

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE OF CALLIGRAPHY  
AT THE TANG COURTS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Turning away from well-established traditions of stylistic analysis and biographical studies in existing scholarship of art history on calligraphy, this thesis combines sociological, political and anthropological perspectives to examine the seldom mentioned social and political uses of calligraphy at the Tang courts. It focuses on five groups of calligraphic objects and the interpersonal relationships on which these objects functioned. I demonstrate that the meaning of a calligraphic work was not abstract; it was not intrinsically a work of art, but rather its significance emerged out of the concrete relationships between objects bearing calligraphy and the people who produced, received, and commented on these objects. It is the pervasive and multiple uses of calligraphy and its close alignment to the broader political, cultural, and religious contexts that contributed to calligraphy's high position within the Chinese cultural matrix. Calligraphic interaction provides a lens zooming in on the relationship between Tang emperors and other court members, revealing the nature of court society as a network of interdependencies. As a means of self-presentation and a vehicle for social interaction, calligraphy facilitated court members' various agendas and united individuals of various strata across court society. In addition to enrich the understanding of Tang court society and the mechanism of rulership, the focus of some of my inquiries, as well as the notions of what constitutes 'art works' and 'artists', as employed in this thesis may also contribute to the diversity of art history, a subject that has been largely based on models and theories designed to explain western art.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BKLB* *Baoke leibian* 寶刻類編 [*Classified Compilation of Precious Inscriptions*], in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑志叢書 [*Series of Steles and Inscriptions Throughout Dynasties*] vol.1, (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998).
- BKCB* 陳思 Chen Si, *Baoke leibian* 寶刻叢編 [*Mixed Compilation of Precious Inscriptions*], in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑志叢書 [*Series of Steles and Inscriptions Throughout Dynasties*] vol.1, (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998).
- FSYL* Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, *Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄 [*Essential Records on Calligraphy*] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2012)
- JS* Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jin shu* 晉書 [*History of Jin*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974)
- JSCB* Wang Chang 王昶, *Jin shi cuibian* 金石粹編 [*Selection of Writings on Epigraphy*] (Taipei: Guofeng chubanshe, 1964)
- JTS* Liu Xu 劉昫, *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [*Old History of Tang*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975)
- LDMHJ* Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 [*Famous Paintings through the Ages*], translated and annotated by William Renolds Beal Acker, *Some T'ang and pre T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, volume 1, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954).
- QTW* Dong Gao 董誥 (edi), *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文 [*Complete Collection of Tang Period Literature*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983)
- QTWXB* Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良, *Quan Tangwen xinbian* 全唐文新編 [*The New Complete Collection of Tang Period Literature*] (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chu ban she, 2000)
- TPYL* Li Fang, *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [*Readings of the Taiping Era*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1966)
- THY* Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 [*Essential Documents of the Tang Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1955)
- TLD* Zhang Yue 張說, *Tang liudian* 唐六典 [*The Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1992)
- XHSP* Pan Yungao 潘運告 (ed), *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 [*Calligraphy Catalogue of Xuanhe Period*] (Chang Sha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1979)



- XTS* Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [*Old History of Tang*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975)
- ZZTJ* Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑 [*Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956)

## INTRODUCTION

Calligraphic works are situated. Situatedness may be particularly visible in a case such as the Tang dynasty (618-907), as studied here, but all uses of calligraphy can be located within specific contexts. In turn, all calligraphic works are indicative of broader social circumstances. This thesis adopts a broad concept of calligraphic works, that include all objects that bear calligraphy – tomb steles, manuscripts, religious scriptures, etc. It illuminates how calligraphic works do not merely serve as footnotes supporting historians' explanations of historical events, but play significant roles in those events. Turning away from well-established traditions of stylistic analysis and biographical studies in existing scholarship on calligraphy, this thesis adopts a socio-political perspective to examine the seldom mentioned social functions of calligraphy at the Tang courts. Drawing on rich body of textual and material evidence, this thesis reconstructs a variety of scenarios in which calligraphic works were produced, received, circulated and appreciated, as well as the social – and accordingly political – relations formed and played out in these scenarios. The thesis assesses the significance of calligraphy in mediating social relations at the Tang courts and investigates how court members utilised calligraphy creatively as an instrument to exercise their agency for the furtherance of their goals. I demonstrate that the meaning of a calligraphic work was not abstract; it was not intrinsically a work of art, but rather its significance emerged out of the concrete relationships between objects bearing calligraphy and the people who produced, received, and commented on these objects. As a means of self-presentation and a vehicle for social interaction, calligraphy facilitated court members' various agendas and united individuals of various strata across court society. It is the pervasive and multiple uses of calligraphy and its close alignment to the broader political,

cultural, and religious contexts that contributed to calligraphy's high position within the Chinese culture matrix.

The Tang imperial court was both the centre of politics and the household of the imperial family, a network of interdependencies formed among ruler, imperial family members and other political elites. Relationships at the Tang courts involved not only obligations and responsibilities, but also bonds of caring and affection. Calligraphy is especially significant for the study of Tang court social structure and the power mechanisms of rulership, because brush writing was a skill that was mastered and practised by a broad cross-section of the court population, and one which is well-documented by extant sources. This study uses calligraphy as a starting point to explain how individual rulers maintained their supreme status and how they interacted with those subordinates with whom they had direct personal relationships. The Tang rulers made innovative use of calligraphy in their political and social practices to cultivate their public self-presentation and to build friend-like or even family-like relations with subjects beyond the imperial family. Many of these innovations had a very long after-life, living on into the twenty-first century. Tang court calligraphy is a topic of interest not just to specialist art historians but to all those in pursuit of insights into the nature of the Tang court society and elite political culture. Going beyond specialists of calligraphy and of Chinese history, it should be of interest to those with interest in the various manifestations of material and visual culture.

### **Why Calligraphy Holds the Highest Position in the Hierarchy of Chinese Art**

As Frederick W. Mote suggests, Chinese civilisation has presented numerous problems of understanding that not only puzzle Euroamericans but also limit Chinese people themselves

to conventional wisdom. The comprehension of calligraphy's role as a form of high art is one of those difficult problems.<sup>1</sup> While no one could deny that calligraphy occupies a central role in Chinese visual arts, valuing writing as 'art' is not universally comprehensible across all cultures. Even within those cultures that also think highly of writing, people may give quite different reasons to the ones usually given for treating Chinese writing as 'art'. In Islamic culture, for example, 'writing, words, and cultures of text have been important since the earliest recorded periods of Islamic history, and a direct link between the scriptural word and cultures of writing and text was made almost immediately after the death of Muhammad.'<sup>2</sup> In contrast to its close bonds with religious practice in Islamic culture, in Sinitic culture, calligraphy is more rooted in the secular world. Since there is no one-size-fits-all answer to explain the significance of writing in all of the cultures that appreciate this form of art, how can we understand the uniqueness of calligraphy's supreme position in the hierarchy of Chinese art?

To answer this question, this introduction starts with discussing the undesirability of a universal consensus on a definition of 'art' that could suit all periods and cultures. After that, I will introduce the key influential theories and beliefs justifying the significance of calligraphy to Chinese culture from the perspective of aesthetics, religion, and politics. Ultimately, I will define the approaches adopted in this thesis to verifying the significance of calligraphy in the Tang dynasty, arriving at the premise of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick W. Mote and Chu Huang-lam, *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 3.

<sup>2</sup> James J. Ellas, *Aisha's Cushion—Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2012), 236.

If we think of calligraphy as a form of ‘art’, it is impossible to bypass the big question of ‘what is art?’ Attempting to dive into the existing philosophical and aesthetic thought and theory around this question may lead us to an endless discussion without definite conclusion.<sup>3</sup> What I want to emphasize here is that we should by no means take the notions of ‘art’ or ‘high art’ for granted. Definitions of art must be considered in their specific contexts in space and time. Any attempt to provide a single and universal definition risk failure as soon as they meet the assumptions, expectations, ideologies of a different time and space. Like many other terms, the notion of ‘art’ as presently conceived is highly problematic and derives from later generations’ constructions.

One of the most influential notions of art, and one that has to a large degree conditioned our understanding of art and influenced our comments on artworks up to the present, is the slogan ‘art for art’s sake’. Fred Orton underlines the unprecedented nineteenth-century change in art’s intrinsic value and autonomy as follows:

The defining parameters of art recognized as modern were adumbrated in the practices and procedures of art-making in Paris in the 1850s-1870s. Art, it was claimed, should have no aim but itself: art should use its own techniques to bring itself into question.<sup>4</sup>

Since the nineteenth century, ‘art for art’s sake’ has become a slogan employed to underpin the divorce of art from moral, didactic, or utilitarian function. Under this notion art becomes

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive survey incorporating a wide range of theories on definitions of art, see Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Fred Orton, *Avant-gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 142.

an end in itself. Having no utilitarian function has thus been regarded as an essential characteristic of pure art.

Although this notion still prevails, it has been challenged in and through institutions. During the past few decades, a large and growing body of literature has expressed distrust in the assumptions that the only purpose of art should be to stimulate aesthetic contemplation and that art should be free from any concern with practical purpose or context. Indeed, adopting this standard to evaluate and reconstruct the concept of ‘art’ created in other historical circumstances may well result in distortion. Harold Osborne notes that to view artworks ‘as an artefact primarily intended for aesthetic consideration’, we should have to exclude most of the art products we have inherited from the past’.<sup>5</sup> He argues that the Greeks had neither the word nor the concept of ‘art’ in our sense. For the Greeks, artworks were regarded as artefacts made for a purpose and the criteria to assess the success of works of art was their effectiveness for their purpose, an approach which is opposed to the modern belief in art’s autonomy and independence.<sup>6</sup>

Nick Zangwill claims that people certainly often had many non-aesthetic aims in making works of art. But he notes that no matter what the primary or most important function is for an artefact, when we call it a work of art, the aesthetic function must be a significant factor in its creation.<sup>7</sup> Confronted with the issue of cultural diversity, however, not only do the influential Western definition of art and hierarchy of art genres look suspect when asked to

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory, An Historical Introduction* (London: Longmans, 1971), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Zangwill, “The Creative Theory of Art”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 (1995), 307-323, 312.

fit the observation of arts in other cultures, but the very concept of the ‘aesthetic’ is open to question. Alfred Gell suggested that it is inconceivable that ‘every culture has a component of its ideational system which is comparable to our own aesthetics.’<sup>8</sup> He claims that seeing the art of other cultures from the perspective of aesthetics reflects more about the viewers’ own ideology and their worship of art objects as ‘aesthetic talismans’ than it tells about these other cultures.<sup>9</sup> All of these lead to mistrust of the possibility of developing a ‘universal’ theory of art based on those models and theories designed to explain the European art in western contexts. Gell attempted to formulate a ‘theory of art’ that would fit to the context of anthropology, where the subject-matter is social relationships, by claiming that ‘the nature of the art object is a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded. It has no intrinsic nature, independent of the relational context.’<sup>10</sup> It seems that, by denying the existence of a universal principle of ‘aesthetics,’ Gell’s theory could make possible a cross-cultural study of art. Gell did not break from aesthetic judgement entirely, however, but instead considered ‘art as a component of technology’, the captivating power of art being a technology of enchantment.<sup>11</sup> The agency inherent in the ‘index’ (the art object), he argues, might be physical, spiritual, political, as well as ‘aesthetic’.<sup>12</sup> It is undeniable that ‘the agency’ itself is not a set of absolute natural or neutral signs, as the interpretation of these signs of agency cannot be separated from the cultural conventions of specific social and historical contexts.

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology”, *Anthropology Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40-66, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, 66.

Related with the global conceptual hegemony exercised by ‘the West’ over the past few centuries, at present the most influential definition and notions around art inescapably bear prominent marks of modern Western ideologies. However, more often than not, these theories and models do not provide sufficient basis for making ‘universal’ claims, and they fail to grasp the specificities of the world prior to modern periods and outside the European sphere. It is widely acknowledged that modern western notions around ‘art’ have exerted great influence over the study of Chinese art. Even the concept of ‘Chinese art’ was created in nineteenth-century Europe and North America; in traditional China there was no term that refers to the same range of meanings ascribed to the word ‘art’ in English.<sup>13</sup> The application of the term has led to the valuing and appreciation of a range of types of objects that prior to the nineteenth century were seldom grouped together as ‘Chinese art’.<sup>14</sup> ‘Professors treat them in art history courses in accordance with the modern Western concept holding that aesthetic purposes are uppermost in defining art.’<sup>15</sup> The term ‘Chinese art’ obviously does not equal ‘what is the historical notion of art in China’. Hence, instead of looking for a universal definition of art to discuss to what extent Chinese calligraphy fits within it, or adopting Alfred Gell’s anthropological theory of the art nexus into the examination of Tang calligraphic works, what I seek is a theoretical basis for the significance of Chinese calligraphy, exploring the specificities of this phenomenon from the cultural and historical traditions in which it was created and functioned.

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<sup>13</sup> Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 187.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



Despite numerous research studies of Chinese calligraphy regarding calligraphy as ‘art’ in its own right, some scholars who claim that calligraphy is a premier art form in Chinese culture have made the attempts to justify this statement. A series of theories have been devoted to emphasizing the specificities of Chinese calligraphy and its inherent value. The first and most prevalent emphasizes the pictographic elements of Chinese characters. Mote suggests that the answer to this question – why calligraphy is a form of art – rests on the nature of the Chinese script itself: ‘its forms are capable of a vast range of extension and variation, subject to the discipline of traditions and the inventiveness of personal style, for which alphabetic scripts in the Western tradition offer no counterpart.’<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Nakata Yujiro claimed that it is difficult to say in short what forms the basis for the beauty of calligraphy, but there is no doubt that the Chinese characters themselves are the greatest factor in creating this beauty.<sup>17</sup> ‘The combination of the concrete and the symbolic is the base from which all other varieties of characters developed.’<sup>18</sup> This theory does not spring solely from outsiders’ aspirations to rationalise the charm of Chinese calligraphy as a form of art by tracing characters’ pictorial origins, but has its cultural foundation in traditional calligraphic criticism. Chinese critics have themselves long related the art of writing to the art of painting. The Tang critic Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 claimed that *shuhua tongti* 書畫同體 [painting and calligraphy are of the same substance]. This traditional view has been explained by Wen C. Feng as follows: ‘in the Chinese visual world both calligraphy and painting use a graphic convention (*tuzai* 圖載, literally, “pictorial diagram”) as an image-sign, which they saw both as a semantic or representational sign and the artist’s presentational self as the sign-maker that is signified.’<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Frederick Mote and Chu Huang-lam, *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Nakata Yujiro, general editor, *Chinese Calligraphy*. Translated and adapted by Jeffrey Hunter (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Ouyang Zhongshi [et al.]; translated and edited by Wang Youfen, *Chinese Calligraphy* (New

Is there an objective aesthetic criterion for the evaluation of calligraphic works? For example, there is a well-presented *Lotus Sutra* (S.2573), a Dunhuang manuscript, followed by a colophon indicating that it was transcribed by the low-ranking *Menxiasheng qun shushou* 門下省群書手 [Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery] Feng Anchang 封安昌 in 673. The *Yinfu jing* 陰符經 [*Scripture of Hidden Contracts*] has been attributed to the Tang official-calligrapher Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢. Comparing these two works, can we find a set of objective aesthetic criteria to guide us and to back us up as we make a judgement on which one is the more ‘valuable’? To answer this question, we need to introduce the popular belief that calligraphy is an outward manifestation of a calligrapher’s inner character. Under this belief, in the traditional aesthetic criticism of calligraphy, the visual beauty of writing usually gives way to the writer’s morality, reputation and social influence. In the landmark work, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing’s Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*, Amy McNair puts forward the question of how the Tang official-calligrapher Yan Zhenqing, whose calligraphic style cannot be called conventionally beautiful or graceful, could earn such a prominent position in the history of calligraphy. To answer this question, McNair draws on the idea of characterology and develops it to reveal the political dimension of calligraphy. According to McNair, characterology refers to the notion that: ‘assessing a man’s character and fitness for government office from examination of his aesthetic affect, both in his physical appearance and comportment and in his practice of the polite arts.’<sup>20</sup> She suggests that, in the eleventh century, Confucian reformers chose Yan Zhenqing, whose character was upright and whose calligraphic style was forceful and severe, to compete with

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Haven: Yale University Press; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), xiii-xiv.

the imperial choice of Wang Xizhi.<sup>21</sup> A more direct response to the issue of Tang aesthetic criteria for calligraphy has been made by Yolaine Escande. She has examined the eighth-century work of calligraphic criticism *Shuduan* 書斷 [*Judgements on Calligraphy*] that was composed by the Tang dynasty scholar Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘. Escande arrives at the conclusion that, in contrast to the Western art critics' tendency to focus on the value of the object, seeking the 'essence' of art in a physical object, Chinese connoisseurship is interested in the spiritual value (aesthetic, ethical, and ideological) of the artist.<sup>22</sup> Neither McNair's theory of characterology nor Escande's theory that the emphasis of Chinese art critics was the spiritual value of the artist is far from the traditional view that still endures today. That is 'writing defines the person' 字如其人.

It is worth mentioning that the acknowledgement of the weight of an artist's spiritual value and reputation does not mean the absolute negation of aesthetic criteria in the criticism of their calligraphy. A system of ideas that involve an aesthetic reflection as part of an evaluation was also established and had a firm grip as well. Incorporating ancient critical theories on Chinese calligraphy, Zong Baihua 宗白華 made a useful attempt to transform some abstract ancient metaphorical vocabularies used in calligraphic criticism (such as 'bone,' 'flesh,' and 'sinew') into a systematic formal analysis. He developed three angles for attempting stylistic analysis of calligraphy: the brushwork, the compositional structure of individual characters, and the overall composition of the work.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> McNair, *The Upright Brush*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Yolaine Escande, "Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shuduan*," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41:1-2 (March-June 2014), 148-169: 166.

<sup>23</sup> Zong Baihua 宗白華, "Zhongguo shufa li de meixue sixiang" 中國書法裡的美學思想 [The Aesthetic Ideology of Chinese Calligraphy], *Meixue sanbu* 美學散步 [*A Stroll in Aesthetics*] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), 135-160.

Some scholars' emphases are not on calligraphy itself and its relations with the artists, but on the part that writing or calligraphy played in the social and political context in which they were created and functioned. Making use of archaeological discoveries, Zhang Guangzhi traced the origins of Chinese writing, examining the emblematic meanings of prehistoric pottery marks, the oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang and early Zhou dynasties, and the bronze inscriptions of the Shang and Western Zhou eras.<sup>24</sup> In a chapter called 'Writing as the Path to Authority,' he claimed that because the living communicated with their ancestors through writing, ancient Chinese writing had intrinsic power that came from the written word's association with knowledge received from the ancestors.<sup>25</sup> These early marks and inscriptions were identified with the information they contained because when writing began, the graphs themselves 'were part of the instruments of the all-important heaven-earth communication.'<sup>26</sup>

After the initial stages in which writing was mainly used in religious services, and thereby developed associations with the sacred, with the expansion of state administration the population of specialists who possessed knowledge of writing extended to those bureaucrats who maintained imperial official documents. The close association between calligraphy and the educated elites is one of the most widely accepted explanations of the significance of

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<sup>24</sup> According to Zhang Guangzhi's research, most prehistoric and Shang dynasty pottery marks were the emblems of the social groups who used the pottery; Shang oracle bone inscriptions are the recordings of oracular inquiries made on behalf of the kings. See Zhang Guangzhi, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Zhang Guangzhi, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

calligraphy in imperial and even modern China. In imperial China, for a long period of time, good handwriting was a criterion for the judgement of one's fitness for government office and even a means for the advancement of political careers. As Kraus puts it, 'Calligraphy is the quintessential bureaucrat's art, transforming the brushwork of clerks into China's most distinctive art form. Calligraphy acquired a mystique which reinforced its political role of distancing the educated elite from ordinary citizens.'<sup>27</sup> It is worth mentioning that historically calligraphy was not exclusive to literati studios and thus lacked a mass base. In other words, it was also practised by ordinary people and could arouse their sympathies and interest. Calligraphy or written characters were a ubiquitous presence in ordinary people's everyday lives. The characters appearing at building entrances, inscriptions incised on steles erected in public areas, and the characters on the ancestral worship tablets, etc., constitute the scenes of ordinary people's lives. This group of people might hold a distinct perception of calligraphy compared to that of the educated elites, but left little personal records.

As for the social and political dimensions of calligraphy, its power was not only believed to be embodied in the roles it played in dividing society between the educated elite who mastered the skill of performing excellent writing and the population who could not write or wrote only crudely, but also in its part in unifying the educated elite. Ledderose makes the observation that 'the aesthetic and stylistic unity within the calligraphic tradition both reflected and confirmed the social coherence of the educated elite...Along with political, economic, ideological, and other factors, calligraphy was an important means of self-identification for the ruling class, and supported its social unity.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 36.

<sup>28</sup> Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton:

These theories mentioned above are neither mutually exclusive nor inviolable. Together they reveal the framework within which calligraphy has long been valued and appreciated in Sinitic culture. However, it is worth mentioning that, except for Zhang Guangzhi, who argues that the power of written characters arose from the sacred message they carry and the ritual objects bearing them within specific historical and cultural contexts, almost all of the other existing theories have a tendency to lead us towards an idea that calligraphy's importance lies in its inherent essences (as a visual art with aesthetic value or a quality distinguishing the educated elite). As seen in our previous discussion of the limits of the concepts of 'aesthetics' and 'art', the emphasis on other presupposed values embodied in calligraphy might trap us again in the dilemma of taking calligraphy's significance for granted.

