

Article

Local Perspectives on Monastic Practices in the Jianghuai Region During the Mid-to-Late Tang Period: Ordination Altars, Social Networks, and the Cult of Sengqie 僧伽

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Abstract: The so-called “counterfeit monks and nuns” 僧尼偽濫 is regarded as an important reason for the “Huichang Persecution of Buddhism” 會昌滅佛, but it reflects the central views of the Tang Dynasty. When we delve into the local society of the Mid-to-Late Tang period, we find that they developed their own narrative logic. From the perspective of the imperial court, Li Deyu 李德裕 criticized Wang Zhixing 王智興 for establishing an ordination altar in Sizhou 泗州 for personal gain. However, in the biographical inscription of monk Mingyuan 明遠 in Sizhou, Wang Zhixing is portrayed as a key figure who collaborated with Mingyuan to ensure the survival of the Kaiyuan Monastery 開元寺, with the inauguration of the ordination altar 戒壇 serving as a necessary means to obtain financial resources. In fact, Mingyuan had previously undertaken a similar operation at the Lingju Monastery 靈居寺 in Liuhe County 六合縣, Yangzhou 揚州. The inscription of the Lingju Monastery Stele 大唐揚州六合縣靈居寺碑 reflects the cooperation between local monks and secular people at that time. During the process of rebuilding the monasteries, Mingyuan cleverly exploited the cult of the divine monk Sengqie 僧伽 within the Society of Jianghuai 江淮. The cult of Sengqie had become a national belief during the Mid-to-Late Tang period, and the existence of the Sengqie pagoda 僧伽塔 made the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou uniquely significant. Later on, Youxuan 幽玄 also carried out similar initiatives by establishing an ordination altar for the restoration at the Baoli Monastery 寶曆寺 in Hongzhou 洪州. If we set aside the shadow of the overarching theme of the Huichang Persecution of Buddhism on the history of Buddhism during the Mid-to-Late Tang period, we may uncover a more vibrant picture of local Buddhism.



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1. Introduction

The Huichang Persecution of Buddhism that occurred in 845 is undoubtedly the most significant religious event of the Mid-to-Late Tang period, and numerous studies have been conducted on it. Scholars are particularly eager to explore the reasons behind the Buddhist persecution. These reasons are primarily analyzed at three levels: religious,¹ political,² and economic.³ Due to the significance of the Huichang Persecution of Buddhism, many discussions surrounding this phenomenon are immersed in this type of grand narrative. When examining the economic causes, “counterfeit monks and nuns” becomes a crucial element of analysis (See (He 2008, pp. 110–27; Jing 2013, pp. 41–42)).

In reality, the so-called “counterfeit monks and nuns” reflects the views of the imperial court. The notion that establishing the ordination altar was merely a way for people to

hide their household registration by joining monasteries, thereby affecting state taxes and corvée labor, is one-sided. This perspective overlooks the subjectivity of the monasteries. In the second year of the Yuanhe 元和 era (807), Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (reg. 805–820) issued an imperial edict aimed at strengthening the examination of the identities of ordained monks.⁴ Since then, the imperial court has theoretically imposed strict restrictions on local monastic ordination and criticized the establishment of private altars as “inaugurated an ordination altar without permission” 擅置戒壇.⁵

This paper focuses on the local Society of Jianghuai 江淮, referred to by scholars as the “military province of the Southeast Source-of-Financial-Resources Type” 東南財源型藩鎮,⁶ which served as the economic base for the court in Chang’an 長安, making the “inaugurated an ordination altar without permission” all the more deserving of our attention. After the second year of the Yuanhe era and before the Hui-chang Persecution of Buddhism, two large-scale ordination altars were established in the Jianghuai region. One instance occurred at the Lingju Monastery 靈居寺 in Liuhe County 六合縣 (present-day Liuhe District, Nanjing City) but failed to attract the court’s attention. Another, the ordination altar at the Kaiyuan Monastery 開元寺 promoted by Wang Zhixing 王智興 (758–836), drew the court’s attention through a record submitted by Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850). The local memory of the ordination altar is reflected in the biographies of the monks and the steles of the monasteries written later. In contrast to Li Deyu’s record, which was written from the court’s perspective, it becomes evident that the local understanding and expression of the ordination altar follow their own narrative logic.

In fact, some scholars have already recognized this intriguing case of Wang Zhixing 王智興 (758–836), as well as the existence of differing voices apart from Li Deyu’s memorial record.⁷ They have even noted that the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou is the birthplace of the cult of monk Sengqie.⁸ However, none have fully utilized the key material, the Stele of the Lingju Monastery, associated with these circumstances. This article aims to reorganize the relevant materials regarding the establishment of an ordination altar by Wang Zhixing and to conduct an in-depth discussion on the relationships among the illegal establishment of ordination altars, the cult of Sengqie, and the Jianghuai region during the mid and late Tang Dynasty.

2. Li Deyu’s Memorial Record and the “Epitaph of Master Mingyuan”: The Multiple Dimensions of Wang Zhixing’s Memorial Concerning the Ordination Altar

In the fourth year of the Changqing 長慶 era (824), Wang Zhixing submitted a memorial petition to inaugurate an ordination altar, which was later strongly opposed by Li Deyu, then the Surveillance Commissioner of Zhexi Circuit 浙西觀察使. Wang Zhixing was one of the most representative military governors 節度使 of the Mid-to-Late Tang period. Born in 758, he was a native of Wen County 溫縣, Huaizhou 懷州 (present-day Wen County, Jiaozuo city, Henan Province), and spent many years as a soldier in Xuzhou 徐州. In the second year of the Changqing era, Wang Zhixing led an expedition against the rebels in Hebei as the deputy military governor of the Wuning military governorate 武寧軍, and upon his return to Xuzhou, he expelled Cui Qun 崔群 (772–832) and made himself the governor. During his rule in Xuzhou, to expand his financial resources, Wang Zhixing imposed a high cargo tax on ships traveling to and from Sikou 泗口 and Yongqiao 埇橋.⁹ Both Sikou and Yongqiao were hubs on the North–South Canal, and their geographic locations were very important. Sikou was located at the southern end of the Bian River 汴河 and the confluence point with the Huai River 淮河, serving as the administrative seat of Sizhou 泗州, Linhuai County 臨淮縣.¹⁰ The ordination altar is situated at the Kaiyuan Monastery 開元寺 in Linhuai.

Li Deyu, on the other hand, came from the Li Clan 李氏 of Zhao Commandery 趙郡 and was the son of Li Jifu 李吉甫 (758–814), the famous Grand chancellor 宰相 of the Yuanhe era. Li Deyu had already accumulated a wealth of administrative experience at both local and central levels during the Changqing era. After Li Fengji 李逢吉 (758–835), who was in conflict with Li Jifu, came to power, Li Deyu was implicated and subsequently took up the position of the Surveillance Commissioner of Zhexi Circuit 浙西觀察使. During his term, Li Deyu was eager to innovate. In a few years, he cracked down on shamans in Jiangnan 江南, destroying more than 1000 obscene shrines (*yinci* 淫祠) and tearing down private houses in the mountains in hopes of changing customs and securing the people's safety.¹¹ When an ordination altar was set up in Sizhou, Wang Zhixing sent his subordinates to publicize the event. Zhexi, bordering Sizhou with Huainan 淮南 lying in between, was affected by the event. In Li Deyu's opinion, Wang Zhixing's request for the inauguration of the ordination altar was disingenuous:

Deyu's memorial stated: "The Surveillance Commissioner of Xuzhou inaugurated an ordination altar in the Kaiyuan Monastery of Sizhou recently, having sent monks to Liangzhe 兩浙 and Fujian 福建 where they posted notices calling for monks and nuns to be ordained since last winter. Since the second year of the Yuanhe era, Jianghuai had not ordained any people, so when the residents heard, they gathered there from near and far...I received the news that the ordination altar set up in Sizhou was only for the gathering of wealth and goods, not for blessing the birth of the emperor. The monks each paid two thousand *qian* 錢 (maces), and then they were given ordination and went home the same day without receiving the formal precepts ..."

德裕狀論云：“徐州觀察使近於泗州開元寺置戒壇，從去冬便遣僧人於兩浙、福建已來，所在帖榜，召僧尼受戒。江淮自元和二年後，更不度人，百姓聞知，遠近臻湊當道。……聞泗州所置戒壇，只在聚斂財貨，殊非為降誕資福之意，其僧¹²到者，每人納錢二千，當日給牒放回，元不受戒。……”¹³

When Wang Zhixing proposed the inauguration of the ordination altar, he told the court that its purpose was to pray for the birthday of the newly crowned Emperor Jingzong 敬宗 (reg. 824–827). Although birthday celebrations for emperors may have begun during Emperor Zhongzong's 中宗 reign (reg. 684–684; 705–710), they became more elaborate under Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (reg. 712–756). The practice of celebrating emperors' birthdays originated from the celebration of Buddha's birthday, but during Xuanzong's reign, Buddhist influence on these celebrations was minimal. By Emperor Suzong's 肅宗 time (reg. 756–762), however, there was a significant amount of Buddhist content.¹⁴ Later, there emerged "a debate between three teachings" 三教論衡.¹⁵ These Buddhist programs aimed to bless the emperor.

