the so-called academy was located. Situated inside the walls of the Daming Palace 大明宮 in Chang’an and its three buildings served literati officials. Gradually, this politico-literary institution became the repository of all the arts, comprised not only of scholars in charge of official documents but writers, poets, calligraphers, painters and specialists in divination, medicine and other areas. It was headquartered in Chang’an, but each imperial residence had its own Hanlin.¹¹¹

After the Tang’s fall, subsequent dynasties adopted the Hanlin institution. It became an important symbol and instrument of power of the kings of Shu who used artists to promote their political ambitions. In 916, Wang Jian built his own Jixian dian 集賢殿 “Hall to Gather the Sages” in imitation of the one created under the Tang.¹¹² He continued to bestow the title *hanlin daizhao* and the symbol of the “Purse” decorated with a “Gold Fish” (*yujindai* 魚金袋) or “Silver Fish” (*yuyindai* 魚銀袋) that was hung on the belt of the ceremonial “Purple Robe” (*yizi* 衣紫) or “Scarlet Robe” (*yifei* 衣緋) according to Tang protocol. Those emblems, which denoted specific court ranks were cherished by their recipients. The poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) recalled that when named to an inferior position in the capital, he felt deep sorrow that he had to renounce the Silver Fish symbol and Scarlet Robe he had been allowed in his former position of provincial prefect.¹¹³ In the Shu Kingdom, painters designated *hanlin daizhao* were those whose art was directly associated with the king’s political strategy to emphasize his virtue as a conqueror as well as his actual power. For example, when the portraitist Li Wencai who was asked to paint the new heir to the throne as well as civilian and military ministers and officers was made a member of the *Hanlin* Academy and received the honorary title *jiangshibilang* 將仕郎 which denoted a secretary in the heir-to-the-throne’s department. He also was allowed to carry the Purse with the Fish on his belt and to wear the Scarlet Robe.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Cf. Drège 1991: 72-77; Bischoff 1963: 1-24; Yonezawa 1937: 3-9.

¹¹² *Xin Wudai shi*, 63: 790.

¹¹³ Cf. Des Rotours 1959: 69-73.

¹¹⁴ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 37-38.

5.3. Working Conditions

Neither official nor independent painters were free to paint what they wanted. They had to satisfy their sponsors and adapt to the sites at which they worked. The Dashengcisi with its political and religious radiance was a very demanding commission. This influenced both the paintings' contents and the artists' working conditions. A mural required that the painting be done at the site. The walls to be decorated were divided into unit pannels five *zhang* 丈 wide (about 15.50 m), between two pillars. Paintings in the Dashengcisi were particularly monumental. Zhao Gongyou is said to have been skilled in executing large murals of several meters high, and the flowers painted by Gao Daoxing were about five meters high.¹¹⁵ From the dimensions of a single flower motif, it is clear that paintings of major themes must have been very much larger. Because of the scale, numbers of commissioned paintings and the strict schedule imposed, painters had to be extremely productive. A painter's career may have lasted from youth to old age or death. Li Sheng, for example, began painting before he was allowed to wear the virile hat (before age 20), and Diao Guangyin is said to have worked "without rest" until his death at age 80.¹¹⁶

Some works were individual paintings, others important sets. Gao Daoxing and Zhao Deqi painted more than one hundred panels in the Chaozhen dian 朝真殿 of the Ancestor Hall dedicated to Wang Jian and more than another hundred in the royal tumulus and its attached shrine. Zhang Nanben 張南本 executed more than one hundred and twenty banners in the Baolisi monastery. We also know that between 847 and 879 after the Buddhist persecution and during restoration of the Chengdu monasteries, three painters; Fan Qiong, Cheng Hao and Peng Jian produced more than 200 wall panels,¹¹⁷ an average of six or seven paintings per year per artist. Obviously, to be that productive, artists had to be strictly disciplined. Diao Guangyin is said to have worked energetically until his death and Du Cuo to have painted day and night for twenty years. Clichés similar to those used by Huang Xiufu to describe productive painters previously had been used to describe Zhang Sengyou

¹¹⁵ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 2-3, 14-15.

¹¹⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 27-30.

¹¹⁷ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 3-8, 13-15.

張僧繇 (active ca. 502-550) in the 6th century *Xu huapin* 續畫品. A painter of Buddhist themes during the Liang Dynasty, he was said to have worked until night without putting down his brush. In dozens of years, he took no rest.¹¹⁸ This information about artists who worked in huge monasteries such as the Dashengcisi is particularly meaningful when considering the political and religious challenges involved.