In this thesis, I shift the focus from existing studies that demonstrate the cultural value of calligraphy and turn to an examination of the meanings of calligraphy as embodied in particular objects bearing it and arising in specific social contexts. Situated in concrete social relations, the objects bearing written characters and the formats in which calligraphy was presented usually have more specific and diverse meanings than the presupposed values that have been projected onto calligraphy as a form of art. In Gell's words, 'art object[s]... are produced and circulated in the external physical and social world. This production and circulation have to be sustained by certain social process of an objective kind, which is connected to other social processes (exchange, politics, religion, kinship, etc.)'.<sup>29</sup>

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Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 3.

Responding to the question of ‘Why calligraphy is significant,’ this study neither aims to propose a universal definition of ‘art’ by doing a study on Chinese calligraphy nor to discuss the significance of calligraphy in a broadly ideological way, but rather treats it as a historical issue to deepen our knowledge about the complexity and pervasiveness of the use of calligraphy in Chinese culture. The study’s scope is defined as the people and the calligraphic objects that were presented or produced in the specific context of Tang courts. The following section provides a summary of existing scholarship on Tang dynasty calligraphy and highlights gaps that require filling.

### **Scholarship on Tang Dynasty Calligraphy**

The Tang dynasty, which lasted from 618 to 907, has been regarded as a golden age in Chinese history. Calligraphy is a distinctive feature of Tang culture. Not only did the five main calligraphic scripts (seal, clerical, cursive, semi-cursive, and standard) achieve full maturity, but a large number of highly celebrated calligraphers of this period have been admired for their fine and innovative work. According to Wang Yuanjun’s 王元軍 calculation, more than six hundred Tang calligraphers are recorded in the eighteenth-century imperial encyclopaedia *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 [*Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from the Earliest to Current Times*].<sup>30</sup> Among those figures, fewer than thirty were the most eminent Tang calligraphers who draw the majority of scholarly attention on the history of Tang calligraphy. After examining the identities of these eminent calligraphers, it is not hard to find that a majority either held official positions in the central

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<sup>30</sup> Wang Yuanjun 王元軍, “Ganlu shijin yu tangren de shu fa” 幹祿仕進與唐人的書法 [Seeking of Official Positions and Promotions and Calligraphy of Tang People], *Journal of Shaanxi University (Social Science)*, September, 1994, Vol.23, 112-117: 115.

government or gained certain forms of imperial patronage. The unprecedentedly close relationship between calligraphy and politics is a distinguishing characteristic of the history of calligraphy under the Tang. To some extent, it is the aura of political power that enhanced the enchantment of these calligraphers' works. Both traditional works and modern scholarship are rooted in and contributed to the norms of Tang dynasty calligraphy study, a discipline that is mainly based around several dozen biographies for great calligraphers and the detailed analysis of their calligraphic styles. With specific reference to 'court calligraphy', however, existing scholarship lacks a framework that can present a more dynamic picture of the uses of calligraphy, in which more figures of different backgrounds, together with calligraphic objects of various types can be incorporated into evidence base, rather than remaining focused on just a few dozen eminent official-calligraphers and studying them as groups according to their identities.

Since the middle of the Tang dynasty, scholars and connoisseurs have made continuous contributions to scholarship on Tang calligraphers. The eighth-century critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 ranked two hundred and thirty calligraphers who were no longer alive in 727 and composed a short biography for each in his significant work *Shuduan* 書斷 [*Judgements on Calligraphy*].<sup>31</sup> The Song dynasty calligraphy theorist Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039-1098) followed the pattern of *Judgements on Calligraphy* and composed the *Xu Shuduan* 續書斷 [*Sequel to the Judgements on Calligraphy*]. In this work, Zhu adds to

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<sup>31</sup> Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, "Shuduan" 書斷 [*Judgements on Calligraphy*] in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 [*Selected Essays on Calligraphy from Successive Dynasties*], Huang Jian, ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2014), 154-207. For the functioning and efficacy of the classifications of calligraphy in this work, see Yolaine Escande, "Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria Zhang Huaiguan's Shuduan," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol.41(1-2), (March 2014): 148-169.



Zhang's work by including those Tang imperial family members who had excelled at calligraphy and dozens of Tang calligraphers who had died after 727.<sup>32</sup> Traditional works on Tang calligraphers, which emphasise the calligraphers' biographies, conducted preliminary surveys of Tang calligraphers, but their information is in general descriptive and unsystematic.

Modern scholars' research on the history of Tang dynasty calligraphy usually takes two approaches: the first conducts case studies on individual calligraphers; the second is examining calligraphers arranged in groups according to their practice of similar styles, sharing of similar identities, or living at the same time. In either approach, identifying and narrating the lives of 'great' calligraphers and their calligraphic styles are the focal points of scholars' research on the history of Tang calligraphy. Amy McNair's study of the eighth-century calligrapher-statesman Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 pioneered an approach which explores the relationship between calligraphic styles and political discourse.<sup>33</sup> Adele Schlombs addresses the beginning of wild cursive script in the eighth century by presenting the biography of the calligrapher-monk Huaisu 懷素 and analysing the styles of his representative works.<sup>34</sup> In these works, individual calligraphers' biographical information and calligraphic styles are the main research subjects.

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<sup>32</sup> Zhu Changwen 朱長文, "Xu shufuan" 續書斷 [Sequel to the Judgements on Calligraphy] in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 [Selected Essays on Calligraphy from Successive Dynasties], Huang Jian, ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2014), 317-352.

<sup>33</sup> Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> Adele Schlombs, *Huai-su and the Beginings of the Wild Cursive Script in Chinese Calligraphy* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1998).

Another approach examines calligraphers as groups, in order to reveal the characteristics of Tang calligraphy in different phases or the features of a certain movement's calligraphic practice. Liu Xiaoling 劉小玲 reveals the development process of *bafen* clerical script from the early to the high Tang by setting out more than twenty Tang clerical calligraphers' biographies and their calligraphic styles.<sup>35</sup> Claiming that Emperor Taizong, Emperor Gaozong, Empress Wu, and Emperor Xuanzong were the most outstanding emperor-calligraphers of the Tang dynasty, He Bingwu 何炳武 briefly examines the four emperors' calligraphic practice and representative works.<sup>36</sup> Zhu Guantian 朱關田 has put forward the concept of 'Shengzhong Tang de guange shujia' 盛中唐的館閣書家 [Calligraphers of imperial colleges and cabinets in the prime and middle Tang] and examined around ten representative calligraphers who held office in the two imperial academies *Jixian yuan* 集賢院 [Academy of Scholarly Worthies] and *Hanlin yuan* 翰林院 [Hanlin Academy] in the high and middle Tang eras.<sup>37</sup>

When we try to understand the history of Tang calligraphy as a whole, it is impossible to pass over Zhu Guantian's comprehensive research on this topic. Thanks to his research, we can gain the gist of the characteristics of Tang calligraphy in different periods throughout the

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<sup>35</sup> Liu Xiaoling 劉小玲, *Shengtang bafenshu yanjiu* 盛唐八分書研究 [A Study of the *Bafen Clerical Script of the Prime Tang*] (Taipei: Wenjing chubanshe youxian gongsi, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> He Bingwu 何炳武, "Tangdai diwang yu shufa" 唐代帝王與書法 [Tang Dynasty Emperors and Calligraphy], in Li Bingwu 李炳武 and Huang Liuzhu 黃留珠 edit, *Tangdai lishi wenhua yanjiu* 唐代歷史文化研究 [Research on Tang History and Culture], (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2005), 317-321.

<sup>37</sup> Zhu Guantian 朱關田, *Zhongguo shufa shi: Suitang wudai juan* 中國書法史: 隋唐五代卷 [The History of Chinese Calligraphy: the Volume of Sui and Tang], (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chu ban she, 1999), 49-52.

dynasty. *The History of Chinese Calligraphy: Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties* represents a foundational piece of scholarship providing a framework for an overall understanding of Tang calligraphy.<sup>38</sup> In this research, Zhu Guantian divided Tang calligraphy into three historical periods: the early Tang (618-713), the high and the middle Tang (713-820), and the late Tang (820-907). To provide a general picture of the development of Tang calligraphy, I summarize Zhu's research as follows: The calligraphy of the early Tang era has been defined by Emperor Taizong's (598-649) admiration for Wang Xizhi's (265-420) calligraphy and the achievements of three great calligraphers – Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596-658). After Emperor Xuanzong (685-762) ascended the throne in 713, an era of prosperity followed, and Chinese calligraphy, in Zhu's words, 'reached its zenith'.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the dominant status of standard, semi-cursive, and cursive scripts in early Tang, during the prime and middle periods of the Tang, Emperor Xuanzong's patronage led to the emergence of a group of specialists in seal and clerical scripts. Most notably, more than half of the stele inscriptions produced during Emperor Xuanzong's reign were written in clerical script. Han Zemu 韓擇木 (active 713-740), Shi Weize 史惟則 (742-756), and Cai Youlin 蔡有鄰 (active 713-755), all of whom once held posts in the central government, were the best-known calligraphers working in the clerical script. Furthermore, cursive script was also one of the most important accomplishments of the middle Tang period. The low-

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Zhu Guantian 朱關田, "An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers: The Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties," in Ouyang Zhongshi... [et al.]; translated and edited by Wang Youfen, *Chinese Calligraphy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2008), 208.

ranking official Zhang Xu 張旭 and the monk Huaisu 懷素 were the most eminent calligraphers in cursive script. In the meantime, the development of the standard script did not pause. With the two senior officials Xu Hao 徐浩 and Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 stepping into the limelight, Tang calligraphy reached a new artistic height. Entering the late period of the Tang dynasty, like other forms of art, calligraphy gradually lost its lustre. Liu Gongquan 柳公權, calligraphy teacher to the imperial family for twenty years, was without question the last eminent calligrapher of the Tang dynasty.

### **Define Court Calligraphy**

Even though the examination of eminent calligraphers has been the main focus of his research, Zhu Guantian has noticed that the personal preferences of Emperors Taizong and Xuanzong had a decisive effect on the development of calligraphy. He suggests that: ‘Although Emperor Taizong’s promotion of calligraphy and his worship of Wang Xizhi were politically motivated – that is, he used calligraphy as a tool to embellish his rule – his patronage had a noble result: it led to rapid advances in the art.’<sup>40</sup> Likewise, it was Emperor Xuanzong’s personal participation that gave the art of clerical script a boost.<sup>41</sup> Despite Zhu pointing out the significance of the role played by these emperors in determining the development of Tang calligraphy, it was Steve J. Goldberg who led the discussion onto a deeper level and put forward the concept of ‘court calligraphy.’ “Court Calligraphy of the Early T’ang Dynasty,” an article adapted from Goldberg’s PhD dissertation, focuses on the standard script of the first three great masters of Tang calligraphy (Ouyang Xiu, Yu Shinan

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<sup>40</sup> Zhu Guantian 朱關田, “An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers: The Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties,” 196.

<sup>41</sup> Zhu Guantian, “An Epoch of Eminent Calligraphers: The Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties,” 210.

and Chu Suiliang). This dissertation investigates the relationship between specific calligraphic styles and the overall ideology of the social group producing these calligraphic works and those to whom these works were addressed. He argues that, at the early Tang court, imperial patronage of calligraphy was mainly motivated by a desire to cultivate an image of legitimacy for the ruling house.<sup>42</sup> In his PhD dissertation, Goldberg defines ‘court calligraphy’ as ‘the calligraphy of the early Tang, Sui, and late Northern and Southern Dynasties, when the court was the real centre of calligraphic activity.’<sup>43</sup> This observation precisely captures the key characteristics of the history of calligraphy both during and prior to the Tang era. However, what I aim to present in this thesis is that Tang ‘court calligraphy’ existed in its own right regardless of the actual power of the ruling house, and was an activity with wide participation among a broad swathe of court members, who varied greatly in background and identity.

Given that the Tang dynasty ruled China for three hundred years, a period long enough that may span many forms of change. Through the second half of the period, especially after the An-Shi Rebellions, the empire never fully recovered its previous glory, and the emperors of this period could not draw on the level of resources enjoyed by their predecessors. The concomitant decline in the court’s magnetic power does not, however, mean that the courts’ calligraphic activities during later periods of the Tang dynasty were necessarily deprived of their significance or particularities. Although the imperial power of the middle and late Tang no longer had the strength to determine the trends of the calligraphic mainstream,

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<sup>42</sup> Steve J. Goldberg, “Court Calligraphy of the Early Tang Dynasty,” *Artibus Asiae* 49, no. 3-4 (1988-1989): 189-237, 189.

<sup>43</sup> Steve J. Goldberg, “Court Calligraphy in the Early T’ang Dynasty” (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 1981), 2.

calligraphic activity at the Tang courts never stopped. Many customs that had early Tang pedigrees, such as the practice of emperors presenting imperial calligraphic works as gifts to subjects and collecting great masters' handwriting, continued through the second half of the dynasty. Furthermore, some phenomena – such as summoning calligraphers to demonstrate calligraphy before an audience at court gatherings and the executing the Vermilion Writing Imperial Letter in person by the emperors – did not emerge or become popular until the middle and late Tang. These practices may have exerted less influence on the history of calligraphy in terms of stylistic development, but they are of great importance to the enrichment of calligraphy's social functions. In this thesis, 'court calligraphy' is viewed as a system, the existence of which was not decided by the strength of the imperial house's external influence, but developed in its own right through the operation of the court.

Since the court has been regarded as both the centre of politics and the household of the imperial family, in some recent works on the Tang courts, the boundary between 'history of politics' and 'history of the court' remains very murky. When we think of 'court calligraphy', what subjects should be included and how can we define the scope?

Although the work of official-calligraphers who served the emperors is an important component of court life and politics, where does the boundary lie between 'court calligraphy' and 'scholar-official calligraphy'? To tackle this question, we need first to solve another question – How to define a court society and comprehend its structure?

Nobert Elias is perhaps one of the earliest scholars who bring academic vigour to the examination of court society. He put forward the concept of 'figuration', attempting to explain how individual rulers with a small circle of helpers could maintain their

dynasties.<sup>44</sup> According to Elias's theory, 'figuration' represents the 'web of interdependences formed among human beings and which connects them: that is to say, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent persons'<sup>45</sup> All court societies, including the one of Louis XIV who has been traditionally regarded as the example of the monarch with mightiest or absolute power, are networks of interdependences. Enmeshed in a net of dependence, even the autonomy of the mightiest king has fixed limits.<sup>46</sup> In Spawforth's words: 'From the ruler's point of view, management of relations with his elites was critical, since it was this group which provided both his key helpers and, as often as not, the most potent source of attempts to supplant him. The chief spatial and social setting in which both ruler and elites sought to manage their mutual interaction was the court.'<sup>47</sup>

In view of a ruler's status as the centre of the court space, in a general sense, members of the ruler's household and various subjects serving the ruler, who interacted with and shared the space with the ruler at court, should all be regarded as legitimate court members. Hence, what is lack in existing scholarship but is necessary is a framework that can incorporate these court figures as a whole, rather than simply categorizing them according to fixed identities by emphasizing the differences between these groups. In this thesis, my solution is an examination of the network interaction between court members via the medium of a variety of objects that bear calligraphy. Focusing on a number of

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<sup>44</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Norbert Elias, *O processo civilizador*. Translation by Ruy Jungmann. (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1990), v. 1, 249. Originally cited by Tânia Quintaneiro, in "The concept of figuration or configuration in Norbert Elias' sociological theory". Translated by Maya Mitre from *Teoria & Sociedade* [on line]. 2005, vol. 12, pp.54-69.

<sup>46</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Tony Spawforth, "Introduction," in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. A. J. S. Spawforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

calligraphic works, this approach highlights the relationships among the persons for whom these works were made, the calligraphers, and the audience these works addressed. I deliberately anchor each of the five chapters around a group of calligraphic objects. As such I examine a variety of objects on which calligraphy appears (including imperial calligraphic collections, imperial edicts, religious scriptures, calligraphic gifts, entombed epitaphs and tomb steles) and a series of interactive acts formed around the production and reception of calligraphy, including collaborations, gifts, communicating, and appreciation etc. In this way, the less prominent social uses of calligraphy and the roles that calligraphy played in mediating social relations at the Tang courts will be investigated, through which we may be able to not only approach the broader question of why calligraphy is significant in Chinese culture from a different perspective but also gain a better understanding of the Tang court society.

## **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter One, ‘Calligraphy and Imperial Collections’ explores the cultural and political values with which imperial collections were endowed by Tang critics. This chapter also examines the management and use of imperial calligraphic collections at the Tang courts from the perspective of relationships between emperors and their ministers. This chapter argues that, according to accounts produced before and during the Tang dynasty, the significance of imperial collections to a ruler’s legitimacy was not an abstract matter through which possession of a large number of collectable objects automatically manifested the bestowal of the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ and the virtues expected of rulers, but rather functioned in more specific ways. This chapter begins with a discussion of the monumental nature of Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy, arguing that Emperor Taizong’s enthusiastic quest for



Wang Xizhi's Jin dynasty calligraphy and the centrality of the "two Wangs" works throughout the Tang imperial calligraphic collection were not only motivated by the Tang rulers' personal aesthetic sensibilities, but were driven by a desire to demonstrate imperial authority and to present their rulership as continuations of a classical cultural tradition associated with the Central Plains.

The second section moves to the management of, and vicissitudes faced by, imperial Tang calligraphic collections. I demonstrate that the substances and colours used for the standard mounting of calligraphic treasures held at the inner storehouse were chosen in accordance with rulers' requirements to demonstrate respect for a specific cultural legacy and to claim that they possessed authoritative knowledge of this culture. I show that, to a large degree, the quality and quantity of imperial calligraphic collections were decided by the expert knowledge and virtues of the ministers entrusted by the rulers with the task of managing the calligraphic works, which also relied upon the rulers' capability of making judgments on their subjects and reflected the imperial virtue of choosing proper ministers. In addition, apart from being available to imperial household members, access to the imperial calligraphic collections was often granted by emperors as a reward to favoured and faithful officials. The sharing of exclusive cultural resources, either by distributing reproductions or exhibiting the originals, was supposed to generate gratitude among the scholar-officials and strengthen the bonds between them and their rulers as members of the same community of interests.

Chapter Two, 'Calligraphy and Administration' focuses on the Tang emperors' practice of executing the calligraphy of imperial edicts in person, interrogating the contradictions

between institutional history and calligraphic history on the execution of ‘the Ruler’s Words’ 王言之制. It highlights how the Tang emperors were, on the one hand, patrons of calligraphy and shapers of the notion that calligraphic achievement is worthy of appreciation through institutional designs and talent selections, and, on the other, were themselves subjected to judgement by the same notion. I argue that by calligraphing imperial edicts in person the Tang emperors could circumvent the constraints of the authority of the ‘state’ in the form of the administrative system and act with greater personal autonomy. It was also a pivotal technique by which the rulers sought to accomplish a number of other goals: to build personal bonds with their subjects; to support their own agendas in confrontations with their ministers; to consolidate their personal authority; and to foster an image as civilised and culturally accomplished rulers. I also suggest that, although the employment of imperial calligraphy could colour the relationship between the emperors as calligraphers and their subjects as recipients, the aesthetic quality of imperial calligraphy was not enough in itself to achieve the goals listed above; the prerequisite for the effectiveness of the imperial calligraphy in mediating rulers’ relationships with their officials was the possession of unrivalled imperial authority based on political power and control of military force.

Chapter Three, ‘Calligraphy and Death Rituals’ turns to the employment of calligraphy in the death rituals for imperial household members and prestigious ministers, especially those which survive as inscriptions on tomb steles and entombed epitaphs. I examine three groups of imperial court members’ tomb writings: the tomb steles of Tang emperors and empresses; a group of princesses’ tomb steles and entombed epitaphs; and a group of ministers’ tomb steles bestowed with ‘imperial calligraphy’. The chapter begins with a discussion of a traditional belief addressing the emotional expressiveness of calligraphy. It suggests that

what is fundamental in discerning the emotion of calligraphic works produced for mourning and their social functions is not the mystical belief that calligraphy is an external manifestation of the inner world, but rather the interpersonal relationships behind the production and reception of these works and the identities of the figures involved in these processes. In this way, we see the human side of the interactions among the Tang court members, such as the affinities between sister and brother, husband and wife, mother and son, seldom mentioned in previous research. Furthermore, I find that almost all of the known extant calligraphic works by Tang emperors that are relevant to death rituals are inscriptions on tomb steles, rather than entombed epitaphs. I argue that this finding signifies the essentially public nature of ‘imperial calligraphy’, which functioned as a symbolic vehicle for the emperors’ presence and pronouncements. The presence of ‘imperial calligraphy’ on one’s tomb stele was, on the surface, a dramatic demonstration of the noble position of the tomb occupant and a proof of the emperor’s favour, but on a deeper level, often served the rulers’ specific political agendas that might not only be relevant to the dead, but also their offspring, and even the living public as audience.

Chapter Four, ‘Calligraphy and Scripture Transcription’ illuminates how, within the Tang courts, scripture transcription was not a simple act of copying texts but a practice performed by court members wishing to realize the various secular ambitions that embodied in the prayers appended to colophons and reflected in the calligraphy seen in the sutra transcriptions. Although transcription of religious scripture was the physical media involved in the process of facilitating these political agendas, the underlying functional ideology was a combination of religious ‘merit making’ doctrine and secular Confucian family and political ethics.