In this context, it is understandable that local governments could not participate in the emperor's birthday celebration at the court, prompting them to request the inauguration of an ordination altar for the purpose of praying for blessings. However, the monks who were ordained only needed to pay two thousand maces to qualify, bypassing the rigorous examination process traditionally required for ordination. According to Li Deyu, Wang Zhixing's so-called ordination served only his personal enrichment. It is highly likely that this kind of ordination certificate was produced locally with the approval of the central government.

Moreover, Li Deyu believed that the ordination altar would significantly erode the local economy of Jiangnan. This erosion was twofold: first, many monks who were not officially ordained already owned private property, as the saying goes, "monks and nuns also had private assets, no different from the common people" 僧尼又皆私蓄資產，與編氓無異¹⁶.

More critically, due to the lack of a strict examination, many who had not been ordained sought ordination certificates.

Since the inauguration of the ordination altar, households with three or five adult males would often send one person to become a monk to evade labor obligations and conceal their assets. Since the first month of the lunar calendar, countless individuals have left their homes. On one occasion, over a hundred people attempted to cross the river at the Suanshan ferry; only fourteen of them were old novice Buddhist monks and guest monks, while the rest were individuals from Suzhou and Changzhou—and none carried official certificates from their prefectures. They were all ordered to return to their hometowns and resume their secular lives at that time.

自有戒壇已來，一戶有三丁、五丁者，皆發遣一人出家，意在規避丁徭，影占資產。正月已來，百姓落發者無數。蒜山渡曾一日點得一百餘人過江，勘問唯十四人是舊出家沙彌及客僧，餘悉是蘇、常州百姓，亦無本州公憑。其時並勒歸本貫還俗。¹⁷

Emphasis was placed on families with three or five adult males because a family with a single adult male would face the extinction of the household if he entered monastic life. The reasoning behind “avoiding labor” 規避丁徭 is that after the Two-Tax Law 兩稅法, monks and nuns in monasteries no longer held the privilege of tax exemption but were not yet subjected to corvée service.¹⁸ Regarding the so-called “hidden assets” 影占資產, it likely refers to situations where certain individuals, upon becoming monks, transferred some of their landholdings, presumably to reduce the size of their household registries.¹⁹ This phenomenon was so prevalent that Li Deyu observed in Suanshan ferry 蒜山渡 (present-day northwestern Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province) that up to a hundred people crossed the river in a single day to take ordination; however, most of them were not monks and did not hold any local prefectural or county offices. Jingzong’s birthday is in June, but the ordination altar has been set up since the previous winter. Li Deyu believed that if this phenomenon continued without restriction, the consequences would be unimaginable:

If no measures are taken, 600,000 dingzhuang 丁壯 (strong and able-bodied men) from Liangzhe and Fujian would be lost by the Birthday of Jingzong. This is a matter of significant importance, closely tied to the legal framework of the court. Furthermore, the taxation of Jianghuai is quite critical, and it is indeed necessary to impose some restrictions.

若不鈐制，直到降誕日方停，計兩浙及福建合失卻六十萬丁壯。此事非小，系於朝廷法度。況江淮賦役至重，實要稍為限約。²⁰

Li Deyu asserted that if the ordination altar did not cease operations until Jingzong’s birthday, Liangzhe and Fujian would lose 600,000 dingzhuang 丁壯, an exaggeration designed to raise the vigilance of the central government.²¹ In summary, in Li Deyu’s perspective, Wang Zhixing’s establishment of the ordination altar represented public corruption and selfishness. Although Wang Zhixing was not punished and the monks who had not undergone strict ordination examinations were not required to return to secular life, the Central Secretariat-Chancellery (*Zhongshu Menxia* 中書門下) soon put an end to the ordination, indicating that Deyu’s viewpoint was recognized by the central government. Li Deyu’s memorial was slightly rewritten and appeared in Jingzong’s and Li Deyu’s biography in the Old Book of the Tang (*Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書), Li Deyu’s biography in the New Book of the Tang (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書), and the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), alongside historical monastic materials such as *Dasong sengshi lue* 大宋僧史略, *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, and *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, among others.²² For instance, Jingzong’s biography in *Jiu Tangshu* states: “Zhixing sought substantial profits

from it and thus became wealthy. At that time, the public opinion regarded his actions as despicable. 智興邀其厚利，由是致富，時議醜之”，²³ and in *Longxing fojiao biannian tonglun* 隆興佛教編年通論 it states, “Zhixing thus amassed hundreds of thousands of strings of money in wealth. The prominent public opinion at that time held him in great contempt.” 智興因致資數十萬緡，大為清論鄙之。 The influence of official history and monastic materials was so substantial that the portrayal of Wang Zhixing in this context was overwhelmingly negative, and many modern scholars have accepted this understanding.

Even though Li Deyu addressed the ordination altar in Sizhou as the Surveillance Commissioner of ZheXi Circuit, he approached the matter from the central government’s perspective, weighing the advantages and disadvantages for the imperial court. If we examine the views of local figures throughout this process, we will arrive at a different understanding.²⁴

During the inauguration of the ordination altar in Sizhou, Mingyuan 明遠 (765–834), a monk at the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou, played a pivotal role. The scholar poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote a detailed account of Ming Yuan’s life in his “Stele Inscription, with Preface, for the Superintendent of Three Prefectures, Xu, Si, [and] Hao, Vinaya Master Mingyuan, Preceptor of the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou of the Great Tang [Dynasty]” 大唐泗州開元寺臨壇律德徐泗濠三洲僧正明遠大師塔碑銘並序.²⁵

Mingyuan was a native of Can 鄴, Qiao County 譙郡 (present-day Yongcheng City, Shangqiu, Henan Province) and was born in the first year of the Yongtai 永泰 era (765). At the age of seven, he became a monk under the guidance of Chan Master Pei 霈²⁶ in his home prefecture. Bai’s account states,

At the age of nineteen, he received the full monastic precepts from Preceptor Lingmu 靈穆 in Sizhou. After five summers of study, he mastered the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* 四分律 and the *Abhidharmakośa-sāstra* 俱舍論, then he ascended to the lecture platform (*jiangzuo* 講座) and the ordination altar. In the first year of the Yuanhe era, he was invited by the monastic community to be the head-seat (*shangzuo* 上座) of the monastery. The following year, he was appointed as the chief monk (*sengzheng* 僧正) of the state, unifying the twelve divisions.

七歲依本郡霈禪師出家，十九從泗州靈穆律師受具戒。五夏通《四分律》、《俱舍論》，乃升講座，乃登戒壇。元和元年，眾請充當寺上座。明年，官補為本州僧正，統十二部。²⁷

It is noted that Mingyuan was a highly educated master of the *Vinaya* and had already been the leader of the local monastic community in Sizhou before Wang Zhixing became the lord of Xuzhou.

The Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou is situated between the Huai River and the Si River, in a low-lying area vulnerable to flooding. Mingyuan, along with Su Yu 蘇遇, the Prefect of a Commandery (junshou 郡守) at the time, constructed a water-sheltered monastery in the gap between the sand lake and planted 10,000 trees to ensure that the monks and the local community would no longer need to worry about flooding. Unfortunately, a disaster occurred, and the monastery was destroyed by fire.

Soon after, the monastery was burned down in this disaster. For several years, the monastery lay in ruins, with its statues destroyed and the monks scattered. The master had a connection with Shizhong (Zhixing was Shizhong’s name), the military governor of Xuzhou, so they joined forces with a common wish to rebuild the monastery. The master was then invited to be the Chief monk of the three prefectures. They also submitted a report to request the consecutive inauguration of ordination altars. Taking advantage of donations, they expanded the

scale of the monastery, and *Shizhong* contributed ten thousand [maces] of wealth to help complete the construction.