In many cases massive production required collaborative work. A team might consist of members of one family; a parternal lineage such as that of the Zhao 趙 or Huang 黃 or a fraternal one such as that of the three brothers Qiu Wenbo 丘文播, Qiu Wenxiao 丘文曉 and the monk Lingzong 僧令宗.¹¹⁹ Artists might also be associated because of a common specialty such as portraiture or funeral paintings, as were Zhao Deqi and Gao Daoxing, or in the painting of Buddhist murals, as were Fan Qiong, Chen Hao and Peng Jian. They might also collaborate indirectly on the same paintings by completing unfinished works, restoring or even transferring an ancient work in order to preserve it. In the Guangzheng era (938-965), Huang Jucai 黃居菜 restored the colors and completed “Sparrows and Bamboo in the Four Seasons” which Diao Guangyin, who had died, had begun in the Hall of Eminent Monks in the Chichengguang yuan 熾盛光院 of the Dashengcisi.¹²⁰ When the Sanxue yuan was built in 894 on the site of the East Gallery, “Six Eminent Monks Transmitting the Dharma,” painted there by Lu Lengjia almost a century and a half before, was detached from the walls and refixed in three other places by Zhao Deqi to preserve those respected treasures.¹²¹ Collaboration with specialists skilled in other techniques, in other fields and at other sites, kept the painters extremely busy. Their efforts might well combine literature, sculpture, architecture and decoration. Painters, such as Teng Changyou 騰昌祐, Huang Jubao 黃居寶 and Guanxiu, had multi-disciplinary training in calligraphy, poetry and painting.¹²² The two most famous sculptors in Shu,

¹¹⁸ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 29-30 and 43.

¹¹⁹ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 46; *xia*: 59; *Su Shi wenji*, 21: 622; *Xuanhe huapu*, 6: 180-182; *Tuhua jianwen zhi*: 2: 88; 3: 137.

¹²⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 29-30.

¹²¹ *Yizhou minghua lu, shang*: 7-8.

¹²² *Xu huapin*: 9; *Yizhou minghua lu, zhong*: 33-34; *xia*: 53-57; *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 2:85, 89, 95; *Xuanhe huapu*, 16: 437-440; 17: 473-476; 19: 418-425.

Xu Hou 許候 and Yong Zhongben 雍中本, worked with the painter Yang Yuanzhen 楊元真. He applied color to their numerous statues of Buddhist and Taoist deities in monasteries such as the Shengxingsi and Dashengcisi as well as in the Taoist temples Tianchang guan 天長觀, Longxing guan 龍興觀 and Longhu gong 龍虎宮.¹²³

5.4. Psychological aspects

Certain pictures were considered extremely powerful. After Xin Cheng copied the portrait of the monk Sengqie in the Dashengcisi, many people came to worship it because of the miracles it was thought to have performed.¹²⁴ *Arhat* Paintings attributed to the monk Guanxiu were duplicated because it was believed they had the power to bring rain.¹²⁵ The power in those two examples was of different nature, that of the thaumaturge monk in the first and of the painter in the second.

From every religious perspective, these paintings were respected both for their aesthetic value and moral message. The artist's role in creating paintings with strong psychological impact was crucial. In his note on "The Moral Point of View from Antiquity" *Xu zigu guijian* 敘自古規鑒, Guo Ruoxu insisted educative value was given to paintings in Confucian perspective. According to him, the responsibility for the successful impact of a painter's work lay in his moral disposition, which had to be in harmony with the represented disposition.¹²⁶ As discussed above, "Transformation Pictures" provide explicit examples of the educational and ritual roles of Buddhist paintings. Zhang Xuan 張玄, the painter of *arhats*, was nicknamed "Zhang the Arhat" by the people of Shu in honor of his iconographical specialty and virtue, which deserved such a comparison. Identification of the painter with a Buddhist saint led people to believe they saw Guanxiu's autoportrait among his "Sixteen *Arhats*".¹²⁷ In treatises on Chinese painting, the creative act often is referred to as

¹²³ *Yizhou minghua lu*, zhong: 48; *Tubua jianwen zhi*, 2: 90.

¹²⁴ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 11-12; *Xuanhe huapu*, 2: 85-87.

¹²⁵ See Mesnil 1999: 66-83.

¹²⁶ *Tubua jianwen zhi*, 1: 12-16.

¹²⁷ Cf. Kobayashi 1974: 399-400.

participation in the spontaneous creation of the *dao*; far beyond the simple action of using a brush.