This chapter is composed of three sections. In the first section, I discuss the dual attributes of scripture copying as both a religious practice and an act of calligraphic creation. The second section focuses on specific Tang court members' personal employment of exquisite calligraphy in copying scripture. With reference to Emperor Xuanzong's transcription of the Daoist *Scripture of Laozi* to pray for blessings for his brother, I demonstrate that transcribing scripture not only enabled the emperor to express personal sorrow on the demise of his beloved brother but also allowed the public display of his brotherly kindness, religious preference and calligraphic achievement. This section also highlights the fact that almost all known calligraphic works executed by Tang palace women are religious scriptures. It argues that transcribing scripture was associated with Tang palace women's earthly ambitions, employing calligraphy to increase their own influence within the imperial household and to engage in self-presentation as filial daughters and virtuous wives. The third section is devoted to the religious scriptures that were commissioned by the Tang rulers. These scriptures have been divided into two groups according to the identities of their copyists: high-ranking official-calligraphers on the one hand and professional scribes on the other. It argues that the differences between these two groups of scriptures did not only relate to their critical reception, but were determined by their production processes and initial social functions in accordance with the motives behind the Tang rulers' commissions.

Chapter Five: Calligraphy, Gifts, and Performance focuses on the phenomenon of bestowing 'imperial calligraphy' as gifts on ministers, and on those social occasions at the Tang courts that were themed around the production or appreciation of calligraphy. I argue that in comparison with other forms of reward, as an elegant token of imperial favour the emperors'

handwriting was deemed more honourable in terms of both the personal participation of the emperors in the making processes and often the tailor-made nature of the works' textual content. These two attributes distinguish the bestowal of imperial calligraphy from other forms of gifts as a deeper demonstration of the proximity of the emperors to their recipients. For a subordinate, being bestowed with 'imperial calligraphy', a visible indicator of imperial favour, was a mark of distinction. In the emperors' hands, calligraphic gift-giving was a very flexible instrument of power, which not only strengthened the personal bonds between the emperor and the recipients but might also stimulate the audience to devote their loyalty and service to the throne.

This chapter also reconstructs some social occasions, such as court gatherings and feasts, in which the emperors performed calligraphy in person or patronised calligraphers to write calligraphy in front of an audience. It notices the co-occurrence of calligraphic performance and gift-giving at Tang court gatherings or feasts, suggesting that working together, calligraphic performance and gift-giving served to leave a deep impression on the audience, cultivating the emperors' public-image as civilised and benevolent rulers.

## CHAPTER ONE: CALLIGRAPHIC WORKS IN TANG IMPERIAL COLLECTIONS

Within collections, treasures are not merely representations of exquisite craftsmanship with aesthetic qualities, but often serve more concrete roles. Their specific meanings usually emerge in the relationships established between objects and people. According to the theories of collecting, one's collection is intimately connected to the connotations of one's identity, and can be interpreted as the projection of one's personality. 'As one becomes conscious of one's self, one becomes a conscious collector of identity, projecting one's being into the objects one chooses to live with.'<sup>48</sup> The complexity of an imperial collection lies in that, on the one hand, it was an expression of an emperor's personal taste, and on the other, it was often intertwined with that ruler's political needs. The interpretation of imperial collections, therefore, requires not merely the consideration of a ruler's personal interests but also the incorporation of historical political and cultural perspectives.

In the Chinese case, influenced by Ledderose's theory, imperial collections have regularly been connected with the 'Mandate of Heaven', interpreted as embodiments of political authority and vehicles for the legitimation of imperial power.<sup>49</sup> Accepting the value of the

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<sup>48</sup> John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 3.

<sup>49</sup> Chinese emperors were perceived to be the 'Son of Heaven' whose supreme power was legitimized by a 'Mandate of Heaven.' The emperors' great power was not free from constraint, however. The 'Mandate of Heaven' is like a contract between heaven and the emperor. Unlike the Divine Right of Kings in the Western doctrines, the grant of this 'Mandate' was not unconditional but believed to be bestowed by heaven under the condition that a ruler would be competent and virtuous, performing his responsibilities in a benevolent way. Otherwise, heaven would withdraw the mandate. For more on the relationship between imperial collections, the 'Mandate of Heaven' and legitimacy, see Lothar Ledderose, "Some Observations on the Imperial Art Collection in China," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 43 (1978-1979): 33-45; Jeannette Shambaugh Elliot and David Shambaugh, *The*

notion of the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ to theorizing Chinese imperial collecting in a general sense, this chapter offers a more specific interpretation in regard to the particular internal correlation between imperial calligraphic collections and politics. This chapter demonstrates that the significance of imperial collections to a ruler’s legitimacy was not an abstract matter that the possession of a large number of collectable objects automatically acts to manifest the bestowal of this ‘Mandate of Heaven’ and fulfils the virtues expected of a ruler, but rather functioned in more specific ways.<sup>50</sup>

In her study on Song Huizong’s (1082-1135) collections, Patricia Ebrey has argued that neither ‘legitimacy’ nor the desire for ‘magnificence’ seems adequate to explain why Chinese emperors were keen on building up collections. Her explanation posits that, in a situation specific to the Song dynasty, collecting provided an arena in which the scholar-official class and the emperors competed for cultural leadership.<sup>51</sup> Ebrey’s judgement that imperial collecting in China was closely connected with the relationship between the emperor and the scholar-official class precisely grasps a feature of imperial collecting as a

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*Odyssey of China’s Imperial Art Treasures*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005), 3; Richard M. Barnhart and others, *Mandate of Heaven: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*, (Zurich: Museum Rietberg Zurich, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Focusing on the Yuan dynasty ruler Tugh Temur’s collection of Chinese Paintings, Ankeney Weitz claims that the Mongolian emperor employed Chinese paintings in the direct service of court polity. The ingenuity of this method lay in the use of the collections as more than an accumulation of treasures, but rather the specific, individual images were selected by officials to expound a political message. Ankeney Weitz, “Art and Politics at the Mongol Court of China: Tugh Temur’s Collection of Chinese Paintings,” in *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 64, No.2 (2004), 243-280. Evelyn Rawski suggests that the multicultural nature of Qing rulership is evident in the art objects that were created for palace use and for presentation. Material culture was used as an expression of the Qing court’s cosmopolitan vision. Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1998), 52.

<sup>51</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture – The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press 2008), 17.

component of elite culture. Nevertheless, specifically during the Tang dynasty, my observation is that the relationship between the throne and the educated elite was in no way as competitive as that described by Ebrey under the Song. On the contrary, concerning the management of the Tang imperial calligraphy collection, in many cases we can see not only the Tang emperors collaborating with and effectively utilising the intellectual and material resources of the literati class, but also the scholar-officials being willing to be involved with, and proud of their service to, these imperial cultural projects.

This chapter is composed of two sections. Adopting the perspective of monumentality, the first section uncovers the political meaning of Wang Xizhi's calligraphic works within the tradition of imperial calligraphic collections, as well as the cultural and historical implications embodied in Wang's calligraphic style. As the most sought-after of calligraphic collectables, from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420) onwards possession of Wang's calligraphic works paralleled the transmission of imperial power. The discussion of the monumental nature of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy first reveals the dynamic replacement of imperial power and the role of Wang's works as a manifestation of power transmitted alongside the historical course of events. Second, the discussion analyses the continuous cultural tradition, which persisted through the Southern dynasties to the Tang era, in which Wang's calligraphy was seen to have embodied and preserved the ancient culture of the Central Plains.

This section argues that, although the Tang Emperor Taizong has been traditionally regarded as the initiator of the large-scale collection of Wang's calligraphy and the figure whose patronage contributed most to the calligrapher's status as the 'Sage of Calligraphy', Wang's



works had long been central to imperial calligraphic collections prior to the rise of the Tang. Emperor Taizong's choice of Wang's calligraphy was to some extent motivated by his personal aesthetic sensibilities, but much more importantly it was driven by his desire to demonstrate imperial authority and to present his rulership as a continuation of the classical cultural tradition associated with the Central Plains.

The second section moves from the monumentality of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy as reflected in pre-Tang imperial collecting traditions to the management of, and vicissitudes faced by, imperial Tang calligraphic collections. The relationship between the emperors and their scholar-officials is the focal point for the analysis of the social and political functions of calligraphic collections at the Tang courts. It begins with an examination of the materiality of the calligraphic works as three-dimensional objects held in the imperial inner storehouse. Relating these to the material elements employed in the civil bureaucratic system to distinguish official ministerial rank, I contend that all of the substances and colours used for the standard mounting of calligraphic treasures held at the inner storehouse indicated Tang imperial collectors' choices and targeted a particular audience – the scholar-officials. These choices accorded with the rulers' requirement to demonstrate respect for their cultural legacy and their claims to authoritative knowledge of the culture of calligraphy. Then, I tease out the evolutionary processes of imperial calligraphic collections throughout the Tang dynasty, highlighting the roles of scholar-officials and their interaction with the emperors in determining the collections' quality and quantity. In the last part of this section, I demonstrate that the possession of many rare calligraphic masterpieces provided Tang rulers with vehicles for rewarding favoured and faithful ministers through the selective granting of access to these treasures. The sharing of exclusive cultural resources, either through

distributing reproductions or exhibiting the originals, was supposed to generate gratitude among the scholar-officials and strengthen the bonds between them and the rulers as members of a single community of interest.

### **1.1 The Tradition of Viewing Wang Xizhi as a Monument in Imperial Collections**

The conventional associations of the term ‘monument’ with the features of commemoration, colossal size, durability, and publicity has been challenged by some scholars. Alois Riegl categorized monuments into two groups, the ‘intentional monument’ and ‘unintentional monument’. According to his definition, the ‘intentional monument’ refers to those monuments that are ‘erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations’.<sup>52</sup> The ‘unintentional monuments’ are turned into monuments not because of their original purpose and significance, but rather due to subjective modern perceptions of their ‘age value’.<sup>53</sup> Wu Hung suggests that Riegl’s theory fails to account fully for individual monuments, and argues that the monumental should be approached with greater sensitivity to its historical and contextual situation, in order ‘to explore indigenous concepts and forms within well-defined cultural and political traditions, to contextualize these concepts and forms, and to observe conflicting notions and manifestations of the monumental in specific situations.’<sup>54</sup> Wu Hung suggests that within the sphere of Chinese art and architecture, and before the appearance of private works of art and educated artists, ancestral temples and ritual vessels,

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<sup>52</sup> Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origins,” 1903, translated by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, in *Oppositions*, n.25 (Fall 1982), 21-51.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3.

the capital city and its palaces, tombs and funerary objects can all be qualified as monuments due to their status as the results of religious and political processes.<sup>55</sup> Although the scholar-artists eventually retreated to more private media such as the scroll and album, they continued to interact with new forms of political and religious monuments.<sup>56</sup> By the Tang dynasty, calligraphy had been appreciated as a form of ‘art’ among cultural elites for hundreds of years since the first century of the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE).<sup>57</sup> During this process, some calligraphers had established their names as great masters, their calligraphy had been collected and their styles practised by cultural elites. Here, I argue that, situated in the Tang context, the works of Wang Xizhi can be regarded as an important form of ‘unintentional’ monument that embodied specific historical and political significance. They functioned as a vehicle for the manifestation of political power, as well as the commemoration of a continuous cultural tradition.

By examining the extant accounts of imperial calligraphic collections produced before and during the Tang dynasty, I propose two vantage points from which to examine the monumental nature of the calligraphic works of Wang Xizhi in the tradition of imperial collecting. First, since the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420), Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy have come to be the most sought-after calligraphic works, regarded as the most precious treasures of the imperial calligraphic collections. Changes in the possession of Wang’s calligraphic works had come to indicate the transmission of power from the hands of one ruler to another. By the Tang dynasty, possession of a significant collection of Wang’s works had to a certain

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<sup>55</sup> Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, 279.

<sup>57</sup> Bai Qianshen, “Calligraphy,” in *A Companion to Chinese Art*, ed. Martin Powers and Katherine Tsiang (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 312-328. 313.

degree replaced that of the Nine Tripods as the key symbol of imperial power in the pre-imperial Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) in demonstrating the legitimacy of the owner's authority.<sup>58</sup> Second, the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi did not only embody the calligrapher's personal artistic creation but was interpreted and sustained by Tang people as a preserver of the ancient culture of the Central Plains back to the period before division and as such represented a continuous tradition lasting from the Western Jin through the Southern Dynasties to the Tang. From the Tang rulers' perspective, insisting on such distant origins and long traditions for current practices could confer authority and validity on the present.

#### (1) Wang Xizhi's Calligraphy in the Tradition of Imperial Collecting

In the history of Chinese calligraphy, it is with absolute certainty that the significance of Wang Xizhi (303-361), who was a Daoist practitioner, a politician, and a master of all scripts of calligraphy, is second to none. There is a general consensus that the fourth-century calligrapher Wang Xizhi's status as the 'Sage of Calligraphy' and his reputation as the greatest calligrapher of China date from the Tang dynasty and relate to the patronage of Emperor Taizong, almost three hundred years after the calligrapher's death.<sup>59</sup> Actually, although Taizong is known for his legendary collection of Wang's works, neither the establishment of the imperial calligraphy collection nor the tradition of seeking Wang Xizhi's calligraphy started from his reign. The earliest imperial collection of painting and calligraphy can be traced back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), Emperor Wu (157 -87

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<sup>58</sup> For more about the political meaning of the Nine Tripods, see Ledderose, "Some Observations on the Imperial Art Collection in China," 34.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 32. Stephen Goldberg, "Court Calligraphy of the Early T'ang Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae*, vol 49, no. 3/4 (1988): 189-237, 200.

BCE) having initially established the Palace Library 秘閣 (*mige*) to store paintings and ancient texts.<sup>60</sup> According to Ledderose's research, it was from the second century CE that handwritten pieces came to be valued and collected due to the quality of the handwriting upon them rather than their textual content.<sup>61</sup> By the fourth century, calligraphic works had entered court collections as works of art and later, along with paintings, came to be considered the most valuable components of the imperial collections.<sup>62</sup> By the establishment of the Tang Dynasty in 618 CE, the practice of collecting hand-written works, not because of their texts but the quality of their calligraphy, had already persisted for hundreds of years.

Some treatises on calligraphy and painting composed prior to and during the Tang era recounted the development of imperial calligraphic collections. Those critical works that survive to the present day include the fifth century critic Yu He's 虞龢 *Lunshu biao* 論書表 [*Memorial Discussing Calligraphy*] and several Tang dynasty calligraphic treatises. The *Xushi fashu ji* 徐氏法書記 [*Record on Mr Xu's Calligraphy*] has been attributed to Wu Pingyi 武平一, a member of Wu Zetian's royal clan who had been raised in the palace, and later served as a calligraphic connoisseur at the court. This latter work briefly introduces the evolution of script types and the history of imperial calligraphic collections.<sup>63</sup> Zhang

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<sup>60</sup> Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (815-907), *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 [*Famous Paintings through the Ages*], translated and annotated by William Reynolds Beal Acker, *Some T'ang and pre T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, volume 1, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 112.

<sup>61</sup> Lothar Ledderose, "Some Observations on the Imperial Art Collection in China." *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 43 (1978-1979): 33-45, 35.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Several sentences are missing in the version compiled in the Tang dynasty *Fa shu yao lu* 法書要錄 [*Essential Records on Calligraphy*], but a full version of this work is included in the Song dynasty compilation of calligraphic treatises *Mochi bian* 墨池編 [*Collection of the Ink Pond*]. Yu He's *Memorial Discussing Calligraphy*, Zhang Huaiguan's *A Record of Calligraphy by the Two Wangs and Others*, and Wu Pingyi's *Record on Mr Xu's Calligraphy* are all

Huaguan's 張懷瓘 *Er Wang deng shulu* 二王等書錄 [*A Record of Calligraphy by the Two Wangs and Others*] includes some anecdotes about the works of the two Wangs, enumerates a number of imperial calligraphic collectors, and introduces some details of the management of the imperial collections from the Eastern Jin (317-420) to the Tang dynasty. In *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 [*Famous Paintings through the Ages*], the Tang dynasty calligrapher and critic Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 wrote a chapter entitled 'On the Vicissitudes of the Art of Painting' 畫之興廢, providing a summary of the vicissitudes of the imperial collections of 'Fashu minghua' 法書名畫 [Masterpieces of Calligraphy and Famous Paintings] from the Han dynasty to the Tang.

Although these three Tang works differ in details and emphasis, overall, they narrate a similar developmental trajectory for the imperial calligraphic collections prior to and through the Tang era. This trajectory unfolds on the following timeline: Eastern Jin (266-420) – the four Southern dynasties (Liu Song (420-479), Qi (479-502), Liang (502-557), and Chen (557-589)) – Sui (581-618) – and Tang (618-907). During the lifetimes of the two Wangs (Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi), their works had become the calligraphy most sought-after by the ruling classes. The earliest appearance of works by the two Wangs in an imperial collection is found in reports that Wang Xianzhi once executed calligraphy on ten sheets of paper and gave the work as a gift to Emperor Jianwen of Jin 晉簡文帝 (320-372). This work

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compiled in the Tang calligraphic critic Zhan Yanyuan's *Fa shu yao lu* 法書要錄 [*Essential Records on Calligraphy*]. Amy McNair has offered a biographical notice on Zhang Yanyuan and notes on each of the works that comprise *Essential Records on Calligraphy*. Amy McNair, "Fa shu yao lu, a Ninth-Century Compendium of Texts on Calligraphy," in *Tang Studies*, 1987:5, 69-86.

later ended up in the hands of the Jin Dynasty warlord Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369-404) who was known for his obsession with the calligraphy of the two Wangs. It is said that he compiled two sets of their calligraphic works and carried them with him wherever he travelled.<sup>64</sup> After the collapse of the Eastern Jin dynasty, circulation of the two Wangs' works continued among the aristocrats of the Southern dynasties, Sui dynasty, and Tang. The number of scrolls by the two Wangs was often mentioned as a primary indication of the scope, quality and quantity of any given imperial calligraphic collection. The accumulation of a large number of two Wang's works contributed to create an image of imperial legitimacy.

One potent example revealing the relationship between the possession of Wang's works in an imperial collection and court politics is seen in *Lunshu biao* 論書表 [*Memorial Discussing Calligraphy*]. This work is dated to the sixth year of the *Taishi* era (471). It was composed by the Vice Director of the Secretariat 中書侍郎 Yu He 虞龢, and addressed to Emperor Ming of the Liu Song (439-472).<sup>65</sup> In this work, alongside a number of anecdotes about Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, Yu He briefly recounted the history of collecting calligraphy up to and during his lifetime. He began the narration with several warlord-collectors at the end of Eastern Jin dynasty, including Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369-404), Liu Yi 劉毅 (?-412), and Lu Xun 盧循 (?-411). He then turned to details of the imperial collection of calligraphy of his time, under the Liu Song dynasty, and introduced the background to Emperor Ming's expansion of the imperial calligraphy collection:

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<sup>64</sup> *FSYL*, 2:30.

<sup>65</sup> Amy McNair notes that the existing text of this work included in Zhang Yangyuan's Tang dynasty work *Fa shu yao lu* 法書要錄 [*Essential Records on Calligraphy*] is a truncated version. See Amy McNair, "Fa shu yao lu, a Ninth-Century Compendium of Texts on Calligraphy." *T'ang Studies*, 5 (1987), 69-86, 74.

Initially, when the dragon had just taken off, the vassals defied the sovereign's authority. Occupied with state affairs, (your majesty) had no time to study and practice (calligraphy). Only at the beginning of the third year of rule, (could your majesty) start to appreciate the masterpieces of calligraphy. After having the old court collection of calligraphy examined and documented, (your majesty) issued imperial edicts ordering a search for those works that had been lost during the *Jinghe* Era.<sup>66</sup>

'The dragon had just taken off' is a figure of speech referring to the period soon after Emperor Ming of Liu Song had ascended the throne. At the beginning of his rule, political instability did not allow the emperor to spare the time and resources required to build up the imperial calligraphic collection. After stabilising the political situation and defeating his opponents, however, Ming established a splendid calligraphy collection. To show how splendid this collection was, he especially mentioned that it included 'one hundred and twenty-eight scrolls of Wang Xizhi's and Wang Xianzhi's calligraphy works, one hundred and eighty scrolls of Yang Xin's calligraphy works, and five hundred and twenty scrolls of other famous calligraphers' works.'<sup>67</sup> Yu He hence acclaimed the collection for its grandeur:

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<sup>66</sup> 及飛龍之始, 戚藩告釁, 方事經略, 未遑研習. 及三年之初, 始玩寶跡, 既科檢舊秘, 再詔尋求景和時所散失. *FSYL*, 2:31.

<sup>67</sup> *FSYL*, 2:33.



(The collection) is magnificent enough to be known to the world. Its value overwhelms the five capitals. It is the glorious fortune of the land of abundance and the splendid treasure of the flourishing age.<sup>68</sup>

To make Yu He's logic clearer, if pacifying political turbulence was the emperor's greatest priority and responsibility, the accumulation and expansion of an imperial collection, in which magnificence was demonstrated by the quantity of the great masters' calligraphic works – Wang Xizhi prominent among these – was his next mission. According to Yu He's evaluation, this achievement was worthy of proclamation and something to be admired by 'all under heaven'.