旋屬災焚本寺，寺殲像滅僧潰者數年。師與徐州節度使王侍中有緣（侍中名智興）。遂合願叶力，再造寺宇。乃請師為三郡僧正。奏乞連置戒壇，因其施利，廓其規度。侍中又以家財萬計助而成之。²⁸

If we examine the document in the epitaph of Mingyuan, it becomes clear that the purpose of establishing the altar was not for Wang Zhixing's personal gain but for the reconstruction of the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou. Furthermore, Wang Zhixing also contributed ten thousand maces of his own finances to facilitate this endeavor. The three prefectures of Xu, Si, and Hao were all under the jurisdiction of the Wuning military governorate. Among these, Haozhou was situated in the middle reaches of the Huai River, Sizhou in the lower reaches, and Xuzhou, as the capital of the Wuning military governorate, was located northwest of Sizhou. Mingyuan became the chief monk of the three prefectures to streamline the coordination of resources within Wang Zhixing's jurisdiction and to aid in the monastery's reconstruction. This presents a stark contrast to the representation by Li Deyu. To some extent, both portrayals are accurate; one emphasizes the interests of the central government, while the other highlights local societal interests. When the epitaph narrates the process of establishing the ordination, it makes no mention of praying for the blessing of Jingzong's birthday. This suggests that the so-called blessing is primarily a set of words intended for the central authorities.²⁹

As for the number of monks being ordained at the ordination altar, the epitaph recounts Mingyuan's life history with the following words: "He presided over the ordination altar before and after for eight times and ascended to the seat of the *Vinaya* fifteen times. The number of monks and nuns ordained was 30,000" 前後臨戒壇者八，登律座者十有五。僧尼得度者三萬眾。³⁰ The number of monks and nuns ordained at the ordination altar of the Kaiyuan Monastery should not exceed this figure. The reconstructed Kaiyuan Monastery is both beautiful and magnificent. Bai Juyi also underscores the collaborative efforts of Mingyuan and Wang Zhixing in rebuilding the monastery:

From the halls, pavilions, corridors, kitchens, granaries, and storage rooms to the living quarters of Buddhist monks, servants, hired workers, as well as the stables for horses and oxen, there are altogether more than two thousand and several hundred rooms in total ... If the Great Master were not ranked first among the Buddhist monks who possess blessings and wisdom, and if the *Shizhong* were not ranked first among those who are devout and believing, then how could such great Buddhist undertakings have been carried out and the Buddhist teachings been revitalized? Therefore, what the Tathagata said—that after his passing, his *dharma* would be passed on to his disciples and entrusted to the ministers—is indeed true.

自殿閣、堂亭、廊、庖、廩、藏，洎僧徒、臧獲、傭保、馬牛之舍，凡二千若干百十間。……若非大師於福智僧中而得第一，若非侍中於敬信人中亦為第一，則安能大作佛事而中興像教者乎？故如來所謂我滅後我法傳授於弟子，囑於大臣，斯言信矣。³¹

The scale of the reconstruction, when compared with the Ci'en Monastery 慈恩寺 and the Zhangjing Monastery 章敬寺 in Chang'an at their peak, also indicates that the Kaiyuan Monastery was already a monastery of considerable size.³² Some scholars have noted that the phrase "the Buddha's teachings are entrusted to the ministers" (佛法囑於大臣) comes from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (大般涅槃經) and differs in focus from the sentence "the Buddha's teachings are entrusted to the kings", which was quite common during the Mid-

to-Late Tang period. The emphasis on the ministers shows that the military governors had stronger influence at the local level.³³

Mingyuan died at the end of the eighth year of the Dahe era (834), and at the end of the epitaph, it is mentioned that “Shizhong entrusted me [i.e., Bai Juyi] with the task of writing a biography, but he died before I could accomplish the epitaph. Now I write the preface and epitaph according to the biographical account written by Mingyuan’s follower monks Sengliang and Yuansu” 侍中以撰錄見托，未就而薨。今按弟子僧僧亮、元素行狀序而銘之。³⁴

This indicates that Wang Zhixing had long ago entrusted Bai Juyi with the task of composing a biography of Mingyuan, but Bai delayed the task, and the final epitaph was based on the biographical account written by Mingyuan’s disciples. The epitaph reflects the recognition of Mingyuan and his disciples regarding the ordination altar in Sizhou and was probably erected in the form of a tablet stele at the Kaiyuan Monastery, representing a local voice.³⁵ Wang Zhixing died in the first year of the Kaicheng era (836),³⁶ and the epitaph states that Wang Zhixing died before the epitaph was completed, suggesting that it was written after the first year of the Kaicheng era. Emperor Wenzong 文宗 (reg. 826–844) introduced a strict policy of restricting Buddhism in the ninth year of his reign, stipulating that no new monks or nuns should be ordained and that the examination of those already ordained should be intensified.³⁷ The fact that the epitaph was written in such a context may indicate a complex response to the central government’s religious policy.

After Wang Zhixing came to power in the second year of the Changqing era, his rule was unstable. On one hand, he requested the imperial credentials for command (*jieyue* 節鉞) to gain authority from the central government; on the other hand, he actively participated in local Buddhist affairs and presented himself as the protector of Buddhism to gain local recognition. This behavior mirrored that of Tian Chengsi 田承嗣. In the sixth year of the Dahe era, Wang Zhixing was expelled by the soldiers of Xuzhou, illustrating the potentially unstable nature of his rule in Xuzhou.

If we say that Wang Zhixing came to power through a military seizure, all aspects of his behavior could be seen as improper, reflecting a deliberate attempt to stabilize his rule while disregarding the role of local elites. The next case, then, closely relates to the monk Mingyuan, and we can observe how a more stable local society acknowledged the inauguration of an ordination altar in the Jianghuai region after the second year of the Yuanhe era.

3. The History of the Lingju Monastery Ordination in the Ninth Year of the Yuanhe Era, as Recorded by the “Lingju Monastery Stele”

In the *Complete Works of Literature of the Tang Dynasty* (*Quan Tangwen* 全唐文), there is a stele of the Lingju Monastery in Liuhe County, Yangzhou, from the Great Tang Dynasty 大唐揚州六合縣靈居寺碑 (hereafter referred to as the ‘Lingju Monastery Stele’),³⁸ written by Shu Sunju 叔孫炬 (n.d.). This stele is strongly commemorative in nature, focusing primarily on the glorious history and wealth of the Lingju Monastery, while detailing the important figures involved in the establishment of its monument. The list of figures, particularly the specific participants, reflects the stele builders’ acknowledgment of the history and affluence of the Lingju Monastery.

According to Wang Xiangzhi 王象之 (1163–1230) of the Southern Song Dynasty, “The Tang Lingju Monastery Stele. The stele is located in the Lingju Monastery in the northwest of Liuhe County. The fourth year of the Dahe era of the Tang Dynasty stele was written by the jinshi 進士 (degree holder) Shusun Ju of Henan” 《唐靈居寺碑》。在六合縣西北靈居寺。有唐大和四年碑，進士河南孫叔矩文。³⁹ It is evident that the monastery stele was erected during the reign of Emperor Wenzong of the Tang Dynasty. Liuhe County is situated on the north bank of the Yangtze 長江 River and is now part of the Liuhe district of Nanjing,

Jiangsu Province. In the Mid-to-Late Tang period, it was part of Yangzhou in the Huainan Circuit and was not far from Sizhou.

According to the inscription, the Lingju Monastery was founded in the first year of the Tiantong 天統 era (565) during the Northern Qi 北齊 Dynasty. After a period of abolition and revitalization during the Zhou 周 and Sui 隋 Dynasties, the monastery was granted its official name in the first year of the reign of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (reg. 649–683) in the Tang Dynasty (674). Following the description of the terrain surrounding the monastery, Shusun Ju outlines the architectural layout and highlights the significant monks in the history of the Lingju Monastery. For instance, Yugong 禺公 specialized in lecturing on the *Nirvana Sūtra* 涅槃經, the *Lotus Sūtra* 法華經, and the *Vimalakirti Sūtra* 淨名經 (維摩詰經). During Emperor Suzong's reign, Chan master Xian 賢, a monk from northern China due to the An-Shi Rebellion, acquired dozens of hectares of land for the monastery. During the reign of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (reg. 762–779), Chan master Guang 廣, a monk from Yuezhou 越州, was stationed at the Lingju Monastery and built the western corridor. From this information, we can see that the inscription emphasizes the scale and wealth of the monastery. However, by the eighth year of the Yuanhe era, this monastery, which did not appear to be in dire straits when the chief monk from Sizhou, Mingyuan of the Kaiyuan Monastery, came to take up residence there, was already “in a state of ruin” 略見隳廢. According to the *Quan Tangwen*:

He [Mingyuan] considered emulating the merit of patching up the sky (making great restorations) and took advantage of the powerful impetus (to carry out the restoration work). He then invited Zheng Ji, the former County Magistrate (*xian-dafu* 縣大夫), to collaborate with all their strength on a joint plan, and they started the project together. He welcomed the real body of Master Sengqie from Sizhou and moved the kitchen, set up the storeroom, relocated the quarters for the lay servants, and established a granary for the permanent residents of the monastery. A guest reception area was constructed, and the Vinaya hall was established. Its facilities are extremely complete, and it is indeed quite remarkable.