Concerning votive icons, Guo Ruoxu said that they needed the painter's concentration and determination because they were charged with strong emotional and spiritual messages; desire for a "happiness field" (*futian* 福田) or "merit accumulation" (*liyi* 利益).¹²⁸ Therefore the instant of creation required decisive mental preparation on the part of the artist; concentration, purification, meditation and sometimes trance. Because he prepared himself by mental purification before painting human figures, Huang Quan 黃筌 is said to have been successful in obtaining delicate colors and vigorous outlines.¹²⁹ Meditation was a source of spontaneous inspiration for Guanxiu who, almost possessed, painted *arhats* with faces distorted in forms that he had visualized. In "Poem about Arhats Seen in a Dream by the Great Master Chanyue," Ouyang Jiong 歐陽炯 describes precisely the disposition of mind in which Guanxiu used to paint:

At the moment of creation, he first glued a large piece of silk to a high wall. Eyes closed, surrounded by the perfume of incense, he remained seated in his room in meditation and saw in a dream their real appearances. Throwing off his monastic robe, he pointed his divine brush. Then standing, his arm rushed toward the space. "Su Su"! In his impetuosity, the head of the brush ground on the silk. In one quick hand movement, two or three *arhats* appeared. There was nothing in common with laborious painters who worked many days in vain.¹³⁰

Such mental techniques also were used for Taoist paintings. Zhang Suqing 張素卿 possessed by the deities, used to paint with extreme speed and no retouching. To paint a religious icon, considered the incarnation of a deity, was part of a sacred act. Therefore, before starting, Zhang Suqing's disciple, the Taoist priest and painter Li Shouyi 李壽儀, would copy his master's work only after previously burning incense and lighting oil lamps.¹³¹ The ultimate decisive and powerful act lay in dotting in the eyes

¹²⁸ *Tubua jianwenzhi*, 1: 36-38.

¹²⁹ *Shengchao minghua ping*, 3: 2a-3a.

¹³⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu*, xia: 55-57; *Tubua jianwen zhi*, 2: 95; *Xuanbe hua pu*, 3: 116.

¹³¹ *Yizhou minghua lu*, shang: 9-11; xia: 58-59. See also Mesnil 1996-1997: 131-158.

of the subject, thus transmitting the breath of life to the icon. A famous example is that of the four white dragons painted by Zhang Sengyou in the Anlesi monastery 安樂寺. “He did not dot the pupils of the eyes, always saying that if he did dot the pupils they would fly away. But people took this to be mere idle boasting and kept persistently begging him to dot them. He did so with two of them and presently thunder and lightning rent the wall asunder and a pair of dragons riding on clouds flew away up into the sky.”¹³² This crucial opening of the eyes was incorporated in Buddhist ritual and eventually transmitted to Japan. Documents and the brush used, kept in the Shōsōin 正倉院, chronicle the “Eye Opening” ceremony *kaigen kuyō e* 開眼供養会 held in 752 for the Great Buddha of the Nara Tōdaiji 東大寺¹³³; at almost the same time as the founding of the Dashengcisi. This act finalizes the bond between the artist and his painting, producing a new bond, the icon’s own purpose, henceforth creating a junction between the human and divine worlds.

6. Conclusion

The amount of information in sources such as the *Yizhou minghua lu* makes any study of the Dashengcisi an extremely broad one, many aspects of which, particularly architectural structures, doctrinal content and aesthetic painting styles, deserve individual detailed study. This article, however, focuses only on the monastery’s position between political and religious poles through discussion of its paintings and painters. More than simply a Buddhist monastery, the Dashengcisi was the very heart of Shu society, a microcosm, in which all the vivid strength of the Chinese empire converged. It was a strong symbol of political power, and a syncretic, radiant school of Buddhism, as well as an intensely creative artistic site. Paintings crystalized its multiple roles. As in the Confucian tradition, its lay portraits reflected step-by-step the historical context and instructional use politicians made of them. Its Buddhist portraits illustrated the

¹³² *Lidai minghua ji*, 7: 236-241; as translated by Acker 1974: 174.

¹³³ See the web sites <http://www.todaiji.or.jp/index/rekisi>; <http://www.xs4all.nl/~daikoku/>.

history of the transmission and merging of Buddhist teachings with worship of patriarchs and relics. Its Buddhist iconographical paintings also show syncretic doctrinal diversity; various styles of expression, static iconography and narrative mode both in polychromy and in decorative and new monochrome techniques. Benefitting from its particularly favorable context, the Dashengcisi generated intense creativity whose influence during the 8th to 10th centuries reached as far as the borders of Central Asia and remained dynamic until the 12th century. The paradox of its treasures is the enduring heritage they have transmitted beyond their material existence. The spread of printed, illustrated *sūtras* for the teaching of Buddhism, as well as the promotion of the Huang family of painters from the top of the Shu Academy to that of the Song Academy clearly contributed to the establishment of new doctrinal and aesthetic currents that have safeguarded the name of the Dashengcisi for posterity. Owing to its tremendous scale and the activities it was involved in, the Dashengcisi is unique, both in Chinese history and throughout the Buddhist cultural sphere.

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