To sum up, the political meaning of the ownership of Wang Xizhi's works in the tradition of imperial collecting is seen in two points. First, the ownership of a splendid calligraphic collection which included Wang's works could in itself demonstrate and measure the scope of a ruler's achievement. Second, the transmission of Wang Xizhi's works through the hands of their various owners paralleled the fortunes of regimes and the fates of their rulers, indicating the course of history. Ledderose has theorized and rationalized this phenomenon of imperial collecting by asserting that the treasures in imperial collections served as a manifesto of the bestowal of the 'Mandate of Heaven' on a ruler and as a recognition of their virtue. 'If the ruler loses his treasures, this would be an indication that he has lost his virtue. On the other hand, once he has lost his legitimate mandate, he will also soon lose his treasures.'<sup>69</sup> In this sense, since the Jin dynasty, as the most precious calligraphic treasures in

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<sup>68</sup> 足以聲華四字, 價傾五都, 天府之名珍, 盛代之偉寶. *FSYL*, 2:33.

<sup>69</sup> Lothar Ledderose, "Some Observations on the Imperial Art Collection in China," in *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 43 (1978-1979): 33-45, 35.

imperial collections, Wang Xizhi's works had come to exceed their aesthetic value and function as a symbol of power.

## (2) The Lineage of Wang Xizhi's Calligraphic Style and Emperor Taizong's Cultural Policy

With regard to the trajectory of imperial calligraphic collections, another point worth noting is that the transmission trajectory of the two Wangs' works as described in the Tang accounts largely excluded the situation and development of calligraphic collections at the courts of the dynasties in the north. All of the known emperor-collectors of the Southern and Northern dynasties period (386-589) were rulers of the Southern dynasties (420-589).<sup>70</sup> The Tang critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 commented that: 'The emperors of the dynasties of Song, Qi, Liang and Chen were refined and had exquisite hobbies.'<sup>71</sup> Rulers of the southern dynasties, Emperor Wen of Liu Song 宋文帝 (407-453), Emperor Xiaowu of Song 宋孝武帝 (430-464), Emperor Ming of Song 宋明帝 (439-472), Emperor Gao of Qi 齊高帝 (427-482), Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (464-549), Emperor Yuan of Liang 梁元帝 (508-555), and Emperor Wen of Chen 陳文帝 (520-566) have been mentioned in these Tang works mentioned in these Tang works as devoted emperor-

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<sup>70</sup> After the collapse of the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), Chinese history divided along a north-south line. The north was mainly occupied by pastoral nomads, while in the south a series of fragile regimes were established by groups of aristocrats who had fled from the north. The Northern and Southern Dynasties period has been traditionally regarded as a particularly chaotic but culturally fertile era. For more detail on the period, see Mark Edward Lewis, *China between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> 宋、齊、梁、陳之君，雅有好尚。LDMHJ, 115.

collectors who were interested in collecting calligraphy or painting.<sup>72</sup> Noting the close connections between the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi and the aristocratic culture of the southern dynasties, some scholars have attributed Emperor Taizong's policy of promoting the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi to his political needs. Ledderose suggests that the reason for emperor Taizong's patronage of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was that Wang was a representative southern calligrapher: 'The Sui dynasty chose the refined southern tradition, and the Tang emperors followed their example.'<sup>73</sup> Likewise, in Harrist's words: 'His policy of vigorously promoting the art of Wang Xizhi, closely associated with the aristocratic culture of south China, also allowed the emperor, whose power base was in the north, to use calligraphy as a symbol of national unification.'<sup>74</sup> However, if we take the corresponding political context and the origins of Wang Xizhi's style into consideration, this explanation might not be so satisfactory. I argue that it is more appropriate to interpret Emperor Taizong's patronage of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy as an effort to connect the Tang regime with an ancient Central Plain culture that was believed or interpreted by the Tang people themselves to be preserved and continued via the Southern Dynasties.

In around 300, the Western Jin dynasty (265-317) was weakened by the uprising of a variety of nomadic tribes and endless internal conflicts within the empire.<sup>75</sup> The Jin court gradually

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<sup>72</sup> *FSYL*, 3.93-94; 4.120-123. *LDMHJ*, 115-124.

<sup>73</sup> Ledderose Lothar. "Some Observations on the Imperial Art Collection in China." *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 43 (1978): 33-46. 36.

<sup>74</sup> Robert E. Harrist, "A Letter from Wang His-chih and the Cultural of Chinese Calligraphy," in *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection* (Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 240-259, 249.

<sup>75</sup> Crespigny argues that most written sources for the study of early East Asia are in Chinese, which leads to that the traditional attitude towards non-Chinese neighbors of the empire was arrogant and untrustworthy. According to him, the ruin of Western Jin was not merely 'a matter

lost control of northern China. Along with many Chinese aristocratic clans, the remnants of the Jin court fled south from the Central Plains, travelling cross the Yangzi River. The Prince of Langya 琅琊王, Sima Rui 司馬睿 established the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420) in Jiankang (Nanjing, Jiangsu Province).<sup>76</sup> The establishment of the Eastern Jin (317-420) by the southward-fleeing Jin court initiated centuries of division between north and south. From the third to the sixth century the former Han realm was divided into a northern territory mainly ruled by groups of nomads and a southern region ruled by aristocrats who had fled from the north in the late years of the Western Jin dynasty (266-316).

Although Wang Xizhi (303-361) has traditionally been identified as the prime representative of the southern calligraphers, as a character who lived at the turn of Western Jin (266-316) and Eastern Jin (317-420) eras, he differed from later southern calligraphers in that he was more of an heir to the ancient Central Plains culture, and the pioneer of the Eastern Jin style (or the Southern style). The lineage of Xizhi's calligraphic style is not only seen in comments made by his contemporaries but also can be read from his own accounts of calligraphic learning experience. Yu He records that:

(Wang Xizhi) once replied a letter to Yu Liang, that was written in the Zhangcao [A type of cursive script]. Liang showed this work to Yi. Yi admired this work, and hence wrote a letter to Xizhi saying: I once had ten sheets of paper of Boying's calligraphy in

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of powerful barbarian forces pressing against the empire; it came essentially from the irresponsible feuding that had bedeviled the imperial family since the death of Sima Yan more than twenty years before.' Rafe de Crespigny, "The Three Kingdoms and Western Jin." *East Asian History*, December 1991, 143-165: 157.

<sup>76</sup> The standard history of the Jin dynasty is *Jin shu* 晉書 [Book of Jin] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974).

Zhangcao script. I lost these works when (I) was crossing the (Yangzi) river. (After that,) I have always lamented the permanent loss of those masterpieces. I unexpectedly saw the letter that you wrote to my brother. (The calligraphy) shines with a divine aura and suddenly recalls my viewings of old.<sup>77</sup>

Both Wang Xizhi and the Yu brothers were members of the ‘super-elite’ clans that fled from the north during the transitional period from Western Jin to Eastern Jin. Boying was the courtesy name of the great Han dynasty calligrapher Zhang Zhi’s 張芝 (?-192), the only calligrapher that Xizhi ranked ahead of himself. According to the Tang calligraphic critic Sun Guoting, Wang Xizhi commented: ‘I have recently surveyed the famous calligraphers. Zhong You and Zhang Zhi are surely unexcelled; the rest are not worth looking at.’<sup>78</sup> He further said: ‘If you compare my calligraphy with Zhong You’s and Zhang Zhi’s, Zhong You’s is even with mine, or, as some people say, mine surpasses his. Zhang Zhi’s cao is still a little ahead of mine.’<sup>79</sup> In the paragraph above, Yu Yi mentioned that Xizhi’s calligraphy reminded him the calligraphic works of Zhang Zhi, the ‘previous spectacles’, that he lost during his trip fleeing south cross the Yangzi River, which indicates that Yu Yi recognized Xizhi as the successor of the Han calligrapher Zhang Zhi.

*Ti wei furen bizhen tu* 題衛夫人畢陣圖 [Postscript to Lady Wei’s Diagram of the Battle

Array of the Brush] is a legendary work that has traditionally been attributed to Wang Xizhi

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<sup>77</sup> 嘗以章草答庾亮, 亮以示翼, 翼嘆服. 因與羲之書云: 吾昔有伯英章草書十紙, 過江亡失, 常痛妙跡永絕. 忽見足下答家兄書, 煥若神明, 頓還舊觀. *FSYL*, 2.34.

<sup>78</sup> Sun Guoting, *Shu pu* 書譜 [*Treatises on Calligraphy*], Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy: Introduced, Translated, and Annotated by Chang Ch’ung-ho and Hans H. Frankel. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

and was popular in the Tang dynasty. Although Wang probably did not compose the work, its popularity in the Tang period reflects the Tang elite's understanding of lineage of Wang Xizhi's calligraphic style.<sup>80</sup> In this essay, Xizhi recorded his experience of learning calligraphy. Originally studying under a Lady Wei, after travelling to the north and seeing some original works by famous calligraphers from before the Eastern Jin era, including Li Si 李斯 (284 – 208 BCE), Cao Xi 曹喜 (Eastern Han, 25-220 CE), Zhong You 鐘繇 (151-230 CE), Liang Hu 梁鵠 (Eastern Han, 25-220 CE), Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192 CE), and Zhang Chang 張旭 (Eastern Han, 25-220 CE).<sup>81</sup> Wang Xizhi was amazed by these masterpieces and sighed that 'learning calligraphy with Lady Wei was a waste of time.'<sup>82</sup> From this account, we can tell the association between Wang Xizhi's calligraphy and that of the ancient great calligraphers who were active in north China, the ancestral land, the heartland of Chinese culture.

Emperor Taizong's perception of the continuity of classical culture during the period of division is clear in an imperial edict issued in the fourth year of the *Zhenguan* period (630). In this edict, the emperor claimed that:

The errors and omissions in the Confucian classics were caused by the uprising of the five nomadic tribes who threw everything under heaven into disorder. Many of the scholars fled toward the south. The Confucian tradition of the Central Kingdom

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<sup>80</sup> According to Richard Barnhart, this postscript is a late forgery that was faked by a Tang writer who thought in terms of a unified China. Richard Barnhart, "Wei Fu-jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy." *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of American*, Vol. 18 (1964), 13-25. 20.

<sup>81</sup> *FSYL*, 1.11.

<sup>82</sup> 始知學衛夫人書，徒費年月耳。 *FSYL*, 1.11.

gradually declined to the very lowest level. From now on, all people should use the old versions of the Six Dynasties as the normative models.<sup>83</sup>

The Six Dynasties here is a collective term that refers to six dynasties based in the south, which include the Eastern Wu (222-280), Eastern Jin (317-420), Liu Song (420-479), Southern Qi (479-502), Liang (502-557) and Chen (557-589) polities. From the paragraph above, we can see that the emperor's preference for the culture of the south was internally consistent with his belief that authentic classic traditions of the *Zhongguo* 中國 [Central Kingdom] had been preserved and continued under the southern dynasties' rule. Associated with corresponding linguistic and historical contexts, Central Kingdom should be a synonym of *Zhongyuan* 中原 [Central Plain] or the 'heartland' that carried a connotation of the centre of civilization and conveyed an idealised cultural concept.<sup>84</sup> Correspondingly, Emperor Taizong's calligraphy policy, in principle, advocated the tradition of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy, but on a deeper level, aimed to connect his regime to the ancient tradition of the

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<sup>83</sup> 以經籍訛舛, 蓋由五胡之亂天下, 學士率多南遷, 中國經術浸微之致也。今後並以六朝舊本為正。Jiang Shaoyu 江少虞 (Song dynasty 960-1279), *Songchao shishi lei yuan* 宋朝事實類苑 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1980), 30.389.

<sup>84</sup> Central Plain geographically refers to the region of the lower reaches of the Yellow River (covering parts of modern-day Hebei, Shandong, Shanxi, Shannxi, and Henan provinces), that traditionally has always been the cultural, political and economic centre of China. Culturally speaking, it represents an idealized Han Chinese civilization that is distinguished from the one of the 'barbarians'. According to Nicolas Tackett, in around the 500 BCE a new discourse that contrasts the Zhou ecumene with the 'barbarians' of the four directions had emerged in Chinese political culture. The distinction in essence was 'between the "civilized" centre and the "uncivilized" lands on the periphery'. Tackett suggests that the idea of 'grand unity', the notion of the continuance of something that transcended dynasties, and the sense of cultural distinctiveness were the three component elements of a pre-Song period Chinese form of nationalism. These ideas contributed to pre-Song educated elites' imagination of the existence of some sort of transdynastic entity ideally governed by a single emperor and imperial court. The entity prior to the Song is proper to be understood as 'civilisation'. Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (Berkeley: University of California, 2017), 147-156.

Central Plains while maintaining a basis in the styles of the Southern dynasties. The Tang court's enthusiastic quest for Wang Xizhi, who was the most sought-after fourth-century calligrapher, which lasted throughout the dynasty, should be interpreted as the regime's effort to connect their identity, via the culture preserved by the Southern dynasties, to the orthodox mainstream culture of the Central Plains prior to the Eastern Jin. This practice in turn contributed to sustaining, or even creating, a belief in this continuity.

Against this background of the monumental nature of Wang Xizhi's calligraphic works within the tradition of imperial collecting and Taizong's cultural and political considerations behind his patronage of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy (a cultural policy that lasted throughout the dynasty and exerted a lasting impact on the history of calligraphy), we have a clearer perspective on the cultural and political significance of the tradition of imperial calligraphic collection. In the following sections of this chapter, focusing on the vicissitudes, management and uses of imperial calligraphic collections in the Tang dynasty, we will see how the collections were influenced by and functioned through relationships between the rulers and the scholar-officials who were at once audience, advisors and recorders of the Tang emperors' practice of calligraphic collecting.

## **1.2 The Management and Vicissitudes of the Tang Imperial Calligraphic Collection**

### **(1) The Materiality of Calligraphic Works in the Tang Imperial Collection**

Before entering the imperial collection, calligraphic works had various practical functions and formats in the context in which they were produced. For instance, the Tang dynasty *Youjun shu ji* 右軍書記 [A Record of Calligraphic Works by Wang Xizhi] includes a list of



465 pieces of calligraphy attributed to Wang Xizhi and held in the imperial collection during the *Zhenguan* era (627-650).<sup>85</sup> These works include Daoist scripture and prose texts, but the majority were personal letters sent to Xizhi's friends and family members. After being incorporated into imperial collections, the original purposes behind the creation of all these works had been replaced by their new identity as treasures in imperial collections.

Physically, this transition was achieved through a series of procedures including remounting and the affixing of seals, addition of colophons and writing of signatures by court connoisseurs. Here I examine the material elements that contribute to the property of calligraphic works as three-dimensional objects, instead of focusing on their two-dimensional calligraphy. This examination of the calligraphic works in imperial collections from the perspective of materiality reveals not only the details of the Tang court's preservation and management of the collections, but also provides clues revealing the value and political function assigned to these works by the imperial collectors.

As the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) scholar Yu Fengqing 鬱逢慶 has pointed out, the Tang courts did not collect carved stone.<sup>86</sup> Almost all of the calligraphic works in the Tang imperial collections were originally written on thin fine silk or paper, materials that are very fragile, and therefore difficult to preserve and appreciate. The most common format for books, paintings and calligraphic works in the Tang dynasty was the scroll. For the purpose of preservation and appreciation, these scrolls needed proper mounting.<sup>87</sup> As time goes by,

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<sup>85</sup> *Youjun shu ji* 右軍書記 [A Record of Calligraphic Works by Wang Xizhi], *FSYL*, 10. 269-334.

<sup>86</sup> 唐秘府不收石刻. Yu Fengqing 鬱逢慶, *Shuahua tiba ji* 書畫題跋記 [A Collection of Accompanying Inscriptions for Paintings and Calligraphy Pieces], the version of Wenyuange Si ku quan shu 文淵閣四庫全書本, 5: 21.

<sup>87</sup> Although the techniques of mounting change over time, the general process of mounting a

moreover, due to changes in taste and the need to replace mounting materials that have lost their strength, scrolls need to be remounted regularly. There are several basic ornamental components that appear in the mounting and remounting process of paintings and calligraphic works, such as net gauze and rollers. Both the substances that were chosen to make these ornamental components and the colour and design of the mounting had a correspondence to material elements used to distinguish hierarchy within the civil bureaucracy. Grahame suggests ‘that the concept of precious as distinct from merely useful substances could only have arisen in societies enriched by aesthetic sensibilities and sufficiently aware of persons to wish to symbolise relations between them as individuals and as enactors of social roles.’<sup>88</sup> In any society, the value of substances is not self-evident but is closely bound up with people’s awareness of the need to represent their social status. The social hierarchy of a society therefore becomes embodied in these materials. In this sense, the employment of precious substances and noble colours in the standard mounting for paintings and calligraphic works can be read as the Tang imperial collectors’ intentional efforts to glorify these works within imperial collections and through this to reinforce their links to morality and authority. In this way, first, the Tang rulers demonstrated their respect and appreciation for the cultural legacies of their realm, presenting themselves as civilised guardians of their empire’s cultural legacy. Second, they could confirm the value and

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scroll has been summarized by Lin Huaishen as follows:

The mounters first line the painting with very thin paper pasted together, then join borders of lined brocade or very thin silk around this, adding further paper linings, and finally fix a wooden stave at the top and a roller at the bottom of the mounted artwork, so that one may easily roll or unroll the work to appreciate the painting.

Lin Huaishen, “Preservation and Conservation of Traditional Antique Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Seen Through Observation and Examination of Works of Art”, *The Paper Conservator*, 30:1, 93-97. 94-95.

<sup>88</sup> Grahame Clark, *Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6.

significance of the works in imperial collections in a tangible manner, claiming that they, the sovereigns, possessed authoritative knowledge of that culture.

The Tang critic Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (815-907) provides an account of the materials that were used to mount paintings and manuscripts in the Inner Storehouse in the Tang dynasty:

Accordingly, in the Chen Kuan (627-649) and Kai Yuan (713-742) eras all pictures and manuscripts in the Inner Storehouse were mounted on rollers of white sandalwood with roller-tips of dark sandalwood, faced with purple gauze, and provided with bands of woven material. This was the (standard) mounting for all the official paintings.<sup>89</sup>

Another account of the decoration of calligraphic works in the imperial collection was composed by Wu Pingyi 武平一 (around 678) who was a member of Wu Zetian's royal clan and was raised at the court:

I saw palace attendants take out more than sixty boxes of (calligraphic works) and give them a thorough airing in the Yisui Palace. Most of them were tied up with a head flap

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<sup>89</sup> In this paragraph, William Renolds Beal Acker translated 紫羅襪 (*zilu biao*) as 'faced with purple gauze'. Likewise, Edward H. Schafer translated this as 'purple net gauze'. However, both of them misunderstood the meaning of the character 襪 (*biao*) as 'gauze'. According to Wang Yikun's research, here the character *biao* 襪 should refer to Head Flap 包首 (*baoshou*), that is, a stripe of silk or brocade mounted over the top of the back of a scroll. The head flap functions as a cover that wraps over and protects the scroll when it is rolled up. See *LDMHJ*, 249-251. Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of Tang Exotics*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 1963), 135. Wang Yikun 王以坤, *Shuhua zhuanghuang yange kao* 書畫裝潢沿革考 [*History of Mounting Chinese Painting and Calligraphy*], (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1991), 13.

of purple brocade, on carved ivory rollers. It is said that these works were mounted during the period of Emperor Taizong.<sup>90</sup>

From these accounts by Zhang Yanyuan and Wu Pingyi we can tell that rollers made of sandalwood and ivory, and a flap head of purple brocade, were the materials that made up standard mountings for the paintings and calligraphic works in the Tang imperial collections, a set of materials which is distinct from the mountings of previous dynasties. For example, a flap head of green brocade and a tortoise-shell roller were a standard format for works mounted under the Liang dynasty (502-557).<sup>91</sup> Nishio suggests that ‘each time an object is remounted, it is traditional to allow individual taste and the availability of new materials to play a large part in deciding how to remount the work’.<sup>92</sup> The Tang imperial collections of calligraphy and paintings are distinct in that the colour and materials of the mounting did not merely reflect imperial collectors’ aesthetic taste, but also functioned to highlight associations with the authority these works both possessed and symbolized. The purple colour of the flap head brocade was not a random choice. Purple was the government-assigned colour for senior officials’ Casual Dress 常服 (*Chang fu*). For example, in the fourth year of the *Zhenguan* era (630), Emperor Taizong, who initialized the large-scale projects to collect and sort calligraphic works, issued an edict that: ‘Officials ranking three and above wear purple (dress); officials ranking four and five wear red; officials ranking six and seven wear green; officials

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<sup>90</sup> 時見宮人六十餘函於億歲殿曝之，多裝以鏤牙軸紫羅襪，雲是太宗是所裝。 *FSYL*, 4:94.

<sup>91</sup> 青羅襪玳瑁軸。 *FSYL*, 4:94

<sup>92</sup> Yoshiyuki Nishio, “Maintenance of Asian Paintings II: Minor Treatment of Scroll Paintings”, *The Book and Paper Group Annual*, 20 (2001), 15-26, 15.

ranking eight and nine wear (blue).<sup>93</sup> For Tang people, colours were not innocent, but related to social hierarchy. Purple, the flap head colour for calligraphic works in the imperial collections, was a symbol of authority, and one that was exclusive to senior officials at ranks three and above.