思效補天⁴⁰之功，遂假建瓴⁴¹之力。乃請前縣大夫鄭繼，戮力合謀，相與經始。仍於泗上迎僧伽大師真身，並移廚置庫。遷淨人院，創常住倉。客省營，律堂設。功用大備，實有可觀。⁴²

In this way, Mingyuan became the savior of the Lingju Monastery. Upon his arrival at the monastery, he collaborated with the local gentry, Zheng Ji, to enhance all of its aspects. The specifications of the Lingju Monastery, as depicted in the inscription, were likely the result of Mingyuan's maintenance and expansion:

The Pure Land Hall was built on the right side of the gate ... The Sengqie Courtyard was established on the left side of the gate ... Behind the main hall, a lecture hall was constructed ... Right behind the lecture hall, the celestial kitchen was built in due form ... To the west of the kitchen, the guest reception area was arranged, and to the east, the pantry for fragrant provisions was set up. To the northwest of the kitchen, the granary area was opened, and to the northeast of the kitchen, the servants' quarters were expanded at the back. Behind the Pure Land Hall, the Vinaya Hall was newly built. There is a Pond for releasing wildlife below, where one can sit and observe the aquatic creatures.

入自門右，開淨土坊。.....入自門左，辟僧伽院。.....當大殿後，厥構講堂。.....次講堂後，式建天廚。.....廚西序列賓客省，廚東序陳香積庫。廚乾維啟倉廩地，廚艮背廣臧獲院。次淨土坊後，式創律堂。下壓放生之池，坐觀水族。⁴³

The quoted texts of the kitchen; the guest reception area; the pantry for fragrant provisions; the granary area; the servants' quarters; the Pure Land Hall; and the Vinaya Hall

correspond to the work of Mingyuan, as quoted in the previous text, which notes: “[He] moved the kitchen, set up the storeroom, relocated the quarters for the lay servants, and established the granary for the permanent residents of the monastery. The guest reception area was built, and the Vinaya hall was set up” 移廚置庫。遷淨人院，創常住倉。客省營，律堂設。 In this process, Mingyuan’s expertise in the restoration of the monastery was shared by “Changyan, Shaoliang, Fakong, Zhiyuan, ?-zun, Huixing, Rujun, Daotong, and Nanyue” 常演、少良、法空、志遠、□遵、惠興、如筠、道通、南約等.⁴⁴ One of them, Daotong, was the head monk of the Lingju Monastery when the stele was erected in the Dahe period. The inscription is full of praise for the current state of the monastery, but repairing the monastery required funding, which Mingyuan secured:

According to Chief Monk’s rules and regulations, after being invited by the monks and laymen, he [Mingyuan] organized himself with great care, hoping to achieve significant results. In the ninth year, he set up an ordination altar, devised a convenient method, and amassed considerable wealth. Therefore, he recovered more than three thousand hectares of fields that had previously been mortgaged and leased out by the monastery. He cast a large porridge cauldron and made a large incense burner and diligently endeavored to maintain the monastery until today.

稟僧正成規，受緇俗禮請，乃悉心締構，期著厥功。至九年，起檀度門，剖方便法，大致資貨。遂收復常住舊典賃田三千餘頃。鑄大粥鑊，寫大香爐，矻矻然盡力惟（維）持迄今末（未）已。⁴⁵

The so-called rules and regulations refer to the inauguration of the ordination altar in the ninth year of the Yuanhe era. In this manner, Mingyuan “gained a great deal of wealth” 大致資貨, and over 3000 hectares of fields that had been mortgaged or leased were successfully recovered. Although it is not possible to pinpoint specific individuals, the quoted phrase, “invited by the monks and the laymen” 受緇俗禮請, is not a platitude; after all, the restoration of the Lingju Monastery resulted from close cooperation between Mingyuan and Zheng Ji, a local scholar. The erection of the stele more than ten years later was also the culmination of the combined efforts of both the monastic and secular communities. The inscription mentions these secular figures in order:

Emperor Taihe

Yangzhou da dudufu zhangshi, Jingzhao gong (Chief Clerk of Yangzhou Grand Military Commission, the Duke of Jingzhao)

Chaosanlang (Court gentleman of Dispersion), Shouling (Acting County Magistrate) Cui Huan

Zhubu (Chief Clerk of a County) Qian Wen; Wei (County Sheriff) Shi Gongsu; Wei (County Sheriff) Du Xun

Zhen’e bingma shi (Military Commander of Town Defense) Zhao Juncheng

Yike (local guest), *Qian Xuzhou qi xiancheng* (The former Assistant Magistrate of Qi County in Xuzhou) Zhao Zeng; *Shilin guan* (Scholar’s Hall), □*zhiguan, Tong shi-jiang* Zhao Zeng; *Yiren* (County people), *Chushi* (Hermit) Lü Jian; *Qian hangzhou fuyang xian zhubu* (The former chief Clerk of Fuyang County in Hangzhou) Lü Kangwu; *Qian shi zuoweilü fu bingcao canjun* (The Former Acting Military Staff Officer of the Left Palace Guard Commandant’s Office) Hu Fuyan; □□*Jiawang fu zhubu* (Chief Clerk of Jia Prince’s Mansion) Hu Zhengyan; *Qizhou lushi canjun* (Record-keeping Military Officer of Qi Prefecture) Hu Shenyan, etc.

太和皇帝

揚州大都督府也（長）史京兆公

朝散郎守令崔儼

主簿錢文、尉史公素、尉杜珣

鎮遏兵馬使趙君城

邑客前徐州蘄縣丞趙曾、士林館口知官同十將王從一、邑人處士呂鑿、前杭州富陽主簿呂康武、前試左衛率府兵曹參軍胡複言、嘉王府主簿胡正言、齊州錄事參軍胡審言等⁴⁶

Emperor Taihe was Emperor Wenzong of the Tang Dynasty, and the era name “Taihe” is also known as “Dahe.” Since the Lingju Monastery lacked national influence, determining Wenzong’s role in the establishment of the Lingju Monastery Stele is challenging. The inscription’s description of Emperor Wenzong is more of a platitude, stating that he “will promote the ten goods and expound the teachings of the great Buddha” 將宏十善之化，是闡大仙之教, but in reality, he had little interest in Buddhism.⁴⁷ The title of “Chief Clerk of Yangzhou Grand Military Commission, the Duke of Jingzhao” warrants special attention. During the Mid-to-Late Tang period, this position was generally held by the governor of Huainan, a relatively stable military province under the Tang central government, with appointments primarily made by the imperial court. The previous citation of Yudi Jisheng indicates that this stele was composed in the fourth year of the Dahe era. Duan Wenchang 段文昌 (773–835) and Cui Cong 崔從 (761–832) successively held this position from the first to the fourth year of the Dahe era (827–830) and from the fourth to the sixth year of the Dahe era (830–832). Therefore, the Duke of Jingzhao must be one of them. However, neither Duan Wenchang nor Cui Cong seem to be from Jingzhao, nor do they hold any noble titles associated with Jingzhao. Li Wencai believed that members of the Duan clan also originated from Jingzhao according to the genealogies of the Ming Dynasty, and he thinks that Duan Wenchang was connected to Buddhism.⁴⁸ Duan Wenchang indeed appears more likely among the two. When Mingyuan established an ordination altar in Liuhe County in the ninth year of the Yuanhe era, the Military Governor of Huainan was Li Yong 李鄴 (?–820), who likewise did not oppose the establishment of the ordination altar. When Wang Zhixing memorialized for an ordination altar to be inaugurated in the fourth year of the Changqing era, Wang Bo 王播 (759–830) served as the military governor of Huainan (Wu 1980, pp. 727–29). In fact, the Huainan region was even adjacent to Sizhou, the neighboring vassal state that was most directly affected. However, historical records do not indicate that Wang Bo opposed the establishment of the ordination altar. This suggests that, despite the central government’s decree on the limited ordination system in the second year of the Yuanhe era, some military governors were able to reach compromises with local authorities in practice (Wu 1980, p. 726).

Although the Huainan governor permitted the installation of the ordination altar, and Liuhe County fell under the governor’s prefecture of Yangzhou, he may not have been significantly involved in the details of the event. As the quotation suggests, it was the local officials and gentry of Liuhe County who were the primary practitioners. They can be categorized into two groups: the first consisted of the incumbent civil and military officials of Liuhe County, led by the magistrates, chief clerks, county sheriff, and military generals. The second group comprised the local *shishen* 士紳 (gentry) of Liuhe County who had held official positions in other regions, including many from the same family (Hu Fuyan, Hu Zhengyan, and Hu Shenyan). During the Mid-to-Late Tang period, the local *tuhao* 土豪 (magnates) in the Jianghuai region were deeply integrated into the community and actively engaged in grassroots politics, even to the extent of becoming county magistrates. Therefore, we cannot discount the possibility that these figures stemmed from the local magnate group.⁴⁹ It can be asserted that the leading figures of Liuhe County were all involved in

raising the monastery stele, indicating that they shared close social ties with the Lingju Monastery. The erection of the stele occurred only about a decade after the installation of the ordination altar, and the situation would have been well-known to the gentry of Liuhe County. While it was Daotong, the head-seat of the Lingju Monastery, who proposed writing the inscription through the pen of Shusun Ju, the design of the content must have been approved by the local monks and laymen of Liuhe County. The fact that Mingyuan's establishment of an ordination altar to acquire wealth was mentioned in the inscription demonstrates that they did not see it as a violation of court law. Clearly, Li Deyu's assertion that "Since the second year of the Yuanhe era, Jianghuai haven't ordained any people" 江淮自元和二年後，更不度人 contradicts historical truth.

4. The Monastery's Coupling with the Jianghuai Region: The Cult of the Sengqie

Although the central government restricted the number of monks after the second year of the Yuanhe era, this restriction was not enforced at the local level. In the two cases mentioned above, it is even blatantly clear that the ordination altars were set up for profit. If we consider the previous account alone, it is easy to assume that the establishment of the ordination altar was merely an exchange of economic benefits between the monastery and the local community: the monastery provided secular individuals with the opportunity to hide their assets, while the latter returned much-needed funds for the reconstruction of the monastery. Although cooperation between monks and local elites is evident, there is little religious faith involved. In fact, while economic factors are significant, religious factors are also essential. We must keep in mind that Buddhism is a religion, and people do not seek financial rewards alone. It is also the sanctity of Buddhism that connects the monastery to the local community. The monks participated in these fundraisers to gather money for rebuilding the monastery, while also offering donors opportunities to generate merit. Additionally, the Kaiyuan Monastery and the Lingju Monastery are particularly noteworthy.

Li Deyu learned from the post list circulated by Wang Zhixing that the purpose of the monks' ordination was to celebrate Emperor Jingzong's birthday. However, this phrasing was misleading and primarily a political expedient for the government. While rebuilding the monastery and establishing the ordination altar on two occasions, Mingyuan also effectively capitalized on the public's devotion to the divine monk Sengqie.

One of the key reasons why Wang Zhixing, stationed in Xuzhou as the Surveillance Commissioner of the three prefectures of Xu, Si, and Hao, allowed Mingyuan to lead Buddhism in the three prefectures was to shift the center of gravity of Buddhism to Sizhou, where the cult of the Sengqie originated. The earliest record of Sengqie's deeds is found in a stele named the "Stele of Puguangwang Monastery in Linhuai County, Sizhou Prefecture of the Great Tang Dynasty" 大唐泗州臨淮縣普光王寺碑 (hereafter referred to as the "Puguangwang Monastery Stele"), written by Li Yong 李邕 (678–747) in the twenty-fourth year of the Kaiyuan era (736). It is interesting to note that Li Yong's grandson, Li Yong 李鄴, served as the governor of Huainan in the ninth year of the Yuanhe era.⁵⁰ As a native of the Heguo 何國,⁵¹ Sengqie traveled to Jianghuai during the reign of Emperor Wu Zetian 武則天 (reg. 690–705), died in Chang'an in the fourth year of the Jinglong era (710), and was described as a monk who possessed some kind of magical powers during his lifetime. During his travels in Jianghuai, the monk ultimately decided to build a monastery in Linhuai:

Once he had a comprehensive view of Linhuai, he conceived the idea of establishing a monastery. With eyes of compassion and integrity in his heart, he inspired a mindset of extensive relief, modeling his approach after the Buddha of universal radiance. He then requested a name for the monastery, still adhering to the Bud-

dha's title. Emperor Zhongzong of the Tang Dynasty felt that the word "Zhao" (照) in the name violated the imperial taboo (i.e., Zhao 曩, the name coined by Wu Zetian), so the character "Guang" (光) was temporarily used instead. On the second day of the third month in the fourth year of the Jinglong era, he sat upright and passed away at Jianfu Monastery in the capital.

嘗縱觀臨淮，發念置寺。以慈悲眼目，信義方寸。興廣濟心，儀普照佛。……乃請寺名，仍依佛號。中宗皇帝以照言犯諱，光字從權。……以景龍四年三月二日，端坐棄代於京薦福寺。⁵²

From the inscription, it is evident that Sengqie requested a name (probably referring to an Imperial Inscription 敕額) for the monastery built in Linhuai during the Jinglong era. Originally, he had hoped to name the monastery after "Puzhao Buddha," but the word "Zhao" (照) violated the taboo of Wu Zetian, the name she had coined during her imperial reign (i.e., Zhao 曩), so the monastery's name was changed to "Puguangwang Monastery." Cui Gong 崔恭 (n.d.), in his Tang *you buque liangsu wenji xu* (唐右補闕梁肅文集序" Preface to the Collection of Writings by Liang Su," the *youbuque* 右補闕 [Right Remonstrator] of the Tang Dynasty) stated: "If one uses the teachings based on the way of the gods to set up religious instruction and widely assists in the source of moral transformation, then compose the 'Inscription on the Pagoda of Monk Sengqie in the Kaiyuan Monastery of Sizhou'" 若以神道設教，化源旁濟，作《泗州開元寺僧伽和尚塔銘》。⁵³ This shows that the Puguangwang Monastery became an official monastery during the Kaiyuan era.

Scholars generally believe that Sengqie underwent a process of deification from the Early Tang Dynasty to the Late Tang Dynasty.⁵⁴ The most typical example is Li Yong's Puguangwang Monastery Stele cited above, in which the monk is still regarded primarily as a senior monk, 高僧. However, both the *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記 and the Song Dynasty Biographical Records of Eminent Monks (*Song gaosen zhuan* 宋高僧傳) record him as a 'divine monk' 異僧, adding many supernatural components. The fact that the *Taiping Guangji* documented the monk's deeds up to the reign of Emperor Zhongzong suggests that its work focused on the earlier part of the monk's life prior to his death.⁵⁵ At the end of the text, it is said that the quotation is taken from *Benzhuan* 本傳 (authentic biography) and *Ji wen lu* 紀聞錄, both of which have been lost, and the authors remain unknown. It is also noted that this biography is a very detailed account of the monk's incarnation. Since Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001) submitted "The True Records of Sengqie" 僧伽實錄 to Emperor Taizong 太宗 (reg. 976–997) of the Song Dynasty, some scholars believe that this may be the same biography referenced in the *Taiping Guangji*.⁵⁶ Compared to the *Taiping Guangji*, the *Song gaosen zhuan* is more complete in detail and contains many more accounts of the monk's post-death manifestations.

In the Northern Song Dynasty, Huang Xiufu's 黃休復 (n.d.) *Lidai Minghua lu* 歷代名畫錄 (Catalogue of Famous Paintings of All Ages) records that in the first year of the Jianzhong 建中 era (780), the Daci Monastery 大慈寺 in Chengdu established a hall for Sengqie on the south side of the monastery grounds.⁵⁷ The earliest surviving image evidence of the cult of the Sengqie is Cave 1 of the Xichan Monastery (西禪寺) in Anyue (安岳), Sichuan, which contains an image of the monk Sengqie in thirty-two transformations (三十二相), with the inscription "the thirteenth year of the Yuanhe era" (維元和十三年), indicating the date of its carving (Ma 2009, p. 319). Many scholars have noted that the cult of the Sengqie became a national phenomenon in the late Tang Dynasty. It is also important to note the preservation of the real body of the Sengqie in Linhuai, where the cult originated, and a process of sacred molding was involved. Additionally, more iconographic materials related to the Sengqie cult have been found in and around Jianghuai.⁵⁸

According to Li Yong's "Puguangwang Monastery Stele": "They clung to and remembered his appearance and demeanor, and then built a magnificent pagoda courtyard ... His

figure and remains were placed in the empty pagoda” 攀系儀形，建崇塔院。……貯儀形於空塔, it is known that the body of the Sengqie was sent to Linhuai to build a pagoda for worship. The record of *Yizhou minghua lu* shows that the cult of Sengqie existed as early as before the Jianzhong era of Emperor Dezong.

There are many stories of Sengqie, who died and was reborn in different places in *Song gaosen zhuan*. These stories have a clear direction, namely, the pagoda in Sizhou. Many of these narratives have a clear purpose, namely, to gain some benefit for Sengqie himself, for the Kaiyuan Monastery, or even for Sizhou. For example, the biography of Sengqie records that in the Dali era of Emperor Suzong, a merchant went to the Kaiyuan Monastery to sell fasteners: “The merchant, Li Shanxin, went to the monastery by boat to look for fasteners to buy, and suddenly saw Sengqie in the pagoda, and the statue appeared solemn and serene, and pointed out: ‘I came here to buy something because of this monk’” 商人李善信船至寺覓買齋器，僧忽見塔中，形像凝然，而指曰：“正唯此僧來求買矣。”⁵⁹ This was for the purpose of offering sacrifices to Sengqie himself.