Similarly, the sandalwood and ivory used for the rollers of calligraphic works and paintings at the courts might arouse associations to specific religious and ceremonial meanings among people of the Tang era. Both substances were luxurious resources that required long-distance transport to the Tang capitals. According to the *Old History of Tang*, in the twenty-first year of the *Zhenguan* period (647), an Indonesian country identified as Duopodeng 墮婆登 sent sandalwood and ivory to the court.<sup>94</sup> Sandalwood is the heartwood of a small parasite tree that grows in some areas of South and Southeast Asia. The chief sources of sandalwood in the Tang era are not known with any certainty, and imports are largely concealed under collective expressions, such as gifts or tribute in the form of ‘rare aromatics’.<sup>95</sup> Because of its divinely sweet odour, sandalwood was suited to making Buddhist statues and even gained a symbolic meaning of divinity in Buddhist belief. Along with the religious imagery and emotions associated with it, sandalwood had been imported to China for several centuries before the Tang dynasty, since the advent of Buddhism in East Asia.<sup>96</sup> Alongside the attractiveness of its fragrance

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<sup>93</sup> *THY*, 31:569.

<sup>94</sup> *JTS*, 197:5273.

<sup>95</sup> Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of Tang Exotics*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 136.

<sup>96</sup> Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of Tang Exotics*, 137.

and its religious overtones, because sandalwood's fragrance can repel insects, it was also considered a desirable material for making scroll rollers on utilitarian grounds.<sup>97</sup>

Although ivory has no such practical function for the preservation of paintings and calligraphic works, in the Tang period it was an extremely expensive substance with ceremonial significance, and a symbol of status. In *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 [*Extensive Records of the Marvellous*], the Tang dynasty scholar Dai Fu 戴孚 recorded an event that underlines ivory's market value. The woodcutter Mo Yao 莫徭 accidentally found a tusk and sold it to a Hu merchant at the price of four hundred thousand cash. The Hu merchant then brought it to market and raised its price to one million cash.<sup>98</sup> At the Tang court, ivory objects played important roles in a variety of ceremonies and their possession was exclusively restricted to the emperors and their senior officials. On the second day of the second lunar month, the Festival of the Dragon Raising Its Head 龍抬頭 (*Long taitou*), the Central Service Office in the Directorate for Imperial Manufactories 中尚署 (*Zhongshangshu*) was required to present the Tang emperor with rules made of incised ivory and painted sandalwood.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the *Hu* 笏 was a ceremonial tablet that was carried by officials to audiences at court. These ceremonial tablets were made of various materials according to the ranks of the holders. Only the tablets of officials whose ranks

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<sup>97</sup> Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (815-907), *LDMHJ*, 250.

<sup>98</sup> The story is transmitted in Li Fang 李昉 (Song dynasty) compiled, Zhang Guofeng 張國風 collated, *Taiping guangji huijiao* 太平廣記會校 [*Extensive Records from the Taiping Reign Period, with Annotations*], (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2011), 441:7899.

<sup>99</sup> *TLD*, 22. 573. At present a Tang dynasty rule of ivory that is carved with flowers, buildings, and auspicious animals is kept in the Shanghai Museum.

were five and above were made of ivory, while those of the officials whose ranks were between nine and six were made of bamboo or other lesser woods.<sup>100</sup>

For people of the Tang era, who lived in a society with political and social hierarchies carefully defined through the use of specific materials, we can imagine how reverence for works held in the imperial collections could be aroused by merely examining the format of their mounting. In other words, the superiority of these objects in imperial collections lay not only in their inherent aesthetic qualities but was confirmed and reinforced by the materials and colours used for their mountings. The format of the mountings therefore verified their identities as parts of the imperial collections. There is no better evidence to prove that Tang people were conscious of the relationship between mounting materials and the identity of the objects than the following case. In the *Shenlong* era (705-707), Princess Anle, who was doted on heavily by her father Emperor Zhongzong, took out more than twenty boxes of calligraphic works from the Inner Storehouse.<sup>101</sup> A group of renowned calligraphers and connoisseurs were called to identify these works. The best ones were singled out and kept by the princess herself. Their ivory rollers were replaced by lacquer rollers, while head flaps of yellow linen paper were substituted for the head flaps of purple brocade.<sup>102</sup> In this way, the fact that these works were part of the imperial collections was covered up.

## **(2) The Vicissitudes of the Imperial Calligraphic Collections and Court Connoisseurs**

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<sup>100</sup> *TLD*, 4. 118.

<sup>101</sup> *FSYL*, 3. 94.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

‘The Zhenguan and the Kaiyuan eras were the most flourishing periods that have ever been. (In both of these periods) the Emperors were divinely inspired and had many talents and officials were thoroughly and widely learned and loved the arts. They bought and sought for treasures of the utmost value, which collected about them like clouds, and therefore the (collections of) pictures and manuscripts in the Inner Storehouse may be considered to be very complete.’<sup>103</sup>

As the Tang critic Zhang Yanyuan described them, the *Zhenguan* (627-649) and *Kaiyuan* (713-741) eras were the heydays of the Tang dynasty in terms of political stability and economic prosperity as well as for the unprecedented expansion of imperial collections of calligraphy and paintings. This section teases out the vicissitudes of Tang imperial calligraphic collections in chronological order. It first reveals that, throughout the Tang dynasty, not all of the emperors were enthusiastic collectors of calligraphy, possessing the personal interest, resources and justification required to devote themselves to this particular cultural cause. Especially during political catastrophes, regardless of the rulers’ personal willingness and capability, imperial collections often suffered severe damage or great loss. The maintenance and expansion of imperial collections has become a symbol of times of peace and prosperity, and thereby powerful evidence of a ruler’s legitimacy.

The second point to note is that no matter in what ways and to what extent imperial collecting could contribute to a ruler’s legitimacy, the educated class, and especially the scholar-officials, were the most important group, next only to the rulers themselves, in determining the significance and meaning of imperial collections. As we saw in the first

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<sup>103</sup> *LDMHJ*, 203-204.



paragraph, Zhang Yanyuan asserted that Emperor Taizong and Emperor Xuanzong ‘were divinely inspired and had many talents and officials were thoroughly and widely learned and loved the arts.’ Even for the most powerful and enthusiastic collector-emperors, we seldom see evidence that they were personally involved with the calligraphic collections assembled at their courts. From searching the ‘traces of the brush of former worthies’ to assessing the authenticity of these works, throughout the dynasty’s long reign, it was usually a group of scholar-officials or ‘court connoisseurs’ who utilised their intellectual resources to determine the quality and quantity of the imperial calligraphic collections in a more direct way than did the emperors. For this reason, the development and preservation of imperial collections came, to a large degree, from the social interactions between the rulers and their scholar-officials. The latter played the roles of advisor, audience, and recorder to the ruler’s practice of cultural collecting. The political and cultural values imposed on imperial collections were very much entangled with this group’s participation and judgement. What makes this perspective on the interaction between ruler and scholar-officials more meaningful is that trusting and appointing appropriate intellectuals to manage the imperial collections could also serve to demonstrate a ruler’s imperial virtue through choosing good ministers. In this regard, when compared to the pre-Tang and Tang-era scholar-officials’ accounts of imperial collections discussed in this section, Ledderose’s legitimacy or ‘Mandate of Heaven’ theory of imperial collecting seems more like a modern generalisation than a reflection of the ideology embedded in the minds of the cultural elite within this historical context. Relating with the discussion of the monumentality of Wang Xizhi’s works in the imperial calligraphic collection in the first section, it is safe to say that, often, the possession of

large imperial collections did not automatically serve to verify the legitimacy of a given ruler's authority, but rather functioned in more complex and concrete ways.

Emperor Taizong was the second emperor of the Tang, and before ascending the throne he accompanied his father on a series of military campaigns against the Sui. He also defeated several major opponents to the establishment and consolidation of Tang rule. Although his career before taking up rulership was essentially a military one, he deserves credit for initiating the Tang imperial calligraphic collections and normalizing the centrality of the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi in imperial collecting. As seen in the first section of this chapter, this cultural policy can be interpreted as an effort on the part of the emperor to connect his reign and the Tang dynasty with an ancient cultural tradition claimed to have originated in the Central Plain and to have been preserved through the Southern dynasties. According to the records of *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要 [*Essential Documents of the Tang Dynasty*], in the sixth year of the *Zhenguan* Period (632), Emperor Taizong commanded experts to sort the calligraphic works in the inner storehouse. Those reportedly included 1510 volumes of the calligraphy of previous great masters, such as Zhong You and Wang Xizhi.<sup>104</sup> It is highly possible that many of those works had formerly been part of the Sui imperial collections, confiscated by the Tang rulers during the wars. To expand the imperial calligraphic collections, in the thirteenth year of the *Zhenguan* period (639), Emperor Taizong offered a large amount of gold and silk as a reward for calligraphic works by Wang Xizhi, in order to tempt private collectors.<sup>105</sup> The emperor's generosity aroused widespread enthusiasm for the

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<sup>104</sup> *THY*, 35.648.

<sup>105</sup> *FSYL*, 4.122.

presentation of Xizhi's works to the court. The accumulation of valuable works was not the end of the imperial collecting process, however. This was usually followed by a series of research and curatorial activities, such as authenticating, remounting, cataloguing and reproducing. When some works submitted under the emperor's summons proved to be forgeries, several scholar-officials were summoned to use their knowledge of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy and certify the authenticity of these new acquisitions, thereby gaining the Emperor's appreciation.<sup>106</sup> The renowned calligrapher-officials Yu Shinan 虞世南, Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 and Wang Zhijing 王知敬, who all served at the court, were charged by Emperor Taizong to appraise and research the palace calligraphic collections.

Chu Suiliang (596-658) was by any reckoning the most influential curator at the court of Emperor Taizong, entrusted with the tasks of examining, authenticating, and cataloguing calligraphic works in imperial collections. It is said that initially he gained Emperor Taizong's appreciation due to his mastery of the calligraphic style of Wang Xizhi. In the tenth year of the *Zhenguan* period (636), after the death of Yu Shinan, Emperor Taizong complained to the minister Wei Zheng that: 'After Yu Shinan's death, there is no one with whom I can discuss calligraphy.'<sup>107</sup> Wei Zheng replied: 'The brushstrokes of Chu Suiliang are firm and vigorous, demonstrating a good mastery of the style of Wang Yishao [Wang Xizhi]'<sup>108</sup> Introduced by Wei Zheng, Chu Suiliang was immediately summoned to the court and won the confidence of the emperor. He soon became the acknowledged expert on Wang Xizhi. In the thirteenth year of the *Zhenguan* period (639), Chu Suiliang, holding the official

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<sup>106</sup> *JTS*, 80. 2729.

<sup>107</sup> 虞世南死後，無人可與論書。 *THY*, 35.646.

<sup>108</sup> 褚遂良下筆遒勁，甚得王逸少之體。 *THY*, 35.646.

title of Imperial Diarist 起居郎, and the Editing Clerk 校書郎 Wang Zhijing 王知敬, among others, were entrusted with the task of assessing the authenticity of those works attributed to Wang Xizhi that were submitted to the palace. The Tang calligrapher and critic Zhang Huaiguan recorded the process of sorting and storing Xizhi's works:

In the thirteenth year *Zhenguan* (639), (Emperor Taizong) commanded Imperial Diarist Chu Suiliang, Editing Clerk Wang Zhijing and others to make selections outside the Changbo gate and to the west of the Xuanwu gate, to establish the authenticity of these presented works. They compared them to Xizhi's authentic works stored in the inner storehouse. The Supervisor of Rites Wang Xingzhen was in charge of the packing of the calligraphic works.<sup>109</sup>

In the same year, Chu Suiliang was appointed to supervise the mounting of the calligraphic works in the imperial collections and also to sign and catalogue those works. The Tang dynasty *Fa shu lu* 法書錄 [*A Record of Calligraphic Works*] by Lu Yuanqing mentions a scroll of calligraphy by the Jin Dynasty calligrapher Wang Yi 王廙 that he had seen in the imperial collections. This scroll reportedly bore the following sentence as a signature: 'Imperial Diarist Chu Suiliang, on the nineteenth day of the twelfth month of the thirteenth year of the *Zhenguan* period.'<sup>110</sup> This affirms the presence of Chu Suiliang as the supervisor of the process of mounting and arranging those works in the imperial collections. Another of Chu Suiliang's contributions to Emperor Taizong's calligraphic collections was his

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<sup>109</sup> 貞觀十三年...敕起居郎褚遂良, 校書郎王知敬等, 於玄武門西長波門外科簡, 內出右軍書相共參校, 令典儀王行真裝之. Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, "Erwang Deng Shulu," 二王等書錄 in *FSYL*, 4.118.

<sup>110</sup> 貞觀十三年十二月十九日起居郎臣褚遂良. *FSYL*, 4.137.

compilation of the earliest extant catalogue of Wang Xizhi's calligraphic works, a record that might have been a part of the catalogue of the whole imperial calligraphic collection. This catalogue is included in the Tang dynasty *Fa shu yao lu* 法書要錄 [*Essential Records on Calligraphy*]. It lists 266 works attributed to Wang Xizhi and held in the imperial collections at that time, indicating the titles (or first lines) of these works and their length in lines. Among these 266 works, fourteen, in regular script, were mounted as five scrolls, while the others, in semi-cursive script, were mounted as fifty-eight scrolls. The court curator's appraisals of the value of each piece may have been embodied in the order of the works' citation in the catalogue. This is suggested by the fact that Emperor Taizong's favourite – *Lanting xu* 蘭亭序 [Preface to the Poems Collected from the Orchid Pavilion] – is cited as the first work in running script, while the first work in regular script is another legendary work, *Yue Yi Lun* 樂毅論 [Discourse on Yue Yi].<sup>111</sup>

From the reign of Wu Zetian (624-705) to that of Emperor Ruizong (662-716), many of the imperial calligraphic collections that had been built up under the patronage of Emperor Taizong were removed from the palace and lost. In Tang accounts, one of the most frequently cited reasons for their dispersal is that several imperial family members smuggled or stole items from the imperial collections. The Tang connoisseur Wu Pingyi reports that: 'During the *Shenlong* period (705-707) of Emperor Zhongzong, (the emperor) doted on some prominent imperial family members. The prohibition of entry to palace chambers was not strictly enforced. Many of the treasures in the imperial collections were brought into private homes. (They) first emptied the gold and jade, then

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<sup>111</sup> *FSYL*, 3. 71,72.

the calligraphy.<sup>112</sup> Princess Anle 安樂公主, Princess Taiping 太平公主, and Prince Qi 岐王 were depicted in Tang accounts as the ones who took advantage of rulers' favour and of political instability, usurping ownership of the imperial calligraphic collections to satisfy their own desires for masterpieces.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the reported misdeeds of these imperial family members, several officials entrusted to research and manage the imperial calligraphic collections as court curators or collecting advisors were also blamed for the loss of imperial collections over this period. At first glance, these officials failed to retain the imperial collections, a failure which appeared to be due to their own cupidity and misjudgement, but at a deeper level, the depiction of this failure reflects Tang intellectuals' condemnation of corresponding rulers' incompetence with regard to knowing their subordinates and managing them properly, a charge which challenges the rulers' legitimacy given that choosing good ministers is an important imperial virtue. According to Zhang Yanyuan's account, during the reign of Wu Zetian, Zhang Yizhi 張易之, who was reportedly a lover of Wu Zetian, requested in a memorial that painter-artisans should be summoned to court to restore the paintings in the Inner Storehouse. Wu Zetian took Zhang Yizhi's advice and entrusted him to supervise this project:

The result was that he (Zhang Yizhi) set these artisans to work, each working in his own line, industriously making copies and mounting these exactly as the old ones had

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<sup>112</sup> 中宗神龍中，貴戚寵盛，宮禁不嚴。御府之珍，多入私室。先盡金璧，次及書法。FSYL, 3.94.

<sup>113</sup> FSYL, 3.94.

been so that they did not differ (from the originals) by a single hair. Most of the originals then found their way into Yizhi's hands.<sup>114</sup>

It is said that Zhang Yizhi and his brother Zhang Changzong were both talented in music and literature. After being introduced by Prince Taiping to Wu Zetian, they rapidly emerged as her favourites.<sup>115</sup> Although in the paragraph above, Zhang Yanyuan only noted Zhang Yizhi's usurpation of the paintings in imperial collections by replacing the authentic works with copies, it might not go too far to presume that Yizhi did the same thing to the calligraphic works in the imperial collections.

After Zhang Yizhi was killed in a plot among a group of high officials, most of his collections became the property of Xue Ji 薛稷 (649-713).<sup>116</sup> Due to his calligraphic achievement and close personal relationship with Emperor Ruizong, Xue Ji soon played decisive roles in the development of the imperial calligraphic collections. Xue Ji was the grandson of the famous Prime Minister Wei Zheng 魏征.<sup>117</sup> Benefiting from his grandfather's huge collection of books and art works, Xue Ji had access to authentic calligraphic works by Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang. He meticulously imitated the styles of Chu and Yu, distinguishing himself as an excellent calligrapher of the time.<sup>118</sup> Xue Ji has long been acclaimed as one of the 'Four Great Calligraphers of the Early Tang'. It is said that, after the death of Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang, there was hardly a single figure who could measure up to the level that Yu and Chu had achieved. Due to this calligraphic

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<sup>114</sup> *LDMHJ*, 128.

<sup>115</sup> *JTS*, 78. 2706.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *JTS*, 73. 2591-2592.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

talent, Xue Ji had gained the favour of Emperor Ruizong before the latter ascended the throne, and Ji's son Xue Boyang 薛伯陽 married Ruizong's daughter Princess Xianyuan 仙源公主. Xue Ji was subsequently entrusted with a series of important positions and tasks, and after the death of Wu Yanxiu 武延秀, the husband of Princess Anle, Ji was ordered by Ruizong to examine the princess's calligraphic collections.<sup>119</sup> While he was supposed to select the best ones to submit to the court, dozens of scrolls of the most valuable calligraphic works reportedly found their way into his private collections.<sup>120</sup> If it could be said it was a mistake that Emperor Ruizong appointed Xue Ji to manage the imperial collections, this was not because Xue Ji did not have sufficient professional knowledge but because he could not constrain his intense desire to possess objects. Moreover, like the case of Zhang Yizhi, it was the close personal ties between the rulers and their subordinates that prevented the rulers from keeping their judgement fair and making effective supervision. With their emperors' blind trust, subordinates were more likely to commit the crime of embezzlement. In this sense, the underlying criticism in Tang discourses is that the misconduct of Zhang Yizhi and Xue Ji should also be attributed to the rulers' incompetence and misconduct in their governance.

Emperor Ruizong was succeeded by his son, the Emperor Xuanzong (685-762). The latter has long been considered as the restorer of the Tang dynasty to a new peak of power after decades of chaos, and whose reign, up to the An-Shi Rebellions, represented a golden age of peace and prosperity.<sup>121</sup> Like Taizong, Emperor Xuanzong also demonstrated an ardent

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<sup>119</sup> *FSYL*, 3.94.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank edit, *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 3 Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part one* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press,



interest in calligraphy through his own calligraphic practice, patronage to a group of court calligraphers, and the efforts devoted to sorting and expanding the imperial calligraphic collections. One day, during the third year of the *Kaiyuan* period (715), when Emperor Xuanzong was having dinner with Chu Wuliang 褚無量 and Ma Huaisu 馬懷素, both of whom were scholars known for their erudition, the emperor complained that:

All of the books in the inner storehouse are the old ones (collected or organized) during the reigns of Emperor Taizong and Emperor Gaozong. I have continuously ordered palace attendants to take charge of them. The damaged and missing parts have not yet been repaired or replaced. The chapters and scrolls are in disorder. It is difficult to refer to them or read them. Try to organize the (collection) for me.<sup>122</sup>

In the paragraph above, the character *shu* 書 is a general term that refers not only to ‘books’ but also to manuscripts appreciated as calligraphic works. The participation of Chu Wuliang and Ma Huaisu in the management of Emperor Xuanzong’s calligraphic collections can also be verified in Lu Yuanqing’s Tang Dynasty text *A Record of Calligraphic Works*. This lists a scroll of calligraphy by Xiao Daochen, Emperor Gao of the Qi dynasty (427-482), in the Tang imperial calligraphic collections. The date and signatures inscribed on the scroll indicate that it was remounted on the fifth day of the eleventh month of the fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (717). Moreover, according to the order of these signatures, we may presume that the roles that Chu Wuliang and Ma

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1979), 333.

<sup>122</sup> 內庫皆是太宗, 高宗先代舊書, 常令宮人主掌, 所有殘缺, 未遑補緝, 篇卷錯亂, 難於檢閱. 卿試為朕整比之. *JTS*, 46. 1962.