According to the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, during the fifteenth year of the Dali (766–779; The Dali era existed for fourteen years, this may be a mistake in the materials) era, Sengqie appeared in the *nei daochang* 內道場 in Chang’an, which contains an entreaty to Emperor Daizong to be exempted from “the service of the Youting” 郵亭之役, which was a campaign involving the monks of the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou. In the late Tang Dynasty, when Pangxun’s 龐勳 rebellion besieged the city of Sizhou, Sengqie also appeared to protect the city, and this story represents the protection of Sizhou.

The Kaiyuan Monastery, where the pagoda is situated, became a significant monastery in the Jianghuai region during the Mid-to-Late Tang period. When the Japanese monk Ennin returned to China in the fifth year of the Huichang era (845), he traveled to Sizhou and said, “The Puguangwang Monastery in Sizhou is a famous place in the under heaven” 泗州普光王寺是天下著名之處.⁶⁰ In the *Song gaosen zhuan*, it is mentioned that in the second year of the Changqing era, both the monastery and the pagoda were burned down, yet only the statue of Sengqie remained intact as if it had not been damaged at all. The epitaph of Master Mingyuan contains an entry that states, “The monastery was burned in a disaster, and the monastery’s statues were destroyed and the monks collapsed in a few years” 旋屬災焚本寺，寺殲像滅僧潰者數年，⁶¹ which, according to the context of the stele, obviously refers to the fire in the second year of the Changqing era. The second year of the Changqing era was when Mingyuan was the chief monk of Sizhou and the head monk of the Kaiyuan Monastery; if this miracle was deliberately created, then Mingyuan must have played a key role in its creation.

Prior to this, in the eighth year of the Yuanhe era, Mingyuan had deliberately moved the real body of Sengqie from Sizhou to the Lingju Monastery to participate in the rebuilding of the Lingju Monastery in Liuhe County in Yangzhou:

He then welcomed the true body of Master Sengqie from Sizhou. In the ninth year, he established an ordination altar, opened the path to impart the expedient Dharma, and amassed a significant amount of funds and goods.

仍於泗上迎僧伽大師真身，……至九年，起壇度門，剖方便法，大致資貨。⁶²

Mingyuan first relocated the true body of Sengqie to the Lingju Monastery, and the following year, he established an ordination altar for the monks, through which he amassed significant wealth. Although Mingyuan was not a monk from Yangzhou, he successfully led the revitalization of the Lingju Monastery, largely because he brought the true body of Sengqie with him. Additionally, the Lingju Monastery created a dedicated courtyard for Sengqie to enshrine him; the inscription on the Lingju Monastery Stele mentions the *stūpa* in the Courtyard of Sengqie, which holds remarkable salvific power for believers.⁶³

The Kaiyuan Monastery ordination altar served as a vital place for monks in the Jianghuai region during the Tang Dynasty, and documents say,

At the beginning of the Yuanhe era, there was a Buddhist ordination altar in Puguangwang Monastery of Sizhou. Those who wanted to become monks had to undergo this process. People from all directions converged here like spokes of a wheel to the hub. Monks and nuns gathered in large numbers, and the spectators were as numerous as those in a busy market.

元和初，泗州普光王寺有梵氏戒壇，人之為僧者必由之。四方輻輳，僧尼繁會，觀者如市焉。⁶⁴

It can be imagined that Wang Zhixing's inauguration of the ordination altar at the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou must have also invoked the beliefs surrounding Sengqie and served as a continuation of the ordination practices from the Lingju Monastery. During the fire in the second year of the Changqing era, the claim that only the true body of Sengqie remained was likely intended to reinforce his sanctity and promote the opening of the ordination altar for the monks in the fourth year of the Changqing era. Hu Sanxing noted that "there was a 'great sage pagoda' (*da shengta* 大聖塔) in Sizhou, which was honored by the people, so Wang Zhixing asked to set up a preceptor's altar here" 泗州有大聖塔，人敬事之，故王智興請於此置戒壇。⁶⁵ Although he did not understand the purpose behind establishing a preceptor's altar, his observation about the significance of the pagoda for the ordination altar in Sizhou is insightful.

5. A Supplementary Proof: Youxuan 幽玄 and the Baoli Monastery

Between the second year of the Yuanhe era and the Huichang Persecution of Buddhism, Mingyuan was not the only one profiting from establishing an ordination altar for the maintenance of monasteries. In March of the second year of the Baoli era (825),⁶⁶ Yin You 殷侑 (767–838), who served as a Surveillance Commissioner to Jiangxi Circuit from the first year to the second year of the Baoli era (825), "requested that an ordination altar for monks and nuns be placed at the Baoli Monastery in Hongzhou" 請於洪州寶曆寺置僧尼戒壇. In response, the court stated: "It was decreed that Yin You had willfully violated the imperial regulations and had inaugurated an ordination altar without permission, so he should be punished by having his official salary be deducted for one-quarter (of the year)." 敕殷侑故違制令，擅置戒壇，罰一季俸料. It appears that the court did not grant Yin You's request and imposed a slight penalty on him.⁶⁷ Did the monks proceed with the program? The following discussion examines another piece of material.

Three years later, during the reign of Emperor Wenzong, Shen Chuanshi 沈傳師 (769–835) took similar actions in Jiangxi:

In the tenth month of winter (in the third year of the Dahe era) ... On the day of Jiyou, Shen Chuanshi of Jiangxi submitted a memorial stating: "On the occasion of the emperor's birthday month, I request to set up a *fangdeng* 方等 ordination altar for Buddhist monks and nuns." An imperial edict was issued, stating: "There have been repeated imperial decrees banning the ordination of Buddhist monks and nuns. As a regional governor, Chuanshi should have been aware of the imperial edicts. Luring people into such foolish and reckless actions is by no means in line with the principles of governance. You should be punished by having your official salary for one month deducted."

(大和三年)冬十月.....己酉，江西沈傳師奏：皇帝誕月，請為僧尼起方等戒壇。詔曰：“不度僧尼，累有敕命。傳師忝為藩守，合奉詔條，誘致愚妄，庸非理道，宜罰一月俸料。”⁶⁸

Shen Chuanshi was a Surveillance Commissioner to Jiangxi Circuit from the second to the fourth year of the Dahe era. Like Yin You, it appears he did not receive permission from the imperial court. However, by examining records in the *Song gaosen zhuan*, we can obtain a clearer picture:

Shi Youxuan, originally named Liu, was a Buddhist monk from Youzhou. ... In the thirteenth year of the Yuanhe era, Shang You, the Prefect of Yuzhang, highly respected his religious beliefs and invited him to reside in Dongming Monastery. This monastery was established during the reign of Emperor An of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, gathering many monks. During the Baoli era, a memorial was submitted requesting that its name be changed to Shifu Monastery, and an ordination altar was also established. Later, by imperial decree, it was renamed as Duseng Monastery. The statues and images within the monastery were all alms solicited from Youxuan. In the first year of the Dahe era, Shen Chuanshi, the Vice Censor-in-Chief (*zhongcheng* 中丞), demonstrated even greater faith and support. Youxuan constructed a five-story Buddha Pavilion to the south of the monastery courtyard separately...

釋幽玄，俗姓劉，幽州人也。……（元和）十三年，豫章太守商佑篤重其道，命住東明寺，即東晉安帝世之所造，僧數繁湊。寶曆中，為奏改為世福，兼置戒壇，續敕改為度僧寺。其間形像，皆玄之化導。大和元年，沈傳中丞又加信向，玄於院南別造佛閣五層……⁶⁹

The title of Youxuan's biography in the *Song gaosen zhuan* is "Hongzhou baoli si youxuan" 洪州寶曆寺幽玄 (Youxuan of the Baoli Monastery in Hongzhou). However, according to the text, he was stationed at the Dongming Monastery in Hongzhou, which was later renamed the Shifu Monastery and the Duseng Monastery, where he eventually died. This record suggests that he was affiliated with only one monastery in Hongzhou.

Comparing the events surrounding the installation of the ordination altar with the records in *Jiu Tangshu* reveals that "Dongming Monastery," "Duseng Monastery," and "Baoli Monastery" should refer to the same monastery. Behind the establishment of the ordination altar by Yin You, it was Youxuan who served as the driving force. Unlike the description of Yin You in *Jiu Tangshu*, the *Song gaosen zhuan* states that he received permission from Emperor Jingzong to proceed. The statement "The statues and images in the monastery were all obtained through the almsgiving initiated by Youxuan" 其間形像，皆玄之化導, and the assertion that "Youxuan built a five-story Buddha Pavilion in the south of the monastery courtyard separately" 玄於院南別造佛閣五層 were likely funded by the inauguration of the ordination altar, which Youxuan repeatedly leveraged for obtaining funding. In contrast to the biographies of Jingzong and Wenzong, in the *Jiu Tangshu* cited above, the material in Youxuan's biography within the *Song gaosen zhuan* presents a more localized perspective. The biography of Yin You in *Jiu Tangshu* notes that he was recognized for his integrity and honesty during his tenure as a Surveillance Commissioner of Jiangxi. In the sixth year of the Dahe era, Yin You, then the governor of the Tianping Military Governorate 天平軍, proactively requested to submit the two-tax payment along with the funds from the monopoly on wine production and sales.⁷⁰ From these examples, it is evident that Yin You's request for an ordination altar for the Baoli Monastery was rooted not in personal gain, but rather in consideration of local needs.

6. Conclusions

Unlike the rationale that emphasizes control and balance between the central and local levels, this article focuses more on the local perspective beyond the central state level. In the Jianghuai Society during the Mid-to-Late Tang period, ordination altars that did not

undergo strict examinations of *sūtras* were more frequently established when monasteries faced financial shortages. This situation, rather than indicating the growth of the monasteries' wealth, was more likely an attempt to prevent their decline. This contrasts with the imperial sale of ordination certificates to generate funds following the An-Shi Rebellion, as well as the institutional sale of ordination certificates during the Song Dynasty, which was a governmental action driven solely by economic motives. The local ordination altars of the Mid-to-Late Tang showcased a mutually beneficial relationship between the monasteries and their surrounding communities, with the monasteries playing a dominant role. During this period, religious beliefs served as a means of connection between monks and laypeople. The upkeep of these monasteries significantly represented the preservation of faith. Despite the ambiguous role of military governors, who were positioned between central and local levels, many of them, considering the restrictive ordination system, made requests for local monks, indicating their acknowledgment of the need for local monasteries. Within the framework of the local narratives, they did not see a conflict between establishing an ordination altar and fluctuations in finances. Their primary concern was the survival of the monastery itself, as well as the collaboration between monks and laypeople for its well-being. The installation of the ordination altar exemplifies their efforts to sustain the monastery.

Recent research on the relationship between Chang'an and the military provinces in the Mid-to-Late Tang period has led us to realize that, despite the Anshi Rebellion, the authority of the central government was largely re-established through the actions of the rulers and ministers of Chang'an.⁷¹ This was accomplished through the creation of the *Shence Army* 神策軍, the safeguarding of wealth in the southeast, and the acknowledgment of the semi-independence of the military provinces in Hebei in return for their recognition of central government authority. The Tang dynasty came to an end when the financial resources of the southeast were severely strained by rebellions and secessions, resulting in unsustainable conditions. In this context, from the Yuanhe era to the Huichang era, the central government's control over the wealth of Southeast China remained quite effective. Why then did the Jianghuai region, including even Hongzhou, adopt the practice of ordaining monks for profit during a period of decline and the need for reconstruction? This consideration raises questions about the economic prosperity of southeastern regions during the Mid-to-Late Tang period. Some scholars argue that the cities in the Jianghuai region were affected by war, plague, and famine, indicating a downward trend.⁷²

There are two opposing views on the overall assessment of the southern economy in the Mid-to-Late Tang period. One perspective suggests that the southern economy experienced development, resulting in the economic center of the country shifting further south. In contrast, the opposing view posits that this shift was primarily due to the imperial court losing its tax revenue source from the north.⁷³ If we accept the latter perspective, and considering the heavy economic burden imposed by the imperial court on the southeast (Li 2011, pp. 711–26; Li 2007, pp. 622–34), monasteries with significant local influence might have sought a mutually beneficial relationship with the local community in a bid for joint survival, especially if they were not receiving financial support from that community. This localization represented an undercurrent that partly contributed to the emergence of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.

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Notes

- 1 Some scholars have noted that Emperor Wuzong, along with the Daoists, were hostile to Buddhism, see (Stanley 1987, pp. 114–36; Luo 2013, pp. 46–50).
- 2 It is believed that Wuzong’s goal in suppressing Buddhism was to shape the legitimacy of the regime, see (Qin et al. 2014, pp. 36–43).
- 3 For a comprehensive analysis of the economic origins of the Huichang Persecution of Buddhism, see (Ch’en 1956).
- 4 Xianzong’s edict states: “Men and women are the foundation of farming and weaving. Ornately decorated walls and lofty mansions are the sources of waste and depletion. Among the common people across the country, some people pretend to be Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, just to avoid corvée labor. It is advisable to formulate comprehensive regulations and sort out the regulations and then report them to the imperial court.” 男丁女工，耕織之本。雕牆峻宇，耗蠹之源。天下百姓，或冒為僧道士，苟避徭役。宜備為科制，修例聞奏。 *Tang huiyao*: 881, but it was later understood to be a prohibition of private altars (*Jiu Tangshu* 17: 513).
- 5 The expression “Inaugurated an Ordination Altar Without Permission” (擅置戒壇) comes from a record in the *Jiu Tangshu*, “(826) March ... Xinwei, Yinyou, the Surveillance Commissioner of Jiangxi, requested that an ordination altar for monks and nuns be placed at the Baoli Monastery in Hongzhou, It was decreed that Yin You had willfully violated the imperial regulations and had inaugurated an ordination altar without permission, so he should be punished by having his official salary for one quarter deducted (三月……辛未，江西觀察使殷侗請於洪州寶曆寺置僧尼戒壇，敕殷侗故違制令，擅置戒壇，罰一季俸料; *Jiu Tangshu* 17: 519).
- 6 Zhang Guogang divided the military provinces of the Tang Dynasty into four types: those of the Hebei region with separatist tendencies 河朔割據型, those in the Central Plains for defense purposes 中原防禦型, those on the frontiers for border defense 邊疆御邊型, and those in the Southeast for providing financial resources 東南財源型. See (Zhang 2018, pp. 44–45).
- 7 Moroto Tateo is the first scholar to explicitly point out the discrepancies between Li Deyu’s memorial and the inscription on the Stele of Master Mingyuan. Moroto mainly focused on the issues of taxation and corvée. Although he noticed other similar records, he failed to connect them with the local society in the Jianghuai region, nor did he pay attention to the role of the belief in Sengqie behind them. See (Moroto 1990, pp. 319–26).
- 8 Barrett has also observed the records of the ordination altar in Sizhou, concentrating primarily on the issue of Buddhist precepts. From the perspectives of history, politics, economy, Buddhist doctrines, Chan Buddhism, Bai Juyi, and even Daoism, he has sought to investigate the reasons for the establishment of the ordination altar. Although Barrett noted the belief in Sengqie at the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou, he did not successfully establish a strong connection between it and the founding of the ordination altar in Sizhou, see (Barrett 2005, pp. 101–23). Sokolova Anna mainly examined the reconstruction of the Kaiyuan Monastery in Sizhou from the perspective of the history of Buddhist architecture, see (Sokolova 2021, pp. 1–15).
- 9 *Jiu Tangshu* 156: 4138–4140; *Xin Tangshu* 172: 5201–5203.
- 10 Strictly speaking, the Wuning Military Governorate in which Sizhou was located belonged to what Zhang Guogang called the “military province of the Central Plains Defense-Type” 中原防邊型藩鎮, but Sizhou was close to the Huai River and closely neighboring to Huainan, so this article treats it loosely. Sizhou’s zoning and seat of government changed throughout history. Two points are worth noting: First, in the fourth year of Wu Zetian’s Chang’an era (704), the county of Xucheng was analyzed and set up as Linhuai County, named after the Linhuai River, and ruled in the village of Shashu (present-day Chenggen Village, Huaihe Town, Xuyi County, Jiangsu Province), which was across the Huaihe River from Xuyi, which was the first time that the status of the county of Linhuai was confirmed. Second, in the 23rd year of Emperor Xuanzong’s Kaiyuan era (735), the government of Sizhou was moved from Suyu to Linhuai, see (Guo 2017, p. 382).
- 11 *Cefu yuangui* 689: 8219.
- 12 The *Quan Tangwen*’s version record that “僧” to “髡夫” (a tonsured man), See *Quan Tangwen* 706: 7243.
- 13 *Cefu yuangui* 689: 8219–8220. Si Maguang thinks it happened around December Yiwei of the fourth year in the Changqing era, see *Zizhi tongjian* 243: 7840.
- 14 On the origin of the birthday celebration in the early medieval period and its association with Buddhism, see (Hou 2011, pp. 127–63). *Nanbu xinshu* said: “In September Jiashen during the second year of the Shangyuan era (761), on the Tiancheng Diping Festival, the emperor set up a Buddhist rite in the Three Palaces. The palace maids were dressed as images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas and decorated with precious ornaments. The warriors from the Northern Gate were made to act as Vajras and Divine Kings. They were adorned with colored silks, put on armors, held sharp weapons firmly, and stood solemnly as guards at the corners of the seats. Incense was burned, and Buddhist chants were intoned. Ministers and close attendants surrounded them and paid their respects. A vegetarian feast was set up and music was

played. They had a great time until the end of the event, and everyone was given varying amounts of silk as gifts.” (上元二年[761]九月甲申，天成地平節，上於三殿置道場。以內人為佛、菩薩象，寶裝飾之。北門武士為金剛、神王，結彩被堅執銳，嚴侍於座隅。焚香贊唄，大臣近侍作禮圍繞。設齋奏樂，極歡而罷，各贈帛有差; *Nanbu xinshu* 9: 148). These activities were all carried out in the so-called *nei daochang* 內道場, an outstanding research on the *neidaochang* in the Tang Dynasty, see (Chen 2004, pp. 101–73).