Huaisu played in this project were comparable to that of Chu Suiliang as project supervisor during the *Zhenguan* period. Although imperial calligraphic collections had experienced tremendous damage and dispersion during the decades of chaos prior to the *Kaiyuan* period, they were quickly recovered and even expanded due to the patronage of Emperor Xuanzong. The Tang critic Xu Hao reports that by the fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (717), there were one hundred and fifty-eight scrolls of the authentic calligraphy of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi in Emperor Xuanzong's calligraphic collections.<sup>123</sup>

Among the scholars who were employed by Emperor Xuanzong and entrusted with the tasks of searching, examining and managing the 'traces of the brush of former worthies', some were themselves prominent private collectors. From the records of their service we can rarely see competition between the private collectors and the emperor for rare collectables, as was reportedly the case with Xue Ji during the time of Emperor Ruizong, but more often evidence that these private collectors dedicated great diligence and intelligence to the imperial collections. Wei Shu 韋述 (?-757) and Xu Hao 徐浩 (703-783) belong to this category of collector-officials. Born to a prominent family, Wei Shu held a huge collection of a variety of culturally valuable objects. The *Old History of Tang* describes Wei Shu's family collection like this:

There were twenty thousand scrolls of books in (Wei Shu's) home. (Wei Shu) personally collated and emended (these books). Even the collections of the imperial palace could not compete with (Wei Shu's family collections). His collections included portraits of ancient and contemporary ministers, paintings of famous people

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<sup>123</sup> *FSYL*, 3.99.

through the ages, hundreds of scrolls of authentic manuscripts of cursive script and clerical script extending back to the Wei and Jin dynasties, ancient steles, ancient objects, medical prescriptions, formats, catalogues of coins, catalogues of seals, and letters written by the renowned figures of the time. None of the above-mentioned are lacking (from Wei Shu's collections).<sup>124</sup>

The possession of a rich family collection equipped Wei Shu with a wealth of knowledge of calligraphy, painting and other cultural relics. In the fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (717), Ma Huaisu requested the emperor appoint twenty-six officials, including Wei Shu, as his assistants to help with managing the imperial collections. After this, Wei Shu spent forty years serving at court.<sup>125</sup> His *Xu shu lu* 敘書錄 [*A Narrative Record of Calligraphy*] narrates a handful of anecdotes about the imperial calligraphic collections during the reigns of Emperor Taizong and Emperor Xuanzong, offering an insider's insight into the imperial collections.<sup>126</sup>

The expansion of Emperor Xuanzong's calligraphic collections was interrupted by the An-Shi Rebellions (755-763), during which a large number of valuable works were scattered or destroyed.<sup>127</sup> The quashing of these rebellions was not the end of the disruption to the imperial collections, as a subsequent series of disorders led to huge losses. In the eleventh month of 763, Tibetan forces swept into Chang'an and occupied the city for around a

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<sup>124</sup> 家聚書二萬卷，皆自校定鉛槧，雖御府不逮也。兼古今朝臣圖，歷代知名人畫，魏，晉已來草隸真跡數百卷，古碑，古器，藥方，格式，錢譜，璽譜之類，當代名公尺題，無不畢備。*JTS*, 102. 3184.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *FSYL*, 4. 135-136.

<sup>127</sup> *LDMHJ*, 129.

fortnight, looting and burning much of the remainder of the imperial collections.<sup>128</sup> Later, during the Jingyuan Mutiny (783), Emperor Dezong was forced to flee Chang'an, and the imperial collections were lost and scattered once more.<sup>129</sup>

Xu Hao was one of the scholar-officials who had witnessed both the prosperity of the *Kaiyuan* period and the destruction of the An-Shi Rebellions, and he participated in the restoration after the rebellions. He was perhaps one of the most important imperial calligraphy connoisseurs in the period from the latter years of Emperor Xuanzong to the reign of Emperor Dezong. Xu was born into a prominent family with a long tradition of calligraphic practice and collecting. Both his father Xu Qiaozhi 徐嶠之 and maternal grandfather Zhang Tinggui 張庭珪 were renowned calligraphers and calligraphic collectors. According to Shi Rui's research, Xu Hao's family calligraphic collections included some extraordinarily valuable works, such as the manuscripts excavated from the tomb of King Anli of Wei 魏安釐王 (died 243 BCE), the texts of Confucian classics discovered during the Han dynasty (206 BCE- 220 CE) in the walls of Confucius's old residence, calligraphy by the Eastern Han calligrapher Shi Yiguan 師宜官, and works by Wang Xizhi, among other treasures.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank edit, *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 3 Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part one* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 569.

<sup>129</sup> *LDMHJ*, 129.

<sup>130</sup> Shi Rui 史睿, "Tangdai shufa jianshangjia de puxi: cong Wu Pingyi dao Sikong Tu" 唐代書法鑑賞家的譜系: 從武平一到司空圖 [The Pedigree of Tang Dynasty Calligraphy Connoisseurs: From Wu Pingyi to Sikong Tu], *Chinese Calligraphy Studies*, 2018.04, 5-32: 13-14.

Based on Xu Hao's own accounts, we can tell that from the middle of the *Tianbao* period (742-756) of Xuanzong's reign to the *Jianzhong* period (780-783) of Emperor Dezong's reign, his contribution to the imperial calligraphic collections mainly consisted of three activities: searching for works on the emperors' behalf, assessing the authenticity of works in the palace collection, and recommending new talents to take over his work.<sup>131</sup> Like his predecessors, the collection and appraisal of the works of Wang Xizhi was the most important subject of his career as a court connoisseur, and functioned as the key manifestation of his overall achievements. In his *Guji ji* 古跡記 [*A Record of Ancient Traces*], Xu Hao mentioned some highlights of his career. After being recruited into the Academy of Scholarly Worthies, Xu Hao examined the extant calligraphic works in the imperial collection and claimed that the *Dongfang Shuo huazan* 東方朔畫贊 [*Encomium for the Portrait of Dongfang Shuo*] then attributed to Wang Xizhi was a forgery.<sup>132</sup> In the middle of the *Tianbao* period (742-756) and after the recapture of the Tongguan Pass 潼關, which had been conquered during the An-Shi Rebellions, Xu Hao was twice appointed to search for paintings and calligraphic works throughout the realm. During his second stint in the post, Xu Hao found two hundred scrolls of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi and brought them to the court.<sup>133</sup> *Guji ji* 古跡記 [*A Record of Ancient Traces*] was composed by Xu Hao in the later years of his life as a memorial addressed to Emperor Dezong.<sup>134</sup> At the end of this work, Xu Hao referred to his personal experience, emphasizing the importance of talent in connoisseurship to determine the quality of imperial calligraphic collections. That naturally led him to the topic of recommending the brothers Dou Meng 竇蒙 and Dou Ji 竇

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<sup>131</sup> *FSYL*, 3. 97-101.

<sup>132</sup> *FSYL*, 3. 99.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *FSYL*, 3. 96-101.

泉, as well as his own son Xu Shou 徐壽, for imperial service.<sup>135</sup> From the case of Xu Hao, we can tell that, at least in the early and middle Tang dynasty, even the most prestigious private collectors were proud of their services to the imperial collections and sought similar opportunities for their descendants.

After the An-Shi Rebellions, the weakened condition of the imperial centre affected all aspects of its relationships with society as a whole.<sup>136</sup> A major turning point in Tang history, the rebellions led not only to a significant reduction in the strength and authority of the central government, but a sustained decline in the fortunes of the imperial collections. Despite the efforts of some emperors in the middle and later years of the Tang dynasty, such as Emperor Xianzong and Emperor Wenzong, to look for those works that had been lost during the years of chaos, the imperial calligraphic collections never returned to the scale they had attained prior to the An-Shi upheaval. From that time on, moreover, scholars placed less reliance on court patronage and commission to determine their intellectual activities and participation in cultural projects.<sup>137</sup> Hence, to some extent, the scattering of the imperial collections and the loss of the court's status as the centre of intellectual activities, including collecting, stimulated the development of private collections. All these factors might have led to the situation seen during the Song era, when, as Ebrey's suggests, collecting became an arena in which the cultural elite and the emperor subtly competed for cultural leadership.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *FSYL*, 3. 101.

<sup>136</sup> Anthony DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance: The Defense of Literary Culture in Mid-Tang China* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 9.

<sup>137</sup> David McMullen, *State and Scholars in Tang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 12.

<sup>138</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press 2008), 17.

### 1.3 Access to Imperial Calligraphic Works as a Privilege

The key value of calligraphic works was as a form of cultural resource. Calligraphic works by the great masters were not merely objects of appreciation but also models to be imitated by calligraphic practitioners.<sup>139</sup> Although for the emperors the ownership of a large number of masterpieces of calligraphy was in itself a manifesto and demonstration of their devotion to culture and to good government and righteous rule, it would be a waste to hide these masterpieces in an inner storehouse distant from any access. A series of procedures were designed at the Tang court to make full use of the imperial calligraphic collections and to project their aura to a wide audience while maintaining their rarity and exclusiveness. Instead of aiming at reaching as many people as possible, these collections were only available to a certain audience at the emperor's goodwill. The restrictions imposed on the availability of imperial calligraphic collections made access to them a supreme privilege. Many of these uses of the imperial calligraphic collections continued and developed down through the Tang and afterwards, becoming a persistent component of court culture in imperial China.

There are two points to address in regard to the uses and accessibility of imperial calligraphic collections. First, members of the imperial household, especially emperors and princes, utilised works by great calligraphers as models to practice and improve their own calligraphic performance. This practice embraced both a cultural devotion to calligraphy and

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<sup>139</sup> Bai Qianshen, "Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public," in *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collections*, eds. Robert E. Harrist, Jr and Wen C. Fong (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 381-399, 38

the self-presentation of the imperial family as men of letters and suitable rulers. Second, the possession of many rare masterpieces of calligraphy provided the Tang rulers with a vehicle for rewarding favoured and faithful officials by granting them copies of those works or creating occasions on which they were allowed to appreciate them in person. This sharing of exclusive cultural resources was supposed to generate gratitude among the scholar-officials who perceived calligraphy as an important aspect of self-cultivation, and to reinforce the ties between them and their rulers as members of the same community of interests.

Before the invention and popularization of the techniques of mechanical reproduction, even in their earliest forms such as woodcut and woodblock printing, calligraphic works were mainly transmitted within, and exclusive to, privileged families.<sup>140</sup> Given that a calligraphic practitioner would usually begin their study by copying other calligraphers' works, learning calligraphy could not be attempted without models. Calligraphic skill and knowledge became a key element of the cultural and educational capital possessed by these privileged families, and a means of self-identification distinguishing themselves as cultural elites. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the works of Wang Xizhi had long been central to imperial calligraphic collecting prior to and during the Tang dynasty. Hua Rende suggests that even in

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<sup>140</sup> In Walter Benjamin's most cited essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," he stated that with the appearance of the woodcut, graphic art became mechanically reproducible for the first time. It has been generally acknowledged that mechanical woodblock printing originated in China before the eighth century. According to Pan Jixing, archaeological findings indicate that, promoted by the spread of Buddhism, the earliest printing techniques were used for religious purposes. The earliest dated extant printed works include the *Saddharma pundarik sutra*, which was printed in the late seventh century, and the *Sanskrit dharani* charm, printed about 650-670. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, (London: Pimlico, 1999), 219-253 (This essay was originally published in 1935); Pan Jixing, "On the Origin of Printing in the Light of New Archaeological Discoveries," *Chinese Science Bulletin*, Vol. 42 No.12, June 1997, 976-981.



the Eastern Jin dynasty, letters written by the two Wangs were primarily collected by and circulated among families who fled from the north to the south. Even the native aristocrats of the south rarely received opportunities to see the letters, however, let alone the people of the Northern dynasties.<sup>141</sup> During the Tang, the emperors used their power and resources to purchase calligraphic works, building up a huge collection of calligraphy by the two Wangs and other masters. Ideally, once entering the palace, these works would no longer be traded and circulated among private hands, which made it even more difficult for the public to see them. Just how hard it would be for a connoisseur without royal connections to obtain access to these collections can be seen in the Tang connoisseur Zhang Yanyuan's complaints:

It is my constant regret that I have never been able to examine personally the famous works of the Imperial Repository, and so derive instruction on the wide variety of writings and paintings in it, but even (ordinary) amateurs do not like to lend (their works for study).<sup>142</sup>

In comparison, emperors and princes were in a supreme position to study the works of the Imperial Repository and to imitate these models in their own calligraphic practice. As mentioned in the first section, Emperor Taizong was an enthusiastic collector of the works of Wang Xizhi, and his love for Wang's calligraphy did not stop at their possession, rather he incorporated these works as a part of his life and spent a lot of time studying them. In the emperor's spare time, he meticulously made both traced and freehand copies of Wang Xizhi's

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<sup>141</sup> Hua Rende 華人德 and Ian H. Boyden, "Eastern Jin Epitaphic Stones – With Some Notes on the "Lanting Xi" Debate." *Early Medieval China*, 1997:1, 20-88, 63.

<sup>142</sup> *LDMHL*, 212-213.

works in standard and cursive scripts.<sup>143</sup> It is not surprising to see that the calligraphy of Emperor Taizong showed tremendous similarities to that by Wang Xizhi.

Emperor Taizong also ensured the continuity of his cultural policies through calligraphic education for the princes designated to succeed him. The *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* states: ‘In the Tang dynasty, probably because Emperor Wen (Taizong) was fond of studying calligraphy, the descendants still held the legacy that he left... Talents emerged from generation to generation.’<sup>144</sup> In terms of resources, it is unquestionable that the Tang princes growing up at the courts enjoyed exceptional advantages in their calligraphic learning. Great masters’ works stored in the palace were regularly taken out as models for the princes to study. In the first year of the *Zhenguan* period (627), under the edict of Emperor Taizong masterpieces from the imperial collection were taken out and used to demonstrate calligraphy at the Institute for the Advancement of Literature.<sup>145</sup> In addition to this, the calligrapher Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, who had once undertaken the job of demonstrating calligraphy to princes during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (r.713-756), explained the benefits of taking out calligraphic works by great masters to aid the calligraphic education for princes and suggested that:

May I plead that (your majesty) gather all of the princes and exhibit ancient masterpieces to them once or twice a year. Discussing the strengths and shortcomings of the various calligraphers would be extremely helpful to enlighten their hearts... If one can gain enlightenment through even a glance, he will profit from it for the rest of his life.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *FSYL*, 3.103.

<sup>144</sup> 大抵唐以文皇喜字書之學，故後世子孫尚得遺法...世不乏人. *XHSP*, 1:14.

<sup>145</sup> *XHSP*, 8:170.

<sup>146</sup> 伏願每季之間一兩度，悉召諸王，遍示古蹟，商榷諸家工拙，必大開悟心靈...倘一觀而

Beside taking calligraphic works out for public demonstration and exhibition for the purpose of educating princes, there is scattered evidence that the most precious works in the imperial collections were frequently copied, these copies being presented to princes to ensure their access to these resources. Fu Shen suggested that, by around the fourth or fifth centuries, methods had been developed through which calligraphy could be reproduced, in order to meet the growing demand for calligraphic works among collectors and connoisseurs.<sup>147</sup> Two famous Tang-era copies of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy were made by the technique of *Shuang gou kuo tian* 雙鉤廓填 [Outline Tracing and Filling-In].<sup>148</sup> There were some expert copy makers on the staff at the Tang courts. During the *Zhenguan* period (627-649), after Emperor Taizong had obtained Xizhi's piece *Lan ting xu* 蘭亭序 [*Preface to Poems Written at the Orchid Pavilion*] that he had reportedly been longing for, he ordered each of the four copy-makers, Zhao Mo 趙模, Han Daozheng 韓道政, Feng Chengsu 馮承素, and Zhuge Zhen 諸葛貞, to make copies of this work. After that, these copies were presented to 'the Crown Prince, princes and (the monarch's) cronies'.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, in the seventeenth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (729), Emperor Xuanzong sent calligraphic works in the imperial collections to the Academy of Scholarly Worthies and ordered the officials in the academy to make twenty

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悟, 則潤於終身. Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, "Liuti shulun" 六體書論 [Theory of Calligraphy on the Six Scripts] in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 [*Selected Calligraphy Essays from Successive Dynasties*], Huang Jian, ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2012), 213.

<sup>147</sup> Fu Shen, *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977), 3.

<sup>148</sup> According to Fu Shen, the method of 'Outline Tracing and Filling in' required a copyist to painstakingly outline the shape of each original stroke with a fine brush, then fill it in. As long as the copyist is sufficiently skilled, this method can ensure an accurate duplication. See Fu Shen, *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977), 3.

<sup>149</sup> 以賜皇太子, 諸王近臣. *FSYL*, 3.106.

volumes of copies of these works. Later, these copies were ‘bestowed on the Crown prince and other princes (to assist in their) studies’.<sup>150</sup>

Providing princes with access to the riches of the imperial calligraphic collection was far from a purely aesthetic practice, but could have multiple meanings for the Tang rulers. Firstly, since calligraphy had gained prestige as a symbol of cultural capital and a means of self-identification for the cultural elites, the Tang emperor, as both the head of the imperial household and the ruler of the empire, must display a sincere care for the cultural cultivation of their sons and brothers and hence encourage them to master the skill of calligraphy. The imperial family’s commitment to calligraphy and other forms of cultural activity were also related with their public image as civilized rulers, so this practice could also be interpreted as the emperors’ efforts to prove their family’s fitness for continued rule. Secondly, the exclusiveness of the imperial calligraphic collections made the sharing of these resources, either in the form of distributing reproductions or exhibiting originals, a privilege demonstrating the dignity and noble status of recipients and participants. The last point is seen more clearly in the cases of some officials’ access to the imperial calligraphic collections.

Access to the imperial calligraphic collections was routinely granted not only to princes but also to ministers. Evidence shows that the latter group of recipients was strictly limited to the highest-ranking officials. Moreover, the bestowal of this honour was not guaranteed by institutional regulation, but rested on the favour and goodwill of the rulers. Wu Zetian once complimented the Head of the Chancellery Di Renjie 狄仁傑 on his calligraphy. Di Renjie replied: ‘Ever since I was young, I have never had the opportunity to see good models of

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<sup>150</sup> 賜皇太子諸王學. *FSYL*, 3.100.

calligraphy. All I have done is merely following my foolish nature. How could I achieve such ability?’<sup>151</sup> Shortly after that, Wu Zetian had twenty scrolls of authentic calligraphy by Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi taken out from the imperial collection and ordered eunuchs of the fifth rank to show these works to all of the Prime Ministers. After the Prime Minister finished looking at them, these calligraphic works were immediately taken back to the court.<sup>152</sup>

Including the case mentioned above, ministers’ access to the imperial collections was mainly achieved in three ways: invitation to occasions on which the emperors displayed calligraphic works, gifts of reproductions of calligraphic works from the imperial collections and, sometimes, gifts of original pieces. Among these, the giving of reproductions was the most common. The *Taben Yueyi lun ji* 搨本樂毅論記 [*Record on the Copies of Discourse On Yueyi*] was a brief record made by Emperor Taizong’s calligraphic connoisseur Chu Suiliang. The full text of this work is given below:

On the ninth day of the fourth month of the thirteenth year of the *Zhenguan* period (639), under imperial edict, the *Discourse on Yue Yi*, an authentic work by Wang Youjun (Wang Xizhi), was brought out from the imperial storehouse. The Court Gentleman for Ceremonial Service and Auxiliary in the Institute for the Advancement of Literature Feng Chengsu was ordered to make copies (of this work). These copies were bestowed on six men: Minister of Works and Duke of Zhao Zhangsun Wuji, Commander Unequaled in Honor Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs, and Duke of

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<sup>151</sup> 臣自幼以來，不見好本。只率愚性，何由得能。Xu Hao 徐浩，“Guji ji” 古跡記 [A Record of Ancient Traces], in *FSYL*, 24. 98.

<sup>152</sup> 則天乃內出二王真跡二十卷，遣五品中使示諸宰相，看訖，表謝，登時將入。Xu Hao 徐浩，“Guji ji” 古跡記 [A Record of Ancient Traces], in *FSYL*, 24. 98.

Liang Fang Xuanling, Lord Specially Advanced Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs, and Duke of Shen Gao Shilian, Minister of Personnel and Duke of Chen Hou Junji, Lord Specially Advanced and Duke of Zheng Wei Zheng and Palace Attendant and Military Protector Dynasty-Founding Duke of Ande Commandery Yang Shidao, the above numbering six people in all. Hence, there are six copies outside the court. The energy behind the writing (of these copies) was refined and subtle, perfectly capturing the principles behind the models. Chu Suiliang makes this record.<sup>153</sup>

The *Discourse on Yueyi* headed the list of standard script works by Wang Xizhi in Chu Suiliang's *List of Calligraphic Works by Youjun (Wang Xizhi)*, which might indicate that this work was appraised by Chu Suiliang as Wang Xizhi's best standard script work, and probably Emperor Taizong's personal favourite.<sup>154</sup> From the paragraph above, we know that Emperor Taizong ordered six copies of this masterpiece and bestowed them on six officials: Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌, Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, Gao Shilian 高士廉, Hou Junji 侯君集, Wei Zheng 魏徵, and Yang Shidao 楊師道. These six officials were all the closest and the most trusted advisors gathered around Emperor Taizong, and held the highest-ranking offices in the bureaucracy at that time. Being the owners of the only six copies of Wang Xizhi's highest-regarded calligraphic work in standard script outside the court, would be an extraordinary honour for these ministers.

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<sup>153</sup> 貞觀十三年四月九日，奉敕內出樂毅論，是王右軍真跡，令將仕郎直弘文館馮承素模寫，賜司空趙國公長孫無忌，開府儀同三司尚書左僕射梁國公房玄齡，特進尚書左僕射申國公高士廉，吏部尚書陳國公侯君集，特進鄭國公魏徵，侍中護軍安德郡開國公楊師道等六人，於是在外乃有六本，並筆勢精妙，備盡楷則。褚遂良記。FSYL, 3.107-108.