15 For the three teachings debates in the court during the Middle Ages, see (Wu 2013, pp. 23–30).

16 *Cefu yuangui* 689: 8220.

17 See note 16 above.

18 On the loss of tax-exemption rights for Buddhist monks and nuns in the Tang Dynasty, see (Xie 1983, pp. 66–72; Moroto 1990, pp. 403–9).

19 Taxation of households 戶等納稅 after the enactment of the two-tax law, see (Zhang 1986, pp. 141–44).

20 See note 16 above.

21 At the time of Emperor Jingzong’s reign, the total number of registered households in the country was only 4 million (some military provinces did not report their households), see (Dong 2002, p. 147). Moroto believe that from the fourth year of the Changqing era (824) to the fourth year of the Dahe era (830), there were more than 700,000 privately ordained monks (Moroto 1990, p. 321). This is quite questionable. The statistics is set up to the time of the fourth year of the Dahe era because, according to the *Dasong sengshi lue* (T2126: 237c), in this year Emperor Wenzong issued an amnesty decree, granting official ordination to privately ordained monks. It is said that 700,000 people applied. The reason why he took the four year of the Changqing era as the beginning of statistics, is because this is the year Wang Zhixing’s establishment of the ordination altar in Sizhou. In fact, as will be discussed later, a private ordination altar was already established before, which was in the ninth year of the Yuanhe era. *Jiu Tangshu* 17:513, 174: 4514; *Xin Tangshu* 180: 5329; *Zizhi tongjian* 243: 7840; T 2126: 252b; T 2035: 384c; X 1512: 329c; X 1516: 964b. *Jiu Tangshu* 17: 513.

22 Some scholars primary use Li Deyu’s memorial on the establishment of a preceptor’s altar in Sizhou by Wang Zhixing was either to discuss the problem of hypocrisy among the monks or to view the matter as Wang Zhixing’s act of extorting wealth, see (He 2013, p. 222 [This article was first published in 1934]; Stanley 1987, p. 108; Gernet 1995, pp. 58–59).

23 This is based on Sokolova’s translation (Sokolova 2021, p. 8).

24 Sokolova thought Master Pei might have been the common master of Mingyuan and Chengguan, the former abbot of the Kaiyuan Monastery (Sokolova 2021, p. 9).

25 *Bai juyi wenji jiaozhu* 32: 1916.

26 *Bai juyi wenji jiaozhu* 32: 1917.

27 Nevertheless, in Wang Zhixing’s view, submitting a petition to the central government was a necessary means to obtain the legitimacy for the inauguration of an ordination altar, and Emperor Jingzong agreed to this application. It seems that Moroto and Barrett did not take notice of this point.

28 See note 28 above.

29 See note 28 above.

30 For example, the Cí’en Monastery had ten courtyards and more than 4,000 houses (*Datang ci’en sanzang fashi zhuan* 10: 214), and the Zhangjing Monastery had 48 courtyards and 4130 rooms (*Leibian changan zhi* 5:214).

31 A brilliant case study on the use of Buddhist Monasteries by military governors to create the legitimacy of a semi-independent military province, see (Nie 2018, pp. 111–31). The statement in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* that “the Buddha’s teachings are entrusted to the kings” provided a doctrinal basis for secular monarchs in the medieval period to intervene in monastic affairs. As a result, it became a classic formulation of the relationship between politics and religion from the late Northern and Southern Dynasties onward. See (Chen 2020, pp. 324–25).

32 See note 28 above.

33 Barrett simply regarding the epitaph of Master Mingyuan merely representing Bai Juyi’s viewpoint is one-sided (Barrett 2005, pp. 117–19).

34 *Jiu Tangshu* 156: 4140.

35 A comprehensive study on the Buddhist policies of Emperor Wenzong, see (Stanley 1987, pp. 106–14).

36 *Quan Tangwen* 745: 7713–7716. Li Wencai had a transcription of this inscription, see (Li 2021, pp. 493–8).

37 *Yudi jisheng* 38: 1204–1205.

38 This refers to a famous story in Chinese mythology, Nuwa 女媧 Mends the Sky.

39 This refers to a story that comes from Liu Bang 劉邦, Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty. It implies the meaning of a dominant position of looking down from a commanding height (*Shiji* 8: 382).

40 *Quan Tangwen* 745: 7714.

41 *Quan Tangwen* 745: 7713–7714.

42 See note 42 above.

- 45 See note 42 above.
- 46 The inscription contained qualifying phrases for each of the individuals mentioned (it is a relatively large amount of text, so it will not be specifically cited here), mainly describing the identity of the specific person and his Buddhist connection, rather than realizing the relationship with the Lingju Monastery.
- 47 Emperor Wenzong generally adopted a restrictive attitude towards Buddhism, see (Stanley 1987, pp. 106–14).
- 48 See (Li 2021, pp. 503–7). Regarding Duan Wenchang’s affinity for Buddhism, it can be added that he was a staff member of Wei Gao, the military governor of Xichuan Circuit, and that Duan Wenchang was working on several Buddhist-related monuments in Wei Gao’s later years. Later, when Duan Wenchang was the governor of Xichuan, he also wrote Buddhist-related inscriptions. See *Quanshu yuwen zhi* 38: 553–558.
- 49 A brilliant study on the local Magnates in the Late Tang Dynasty, see (Cai 2021, pp. 103–14).
- 50 *Quan Tangwen* 263: 2672–2673. About Sengqie’s life, see (Cai 2005, pp. 49–93).
- 51 The surname He is one of the Nine Clans of Zhaowu 昭武九姓. Barrett believes that Sizhou was located on an important trade route, and since Sengqie was of Sogdian origin, and the Sogdians, as the main force in the Silk Road trade at that time, might have been very willing to support Sengqie (Barrett 2005, p. 106).
- 52 *Quan Tangwen* 263: 2672–2673.
- 53 *Quan Tangwen* 480: 4903–4904.
- 54 For the research review about Sengqie, see (Zhao 2019, pp. 91–102).
- 55 *Taiping Guangji* 96: 638–639.
- 56 For the sources of Sengqie’s biography in *Song gaosen zhuan*, see (Yang 2016, p. 321).
- 57 *Yizhou minghua lu*: 29–30.
- 58 See (Niu 2016, pp. 102–16). For research on the cult of Sengqie during the Tang-Song era, please refer to Huang Qijiang’s study and the previous studies quoted, see (Huang 2009, pp. 31–80).
- 59 *Song gaosen zhuan* 18: 450.
- 60 B 95: 108a.
- 61 *Bai juyi wenji jiaozhu* 2011: 1917.
- 62 See note 42 above.
- 63 *Quan Tangwen* 745: 7713.
- 64 *Xuan guai lu* 3: 23.
- 65 *Zizhi tongjian* 243: 7840.
- 66 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18: 450.
- 67 *Jiu Tangshu* 17: 519.
- 68 *Jiu Tangshu* 17: 533.
- 69 *Song gaosen zhuan* 27: 683–684. The records about Shen Chuanshi in *Song gaosen zhuan* have two mistakes: First, he came to Jiangxi by the second year of the Dahe era. Second, Shen’s name is missing the “shi” (師). However, the association between Shen Chuanshi and Youxuan should be true.
- 70 *Jiu Tangshu* 165: 4320–4322.
- 71 For the Tang Court’s relationship with the regional militarized provinces, see (Zhang 2018; Li 2015; Qiu 2018).
- 72 For the deterioration of the cities in Jianghuai region during the late Tang Dynasty, see (Chen 2010, pp. 28–37).
- 73 For an overview of this opinion, see (Hu et al. 2002, pp. 421–2).

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