<sup>154</sup> FSYL, 3. 72.

It is noteworthy that on some occasions the most powerful and influential ministers also took up roles as supervisors of projects to manage the imperial calligraphic collections. Given that not all of these ministers were connoisseurs of calligraphy, such supervisory posts were often sinecures and granted largely for honorific purposes. In the Tang Daoist-calligrapher Lu Yuanqing's 盧元卿 *Fa shu lu* 法書錄 [*A Record of Calligraphic Works*], we find the names of the same six officials mentioned in the last paragraph as recipients of the copies of Xizhi's *Discourse on Yueyi*.<sup>155</sup> Lu Yuanqing reported that he once saw a scroll of calligraphy attributed to the Jin Dynasty calligrapher Wang Yi 王廙, held in the Tang imperial collections. The signatures that appeared on this scroll included three officials of the Liang dynasty, which indicated that the scroll had previously been among the Liang court collections. In addition to that, the signatures also included the names and official titles of a group of Tang ministers. These are Chu Suiliang, mentioned in the last section as a distinguished official-calligrapher in charge of the imperial collections, and thirteen high-ranking officials serving at the court of Emperor Taizong. The first six of the thirteen ministers are those mentioned by Chu Suiliang as the recipients of the copies of the *Discourse on Yueyi*. Given that the biographies of these ministers contain little information indicating calligraphic interest or achievement, it is unlikely that their participation in the supervision and management of the collections involved, like that of Chu Suiliang, taking responsibility for specific matters such as authentication and cataloguing.

Another similar example is seen in a scroll of calligraphy by Emperor Gao of the Qi dynasty 齊高帝 (427-482). This scroll includes not only the signatures of Chu Wuliang and Ma

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<sup>155</sup> *FSYL*, 4. 137.

Huaisu, who, as mentioned in the last section, were entrusted by Emperor Xuanzong with the task of managing the imperial collections, but also the signatures of Yao Chong 姚崇, Song Jing 宋璟, and Su Ting 蘇頌, all three of whom were the most trusted and respected ministers in the fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (717), when the signatures were added.<sup>156</sup>

Ordering prestigious ministers who might not necessarily be experts in calligraphy to sign their names on these imperially-sponsored cultural projects could be interpreted in two ways: On the one hand, it demonstrated the importance that the rulers attached to these cultural projects, a priority that was reaffirmed by the lofty status of these participants. On the other hand, from the perspective of the ministers, being allowed to inscribe their names on these masterpieces was undoubtedly an extraordinary honour, an endorsement of their merit and scholarly attainments. To sum up, the presence of these high officials' signatures on high-status calligraphy scrolls was an honorary gesture that could both denote the significance of the imperial calligraphic collections and demonstrate the pre-eminent position of these officials at the court.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter first examined the monumental nature and the centrality of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy to the tradition of imperial calligraphic collecting. It is now clear that Wang Xizhi's calligraphic works were valuable to the Tang regime, especially to Emperor Taizong's administration, not only as a declaration on court aesthetics, but also as a statement of political ideology and a vehicle for self-presentation. Wang Xizhi's works had

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<sup>156</sup> *FSYL*, 4.138.



long functioned as a symbol of imperial power transmitted along the historical course and represented a continuous cultural tradition that was seen to have preserved the ancient culture of the Central Plains and which extended through the Jin dynasty, Southern dynasties and Sui dynasty, through to the Tang. By consolidating the political and cultural roles that had already been played by Wang Xizhi's calligraphic works in the pre-Tang period, the Tang rulers achieved a sense of cultural continuity between the Tang and the ancient Central Plains, and deployed this to further legitimate their imperial authority.

In the second section of this chapter, we have investigated the materiality of calligraphic works as three-dimensional objects and the access to calligraphic treasures held in the Tang imperial collections as a privilege, as well as tracing the development and management of Tang imperial calligraphic collections from the perspective of interactions between the rulers and scholar-officials. Relating to the traditional notion that knowing their subordinates and assigning them jobs commensurate with their abilities were important imperial virtues, the examination of pre-Tang and Tang records on imperial calligraphic collections also reveals that imperial calligraphic collections often functioned as a dimension through which a ruler's moral character and ruling capacity could be evaluated. Moreover, due to the exclusiveness and rarity of imperial calligraphic collections, access to the calligraphic works held in the inner storehouse was bestowed on favoured officials as a privilege, a bestowal which functioned as a vehicle for augmenting the bonds between the rulers and their ministers.

The findings of this chapter contribute to the broader goals of this thesis, which explores how calligraphy served Tang rulers' political purposes and how calligraphy functioned in mediating social relations at the Tang courts. Under the Tang, imperial calligraphic

collecting and collection were adopted as a sign of cultured rule, a common aesthetic pursuit among the cultural elites, a platform for power exchange and social interaction between the Tang rulers and ministers. The following chapter, Calligraphy and Administration, once again takes the relationship between emperor and minister as a focal point, to investigate Tang rulers' practice of executing the calligraphy of imperial edicts in person.

## CHAPTER TWO: CALLIGRAPHY AND ADMINISTRATION

The inherent bonds between calligraphy and politics may be seen in the pervasive uses of writing in governmental documents and in administrative information exchange on state affairs. The Han dynasty philosopher Wang Chong 王充 (27-100 CE) said: ‘The Han (regime) should attribute its ability to keep the nine provinces under control to the power of writing. (The Han Emperors) rule the world by writing.’<sup>157</sup> Wang Chong highlights the position of writing as the foremost tool contributing to the Han regime’s successful rule. Efficient central bureaucracies were first established during the Qin and Han periods. Alongside these, maintaining functional administration over an empire with a large geographic range required a huge amount of paperwork and correspondence, from writing public notices to drafting legal provisions, from composing reports to recording taxation. Men of letters who could read and write these records were drawn to careers in public services and became an essential part of the government. Gradually, through the development of a bureaucratic political system and the emergence of an aesthetic consciousness for the art of writing, calligraphers and officials shared not only their tools of brush and ink, but also an aesthetic and intellectual tradition.<sup>158</sup> Administrators with calligraphic talent and calligraphers who carried on the administrative activities of

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<sup>157</sup> 漢所以能制九州者，文書之力也。以文書御天下。Wang Chong 王充 (27-100), annotated by Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiao shi 論衡校釋* [*Annotations on the Discourses Weighed in the Balance*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 591.

<sup>158</sup> Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37.

government often came together as a group of people who might be called official-calligraphers. It is notable that the vast majority of the most prestigious Tang period calligraphers were at the same time accomplished politicians.

Through their frequent interactions with the official-calligraphers, the Tang emperors, first, were the shapers of the appreciation of virtue through calligraphic achievement, playing the role of calligraphy patrons through institutional design and selection of talent. Second, the emperors were themselves subjected to the judgement implied by this notion, and thus prompted to improve their own calligraphic performance. In the interaction between the emperors and officials, the exchange of writings played a fundamental role. Several Tang emperors, who were renowned for their splendid calligraphy, can be categorized in a group of emperor-calligraphers. If for official-calligraphers, calligraphy was a means of advancement in their official careers and a skill necessary to handling administrative paperwork, what were the uses of calligraphy for the Tang rulers with regard to the management of state affairs, and what kind of emperor-minister relations can be illuminated through the examination of the roles of ‘imperial writing’ in administrative textual culture? These are the focal questions to be answered in this chapter.

The Song dynasty imperial calligraphic collection catalogue *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* lists twelve rulers from previous dynasties. Acclaimed for excellence in calligraphy, their calligraphic works had been incorporated in the Song imperial collection. Among the twelve emperor-calligraphers, seven were Tang dynasty rulers.<sup>159</sup> It is noticeable that some of these

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<sup>159</sup> The Tang rulers that are mentioned in the *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* include Emperor Taizong, Emperor Xuanzong, Emperor Suzong, Emperor Daizong, Emperor Dezong, Emperor Xuanzong, Emperor Zhaozong, and Wu Zetian.

calligraphic works that were attributed to Tang emperors by Song court curators were originally made as imperial edicts (see APPENDICES Table 2.1. List of the Imperial Edicts Attributed to Tang Emperors). However, the assumption that these works were brushed by the Tang rulers in person seems to contradict existing scholarship on the administrative textual culture of Medieval China. A large amount of research has been devoted to the topic of ‘the Ruler’s Words’ 王言之制 (*Wangyan zhi zhi*) from an administrative procedural perspective.<sup>160</sup> For institutional historians, it is a commonplace that those imperial documents that speak ‘in the emperors’ own persons’ were routinely composed and executed by the scholar-officials serving at the courts instead of the emperors.

To solve the contradiction between institutional history and calligraphic history around the production of imperial edicts, in this chapter, I will begin with sketching out the institutional regulations, highlighting the emperors’ roles as patrons of calligraphy who preferred to appoint officials with calligraphic talent to take on the duty of executing imperial edicts. Then, it moves to the phenomenon of the presence of imperial writing on the Tang imperial edicts. In this process, I will employ a combination of visual and literary analysis to examine a group of Tang imperial decrees that have been preserved in the form of Dunhuang manuscripts, stone inscriptions, and calligraphic model books collected by the court of the Song dynasty.

In most cases, the collaboration between the official-calligraphers and the emperors in the production of imperial edicts was reciprocal – the former gaining compensation in the form

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<sup>160</sup> For more about the definition and categorization of ‘the King’s Words’ 王言之制, see Nakamura Hiroichi 中村裕一, *Zui To ogen no kenkyu* 隋唐王言の研究 [*Research on the King’s words of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*] (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 2003), 3-20.

of official positions and salary, and the latter relieving themselves of the burden of handling state affairs and improving personal reputation through elegant wording and exquisite calligraphy. Sometimes, however, the official-calligraphers' practice of writing on the emperors' behalf and the complex administrative procedures involved in the drafting of these edicts could erode the edicts' authority and sow distrust between ruler, as producer, and minister, as recipients. Indeed, there are some instances in which the emperors took up the brush to execute the calligraphy of the imperial edicts in person. I argue that by personally executing imperial edicts the Tang emperors could circumvent the constraints of the authority of the 'state' in the form of the administrative system. It was also a pivotal technique by which the rulers sought to build personal bonds with subjects; to pursue their own agendas in the confrontations with the ministers; to consolidate their personal authority and to foster an image of the benevolent and civilised ruler possessing cultural accomplishments. Although the employment of imperial calligraphy could colour the relationship between the emperors as calligraphers and the subjects as recipients, the aesthetic quality of the imperial calligraphy solely was not, on its own, enough to achieve the goals listed above; a prerequisite for imperial calligraphy's effectiveness in mediating social relations was the imperial authority based on strong political influence and military strength.

## **2.1 The System of the 'Ruler's Words': Institutions and Drafters**

This section starts with an examination of those institutional regulations on the drafting of imperial edicts, that legitimized the Secretariat's responsibility for executing the imperial edicts. It then sketches out the history of the institutions (scholarly academies) that traditionally considered to be in competition with the Secretariat for responsibility over the

drafting of edicts. Throughout this examination of the institutional system, biographical information will be presented on official-calligraphers who served in these institutions. Many of the most established calligraphers of the Tang dynasty served in the Secretariat and various academies, and were assigned the duty of drafting the imperial edicts. I argue that along with literary talent and this close personal relationship with the rulers, calligraphic skill was one of the essential qualities that a drafter of imperial edicts was supposed to possess. Tang rulers tended to provide officials excelling at calligraphy with posts responsible for ‘Writing the King’s Words’. On the one hand, this tendency can be regarded as one of the ways in which the Tang rulers provided patronage to the culture of calligraphy, rendering calligraphic talent a means of advancement in one’s official career. On the other hand, it reveals the Tang rulers’ aesthetic requirement for calligraphy in the production of imperial edicts.

### **The System of the Rulers’ Words and the Secretariat**

In the *Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty*, the entry on the Zhongshu ling 中書令 [Secretariat Director] mentions that the *Wangyan zhi zhi* 王言之制 [The System of the Rulers’ Words] included seven genres, categorised according to their content and the context in which they functioned. They are *ceshu* 冊書 [Nomination Declaration], *zhishu* 制書 [Imperial Proclamation], *weilao chishu* 慰勞制書 [Imperial Proclamation of Condolence], *fari chi* 發日敕 [Edict of Day Promulgation], *chishu* 敕旨 [Imperial Rescript], *lunshi chishu* 論事敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs], *chidie* 敕牒 [Imperial Dispatch].<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *TLD*, 9. 273-274.

Focusing on their formats and the government operation mechanism behind the seven genres of the ‘Rulers’ Words’, Li Jinxiu suggests that the seven genres can be generally grouped as *zhi* 制 [imperial proclamations] and *chi* 敕 [imperial edict and document of appointment] according to their contents and the procedures through which they were drafted and issued.<sup>162</sup> Nakamura Hiroichi has noticed that the genres that the emperors adopted to communicate were diverse and not limited to the seven genres listed in the *Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty*.<sup>163</sup> He groups the seven genres mentioned above under the term of *gong de wangyan* 公的王言 [the Public King’s Words] and claims that there are other two other groups of the king’s words. They are *si de wangyan* 私的王言 [the Private King’s Words] and the *guanyong de wangyan* 慣用的王言 [the Customary King’s Words].<sup>164</sup> Consequently, narrowly speaking, the phrase *wangyan* 王言 ‘the Ruler’s Words’ refers to the seven genres of imperial edicts that have been listed in the *Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty*. In a broad sense, this phrase is a designation for all of the documents that were emanated from the court.

Nakamura Hiroichi has undertaken a comprehensive research on the subject of Tang imperial edicts, claiming that the Tang dynasty administrative management relied on the strict official document system and the bureaucratic system.<sup>165</sup> It has been generally agreed

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<sup>162</sup> Li Jinxiu 李錦綉, “Tang wangyan zhi zhi chutan” 唐王言之制初探 [Study on the Tang System of the Rulers’ Words], in Li Zheng 李錚 and Jiang Zhongxin 蔣忠新 edit, *Ji Xianlin jiaoshou bashi huadan jinian lunwenji* 季羨林教授八十華誕紀念論文集 [Papers in Honour of Prof. Dr. Ji Xianlin on the Occasion of His 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday], (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991), 273-291.

<sup>163</sup> Nakamura Hiroichi 中村裕一, *Zui To ogen no kenkyu* 隋唐王言の研究 [Research on the King’s words of the Sui and Tang Dynasties], (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 2003), 3-17.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Nakamura Hiroichi 中村裕一, *Todai sei cho kenkyu* 唐代制敕研究 [Research on the



that by the middle of Emperor Taizong's reign (626-649) each of the three central ministries' roles in the drafting and dissemination of the Ruler's Words had become fixed.<sup>166</sup> Based on an original imperial rescript (S. 11287 stored in the British Museum), Lei Wen has reconstructed the routine production process of the *lunshi chishu* 論事敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs] in the Secretariat 中書省.<sup>167</sup> 'The Secretariat drafted edicts, the Chancellery reviewed and commented on them, and the Department of State Affairs with its six subordinate boards put them into effect.'<sup>168</sup> The Secretariat was one of the three pre-eminent departments of central government. According to institutional regulations, the senior official serving in the Secretariat was responsible for promulgating the emperors' orders and providing advice on important policies, assisting the emperors in governing the country.<sup>169</sup>

Throughout the Tang dynasty, the Secretariat was a ministry in which calligraphically talented officials often served. Among the 'Four Great Calligraphers of the Early Tang', Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596-659) was the one who achieved the most prestigious office, playing a pivotal role in the politics of the early Tang. He was recommended by Wei Zheng 魏徵 who served as Prime Minister to Emperor Taizong as an expert on the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi. In Taizong's latter years, after occupying several positions Chu was promoted to the head of

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*Decrees and Edicts of the Tang Dynasty*], (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 1992).

<sup>166</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, "The Founding of the Tang Dynasty: Kao-tsu (reign 618-26)" in Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank ed., *The Cambridge History of China: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906*, Part I, volume 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 150- 187.170.

<sup>167</sup> Lei Wen 雷聞, "Cong S.11287 kan Tangdai lunshi chishu de chengli guocheng" 從 S. 11287 看唐代論事敕書的成立過程 [A Study on the Drafting of the *Lunshi Chishu* in the Tang Dynasty Focused on Dunhuang Document S. 11287], in *Journal of Tang Studies*, Volume 1, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1995), 323-335.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> *TLD*, 9. 273.

the Secretariat – Zhongshu ling 中書令 [Secretariat Director].<sup>170</sup> Another renowned calligrapher, Zhong Shaojing 鐘紹京 (659-746), to whom the *Lingfei jing* 靈飛經 [Spiritual Flight Sutra] held in the MET New York has been attributed, began his official career in the low-ranking post of Sinong lushi 司農錄事 [Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture]. He was requested to serve as Zhi fengge 直鳳閣 [Auxiliary in the Phoenix Hall] due to his skill at calligraphy.<sup>171</sup> The Phoenix Hall was the official variant designation of the Secretariat during the reign of Wu Zetian. Later, Zhong Shaojing participated in the coup that successfully overturned Empress Wei, who poisoned her husband Emperor Zhongzong, and was planning to become ‘emperor’ like Wu Zetian. As a reward for his contribution to the coup, Zhong Shaojing was promoted to Zhongshu shilang 中書侍郎 [Vice Director of the Secretariat] and soon after that as Zhongshu ling 中書令 [Secretariat Director].

### Scholarly Academies

Throughout the Tang dynasty, in reality, the duty of drafting imperial edicts was not exclusively reserved to officials serving at Secretariat in the regular bureaucracy, but rather shared with academicians at several scholarly academies. The tradition of such academies originated as far back as the *Dongguan* 東觀 of the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE). The *Shilin guan* 士林館 of the Liang Dynasty (502-557) and *Wenlin guan* 文林館 of the Northern Qi (550-577) were all precursors to the academies of the Tang.<sup>172</sup> Academicians in the Tang Dynasty usually enjoyed a close relationship with the emperors, providing

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<sup>170</sup> *XTS*, 120. 3975.

<sup>171</sup> *JTS*, 97. 3042.

<sup>172</sup> *TLD*, 8.20.

scholarly advice, addressing political and ritual issues, executing scholarly commissions, and supplying company for literary entertainment.<sup>173</sup> The Tang scholar Li Zhao 李肇 remarked that the official-scholars serving in the *Jixian yuan* 集賢院 [The Academy of Scholarly Worthies] and *Hanlin yuan* 翰林院 [Hanlin Academy] had, since the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, effectively decentralised the Secretariat's authority over drafting imperial edicts.<sup>174</sup> According to Denis Twitchett, employing scholars who were attached personally to the emperors to draft imperial edicts provided a means by which the emperor could avoid obstruction by the regular bureaucratic organs, a reform which laid the foundation for significant change in the conduct of government affairs later in the Tang dynasty.<sup>175</sup> One point to note is that since the title of 'academicians' was usually assigned to officials who held substantive posts in other agencies within the central government, some official-calligraphers who bore the title of 'academician' and took the job of drafting the imperial edicts might also have held positions in the Secretariat. In this sense, what matters was not who brushed the edicts but rather whether those edicts had been through the appropriate administrative procedures.

Many scholar-officials who staffed these scholarly academies were also the most renowned calligraphers of the Tang dynasty. Zhu Guantian has put forward the concept of 'Shengzhong Tang de guange shujia' 盛中唐的館閣書家 [Imperial Academy Calligraphers

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<sup>173</sup> David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>174</sup> Li Zhao 李肇 (618-907), "Hanlin Zhi" 翰林志 [A Record of the Hanlin Academy], in *Hanxue san shu* 翰學三書 [Three Books of Studies on the Hanlin Academy], ed. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 and Shi Chunde 施純德, (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 1.

<sup>175</sup> Denis Twitchett, "Hsuan-tsung (reign 712-56)," in the *Cambridge History of China*, Vol.3, *Sui and T'ang China, 589-906 AD, Part I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 378.

of the High and Middle Tang] and examined some ten calligraphers who held office in the Academy of Scholarly Worthies and Hanlin Academy during the high and middle Tang periods.<sup>176</sup> Academic institutions, like all of the Tang organs of government, were in fact not static but subject to a variety of constant changes ranging from organization to function, from standing to prestige.<sup>177</sup> The tradition of recruiting officials with calligraphic skill into the academies can be traced back at least to the *Hongwen guan* 弘文館 [The Institute for the Advancement of Literature], founded in the early years of the *Zhenguan* era (627-649). This was followed, during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (685-762), by the establishment of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies 集賢院 [*Jixian yuan*] and the Hanlin Academy 翰林院 [*Hanlin yuan*].

#### (1) The Institute for the Advancement of Literature

The Institute for the Advancement of Literature was established in the fourth year of the *Wude* era (621) and later underwent several name changes. According to the *Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty*, scholars in the Institute for Advancement of Literature were of no fixed number, and included Academicians 學士 (at rank 5) and Auxiliary Academicians 直學士 (at rank 6). They were responsible for administering the imperial collection of books and documents, compiling imperially sponsored cultural projects and tutoring those sons of officials who showed talent.<sup>178</sup> Although the Institute for the Advancement of Literature continued to exist until the

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<sup>176</sup> Zhu Guantian, *Zhongguo shufa shi: Suitang wudai juan* 中國書法史：隋唐五代卷 [*The History of Chinese Calligraphy: the Volume of Sui and Tang*], (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chu ban she, 1999), 49-52.

<sup>177</sup> David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 13.

<sup>178</sup> *TLD*, 8. 254-255.

end of the dynasty, almost all of the important official calligraphers attached to this institute served during a period extending from the rule of Emperor Taizong (598-649) to that of Emperor Ruizong (662-716).

After Emperor Ruizong (662-716) ascended the throne, Jia Fuying 賈膺福 (?-713) and Xue Ji 薛稷 (649-713), both of whom bore the title of Academician of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, were called to the palace to undertake the job of drafting imperial edicts, a service previously undertaken by Shangguan Waner 上官婉兒, a female secretary serving Wu Zetian.<sup>179</sup> Both Jia Fuying and Xue Ji were renowned for their calligraphy during their lifetimes. Jia Yingfu's calligraphic service to the court was mainly undertaken during the reigns of Wu Zetian and Emperor Ruizong. In the first year of the *Wansuitongtian* 萬歲通天 era (696), Wu Zetian commissioned the casting of the *Jiuzhou ding* 九州鼎 [Tripods of the Nine Prefectures] that were to be installed in the Mingtang 明堂 [Hall of Light], in an arrangement according to the location of each prefecture. Each of these sacred bronze vessels was decorated with scenery and products associated with one of the nine prefectures. In addition to that several renowned official-calligraphers, including Jia Yingfu, were appointed by Wu Zetian to write inscriptions for the tripods.<sup>180</sup> As time went by, however, Jia's fame faded, leaving him in relative obscurity quite soon after his death, a situation that persisted until the Song Dynasty. The Song critic Zhao Mingcheng hence commented that 'it is virtue, rather than skill, that can immortalise a gentleman's fame'.<sup>181</sup> In contrast, Xue Ji has long been acclaimed as one of the 'Four Great Calligraphers of the Early Tang'. It is said that after the

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<sup>179</sup> *JTS*, 43. 1853.

<sup>180</sup> *JTS*, 22. 868

<sup>181</sup> 以此知士所以自著於不朽者，果在德而不在藝也。 *JSL*, 25. 326.

deaths of Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang, there was hardly anyone who could measure up to the standards that Yu and Chu had set. Benefiting from his grandfather Wei Zheng's huge collection of books and artworks, Xue Ji had access to authentic calligraphic works by Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang. He meticulously imitated the styles of Chu and Yu, distinguishing himself as an excellent calligrapher of his time.<sup>182</sup> The known calligraphic works that were executed by Xue Ji under Wu Zetian's commission include *Dazhou feng Zhongyue bei* 大周封中岳碑 [The Stele of Offering Sacrifice to the Zhongyue by the Great Zhou] and *Zhou shengxiantaizi bei yin* 周昇仙太子碑陰 [The Reverse Side of the Stele of Zhou Ascended Immortal Crown Prince].

## (2) The Academy of Scholarly Worthies

The Academy of Scholarly Worthies was created by renaming the *Lizheng xiushu yuan* 麗正修書院 (Hall of Elegance and Rectitude) in the thirteenth year of the *Kaiyuan* Era (725).<sup>183</sup> During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the academy was the centre of imperially-supported scholarly and literary activity, staffed with litterateurs and academicians who 'were in charge of editing and compiling the ancient and modern classic works to discern the grand rituals and traditions of the state, awaiting to be consulted.'<sup>184</sup> In addition, searching for, copying and collecting books were also among the principal duties of the academy. The production of a huge number of books

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<sup>182</sup> *JSL*, 25. 326.

<sup>183</sup> For a comprehensive study of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies, see Du Haibin 杜海斌, "Tangdai jixianyuan xintan" 唐代集賢院新探 [New Investigation on the Academy of Scholarly Worthies in the Tang Dynasty], *Tangshi luncong* 唐史論叢 [Symposium on Tang History], 2016 (2), 131-142.

<sup>184</sup> 學士掌刊緝古今之經籍, 以辨明國之大典, 而備顧問應對. *TLD*, 9. 280-281.

in the Academy of Scholarly Worthies could not have been accomplished by the academicians alone. In the fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* era (717), Emperor Xuanzong personally selected a hundred calligraphers for the academy and granted them the title *Shuzhi ji xie yushu* 書直及寫御書 [Calligrapher-on-Duty and Copier of Imperial Writings], which further indicates that the Academy of Scholarly Worthies was an important platform for the calligraphically talented to gather and to learn from one another by exchanging ideas. Xu Hao 徐浩 (703-782) occupied concurrent positions in the Secretariat and the Academy of Scholarly Worthies, and was a celebrated calligrapher and calligraphic theorist under Emperor Xuanzong, Emperor Suzong and Emperor Daizong. Xu's calligraphic style has been deemed a development from the style of Wang Xizhi.<sup>185</sup> His two essays on calligraphy, "Lun shu" 論書 [On Calligraphy] and "Tang Xu Hao gujiji" 唐徐浩古蹟記 [Xu Hao of the Tang's Record of Ancient Traces], are collected in the ninth-century work *Fa shu yao lu* 法書要錄 [Compendium of Texts on Calligraphy].<sup>186</sup> From the second essay we know that Xu Hao had spent decades in charge of the imperial calligraphic collection as a connoisseur, which reveals the Tang rulers' acknowledgement and appreciation of his calligraphic learning and achievement. According to the *Old History of Tang*, Xu Hao's service as a writer of imperial edicts had begun during the reign of Emperor Suzong:

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<sup>185</sup> Amy McNair, "Public Values in Calligraphy and Orthography in the Tang Dynasty," *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 43 (1995), 263-278. 269.

<sup>186</sup> See Xu Hao's "Lun shu" 論書 (On Calligraphy) and "Tang Xu Hao gujiji" 唐徐浩古蹟記 (Xu Hao of the Tang's Record of Ancient Traces) in *FSYL*, 3. 95-101.

After Emperor Suzong ascended the throne, [Xu Hao] was appointed as Drafter in the Secretariat. During this eventful period, a great number of imperial edicts came from Hao's hand. Hao's wording was appropriate and rich. Moreover, he excelled at the regular and seal scripts. Emperor Suzong appreciated Xu Hao's talents and raised him to the position of concurrent Left Aid of the Department of State Affairs. Even Emperor Xuanzong's *Nominating Declaration of Passing on the Throne [to Emperor Suzong]* was written by Hao. [Xu Hao] was in charge of writing out the works of the two palaces. [The emperors'] favour for him was unparalleled.<sup>187</sup>

The paragraph above clearly indicates that for a man of letters with a high degree of literary and calligraphic talent, being assigned the duty of writing imperial edicts out had been viewed as the highest recognition of his performance. As an established official-calligrapher, Xu Hao spent many years in the Secretariat and scholarly academies, and undertaking the execution of imperial edicts. Having gained imperial appreciation, he was entrusted with the responsibility of writing imperial edicts, which even included Emperor Xuanzong's *Xuanzong chuan wei gao ce* 玄宗傳位誥冊 [Nominating Declaration of Passing on the Throne to Emperor Suzong]. After a short period of banishment from the capital, he was recalled and appointed by Emperor Daizong as Drafter in the Secretariat 中書舍人 again and concurrently Academician of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies 集賢殿學士.

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<sup>187</sup> 肅宗即位, 召拜中書舍人, 時天下事殷, 詔令多出於浩. 浩屬詞贍給, 又工楷隸, 肅宗悅其能, 加兼尚書左丞. 玄宗傳位誥冊, 皆浩為之, 參兩宮文翰, 寵遇罕與為比. *JTS*, 137.3759.



### (3) The Hanlin Academy

The last, and the most celebrated, advisory college to be founded in the Tang era was the Hanlin Academy. According to the records of the *New History of Tang*, Emperor Xuanzong set up the Hanlin Academy in the twenty-sixth year of the *Kaiyuan* era (738), to solve problems faced by the Secretariat, which had become overburdened by the responsibility of writing out imperial rescripts.<sup>188</sup> The academicians of the Hanlin Academy shared the Secretariat's responsibility for rescript writing and hence were referred to as *Neixiang* 內相 [Grand Councillors Within the Palace] by their contemporaries.<sup>189</sup>

After the establishment of the Hanlin Academy, many official-calligraphers held positions in it. In the *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue*, the entries on Wu Tongxuan 吳通玄, Wu Rong 吳融 and Lu Yi 陸昉 report that all three had served in the Hanlin Academy due to their calligraphic talent, and that they had been entrusted with the responsibility of drafting imperial edicts.<sup>190</sup> According to the same catalogue, being proficient at calligraphy and painting, Wu Tongxuan excelled especially at semi-cursive and cursive scripts.<sup>191</sup> When Emperor Dezong was still Crown Prince, Wu Tongxuan's father Wu Daoguan 吳道瓘 served the Crown Prince as an instructor of Daoist classics, and Wu Tongxuan hence gained the privilege of free access to the court and befriended the Crown Prince. After Emperor Dezong ascended the throne, Wu Tongxuan, as an old confidant of the emperor, was promoted as Academician of the Hanlin Academy with the supplementary designation *Zhi*

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<sup>188</sup> *XTS*, 46. 1194.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *XHSP*, 3.74; 9.176; 10.193.

<sup>191</sup> *XHSP*, 9.176.

*zhigao* 知制誥 [Participant in the Drafting of Proclamations]. To combat Wu Tongxuan's increasing power, the minister Lu Zhi 陆贄 remonstrated that:

During the period of peace, men with the talents in calligraphy and painting were called to await orders in the Hanlin Academy. At that time, there were no academicians (in the Hanlin Academy). It was only after the *Zhide* era that the emperor began to call academicians to draft imperial edicts in the forbidden inner palace. Because the academicians waited for orders at the Hanlin Academy, they received titles named after the (Hanlin Academy). In the years of chaos, (the academicians) participated in the execution or rectification of (imperial edicts). (The emperor) temporarily assigned them the task of drafting imperial edicts. Now, in a peaceful period, all kinds of government affairs are working in an orderly manner. The duty of drafting imperial edicts should be re-attributed to the Drafter in the Secretariat. The title of Academician should be suspended.<sup>192</sup>

In the above paragraph, Lu Zhi attempted to challenge Wu Tongxuan's political influence by questioning the allocation of responsibility for drafting imperial edicts to the Academicians of the Hanlin Academy. He depreciated the Hanlin Academy as the institution staffed by men with skills in calligraphy and painting, rather than a proper part of the bureaucratic apparatus. The presupposition of Lu Zhi's argument was that men

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<sup>192</sup> 承平時工藝書畫之徒，待詔翰林，比無學士。只自至德後，天子召集學士於禁中草書詔，因在翰林院待進止，遂以為名。奔波之時，道途或豫除改，權令草制。今四方無事，百揆時序，制書職分，宜歸中書舍人。學士之名，理須停寢。 *JTS*, 190.5057.

mastering the ‘minor way of calligraphy’ 書學小道 were inferior to those academicians who were real cultivated men.

The subtext was that Wu Tongxuan was a craftsman, who had mastered the minor skill of calligraphy, instead of being a truly cultivated academician. In reality, an examination of biographical information on the Tang official-calligraphers reveals a substantial overlap between men with calligraphic talent and cultivated scholar-officials. They were the same group of people. As with the skill of literary composition and administrative ability, calligraphic talent was a key tool and one that played an active role in demonstrating a cultivated man’s cultural achievement and in the advancement of his official career.<sup>193</sup>

Throughout the Tang dynasty, since calligraphy was one of the four criteria for the selection of government officials, those officials usually possessed a good mastery of the skill. Among them, those officials who stood out from the crowd and were assigned the task of drafting imperial edicts, were in many cases those whose calligraphic talents were superior to their peers, a tendency which demonstrates that the Tang emperors had their own aesthetic requirements for the calligraphic presentation of imperial edicts. Moreover, those official-calligraphers who were employed in the Secretariat or in the various scholarly academies and who were entrusted with the task of executing the highest form of administrative documents, could further expand the social prestige of their calligraphy and enhance its value and status for posterity.

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<sup>193</sup> By examining the values attributed to calligraphy in the bureaucratic system and its relevant educational policies, Laurentis has concluded that, like literature, calligraphy played an active role in the society of the time, both as a means of self-cultivation and of advancement in officialdom. Pietro De Laurentis, “Calligraphy and Bureaucratic Administration in Tang China (618-907),” *Annali dell’ Università di Napoli “L’ Orientale” – Sezione orientale* 74, 2014, 137-159.

## 2.2 The Presence of Tang Emperors' Handwriting on Imperial Edicts

The last section has sketched the institutional history of the “System of the ruler’s Words”, illuminating two main approaches through which imperial edicts were drafted: that is, we see on the one hand a highly regulated administrative process involving a number of government sectors, and on the other direct commissions from an emperor to a trusted courtier, without going through those administrative procedures. Therefore, the imperial edicts issued in the emperor’s name were supposed to be routinely produced by the hands of scholar-officials who served in the Secretariat or in one of a number of scholarly academies. However, there is a further group of imperial edicts that were either acclaimed by contemporaries at the time of their production or recorded by historians of later generations as bearing the handwriting of Tang emperors. How to explain the discrepancy between administrative customs and the existence of these special cases, as well as the Tang rulers’ motives that lay behind this discrepancy, are the focal points of this section, and the core issues of this chapter.

One event recorded in the *Old History of Tang* reveals how imperial edicts believed to be written by the ‘imperial brush’ 御筆 of Emperor Taizong, were cherished for more than a hundred years after their creation. During the *Taihe* era (827-835), Li Yanfang 李彥芳, a fifth-generation descendant of Li Jing’s 李靖 brother Li Keshi 李客師, presented Emperor Wenzong (809-840) with more than a dozen rolls of imperial edicts that had been treasured within his family for almost a hundred years. These imperial edicts were granted by Emperor Gaozu (566-635) and Emperor Taizong (598-649) to Li Jing, one of the most respected ministers of the era, and one who had made a great contribution to the founding of the Tang empire. It is especially noteworthy that: ‘Among these imperial edicts, four rolls bore the

handwriting of Emperor Taizong.’<sup>194</sup> It is said that Emperor Wenzong valued the imperial edicts with Emperor Taizong’s calligraphy so much that he could not put them down without having copies created. Professional calligraphers were commissioned to make copies of the edicts, then the originals were sent back to Li Yanfang.<sup>195</sup>

How, when considered in the light of the administrative procedures involved in the issuing of imperial edicts, can we understand the conflict that arises from the above paragraph’s indication that Emperor Taizong used to write imperial rescripts to Li Ji in person, rather than entrusting official-calligraphers to write them? Indeed, in some occasions, including the case of Li Yanfang, we find that the Tang rulers deliberately deployed calligraphy in distinctive personal styles in writing imperial rescripts intended for correspondence with their subjects. These exceptional cases can be read in two ways. First, the Tang emperors truly executed the calligraphy of imperial edicts in person. What else could be more serious and closer to an emperor’s own thoughts than imperial rescripts written by the emperor himself? Second, the imperial rescripts were not prepared directly at the hands of the emperor, but rather were written by other calligraphers, commanded to deliberately emulate the emperor’s calligraphic style, in order to create an illusion that the imperial rescripts had been executed by the emperor in person.

Due to a lack of records, this phenomenon of ghost-writers for the ‘imperial writing’ in the Tang dynasty remains largely obscure. In contrast, scholarship on the Song dynasty has uncovered the identities of the people who played this role of ghost-writers for the Song

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<sup>194</sup> 內四卷太宗文皇帝筆跡. *JTS*, 67: 2482.

<sup>195</sup> *JTS*, 67: 2482-2483.

emperors, and revealed significant diversity, ranging from officials close to the emperors, to eunuchs, and to palace ladies.<sup>196</sup> Since the ghost-writers of imperial edicts were supposed to act under the rulers' commission, imperial edicts recorded as having being written in an emperor's calligraphic style were often tacitly approved as being the emperor's handwriting. Hence, the focal question of this issue is not who played these ghost-writer roles for the Tang emperors, but rather under what circumstances the Tang emperors might feel the urge to convince recipients that their imperial rescripts had been executed in person, whether through the use of iconic calligraphic styles or via other techniques. Moreover, we must consider in what ways the belief that an imperial edict had been written by the emperors' own hand affected the relationship between a monarch as calligrapher and a subordinate as recipient.

There is no doubt that the central institutions shared the emperors' burden of administering the state, but at the same time they constrained imperial power and compromised the achievement of emperors' personal agendas, especially where these might conflict with the interests of the educated class. For the emperors, the routine participation of officials in the drafting and issue of the imperial edicts was necessary, but disadvantages were also apparent, such as jeopardizing the timeliness of an edict, leaking confidential information, enfeebling an edict's credibility as the expression of the emperor's own intent, or sowing distrust between the recipient and the emperor. Taking these disadvantages into

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<sup>196</sup> Fang Chengfeng 方誠峰, *Yubi, yubishouzhao yu Beisong Huizong chao de tongzhi fangshi* 御筆, 御筆手詔與北宋徽宗朝的統治方式 [A Study on the Imperial Brush and Imperial Brush Hand-Drafted Edicts under the Rule of Song Huizong], *Hanxue Yanjiu*, Vol. 31. Issue 3 (2013): 31-67. Lee Huishu suggests that during and after the reign of the Song dynasty Emperor Huizong, it was the court ladies who dominated the practice of ghost-writing. Lee Huishu, *Empress, Art & Agency in the Song Dynasty China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2010), 83.

consideration, the emperors' handwriting can be viewed as an anti-counterfeiting measure, a mark of the emperors' personal intentions, or sometimes as a way of circumventing the constraints imposed by the administrative system. Moreover, because of the personal nature of writing executed by the emperors, such imperial rescripts that were sent to specific recipients were suggestive tokens of imperial favour. Evidence also reveals that sending such imperial edicts out was not the end of these works' stories. It was a reciprocal process: On receiving these imperial rescripts, the recipients often responded with praise for the emperors' calligraphic excellence and, after that, as seen in the case of Li Ji, the imperial edicts were preserved carefully, inherited within the recipients' families, or even carved onto stone for public presentation. Since calligraphic excellence had been linked with one's standing as a man of letters, what made the practice more meaningful for the Tang emperors was the significance of excellent calligraphy for the improvement of their intellectual reputation and the construction of their public image. However, it is worth noting that the precondition for the roles that imperial calligraphy played in mediating social relations and fostering an emperor's public image as a civilised literatus has always been unrivalled imperial power.

### **Painting the Decree 畫敕**

In accordance with the administrative process, the emperors were supposed to sign the character *chi* 敕 [decree] in person at the end of each imperial edict to authenticate the contents of the text. I argue that each of the Tang emperors personalised the calligraphic style of the character *chi* in inscribing their approval on imperial decrees, a personalisation which on the one hand functioned as an anti-counterfeit labelling of imperial edicts, and on

the other hand signified the visible presence of imperial power. Due to the administrative efficacy and validity of imperial edicts depending on the signature of characters indicating the ruler's approval, such as *chi* or *yi*, these characters were endowed with an aura as the embodiment of imperial power.

In the Tang dynasty, the Japanese rulers learned from and emulated Tang models to reconstruct and formalize their state. Combining institutional records and the ninth century Japanese work *Ryō no Shūge* 令集解 [Collected Interpretations of the Administrative Laws], Lei Wen has recovered the drafting process of the *lunshi chishu* 論事敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs] of the Tang dynasty. First, the Secretariat drafter drafted the edict. Then the edict was presented to the emperor to allow the latter to write the date and the character *chi*, declaring that the emperor had approved the edict in person, a process which is called *hua chi* 畫敕 [Inscribing the decree]. After that, the edict, now bearing the date and the character *chi* in the emperor's hand, needed to be filed in the Secretariat and replaced with a duplicate. In the production of this duplicate, the officials of the Secretariat were required to meticulously trace the imperial handwriting of the date and character *chi*. Consequently, according to Lei Wen, those papers sent to the Chancellery and the Department of State Affairs to be put into force were the duplicates of edicts, while the originals that bore the imperial handwriting had been filed in the Secretariat.<sup>197</sup>

Even though the drafting process recovered by Lei Wen by examining the ninth century

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<sup>197</sup> Lei Wen 雷聞, "Cong S.11287 kan Tangdai lunshi chishu de chengli guocheng" 從 S. 11287 看唐代論事敕書的成立過程 [A Study on the Drafting of the *Lunshi Chishu* in the Tang Dynasty Focused on Dunhuang Document S. 11287], in *Journal of Tang Studies*, Volume 1 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1995), 323-335, 328.



Japanese *Ryō no Shūge* was applicable to the imperial edicts produced throughout the almost three hundred years of the Tang dynasty, and the *chi* characters surviving in existing imperial edicts were therefore not originals from the Tang emperors' own hands, they are still supposed to be faithful replications of the Tang emperors' handwriting. The examination of existing imperial edicts known to have gone through the formal administrative processes reveals that the character *chi* was usually written in semi-cursive script in a dramatic way, to distinguish them from the main content, which was usually executed in regular script by officials of the Secretariat. One of the extant Tang dynasty imperial edicts – the *Ci Shazhou cishi Neng Changren lunshi chishu* 賜沙州刺史能昌仁論事敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs to the Regional Inspector of Sha Prefecture Neng Changren, hereafter Imperial Rescript to Neng Changren] – preserved among the Dunhuang manuscripts, is held by the British Library in London. This imperial edict was issued in the second year of the *Jingyun* era (711) during the reign of Emperor Ruizong. (Figure. 2.1) It is noticeable that the edict is followed by a three-line colophon indicating the date along with the titles and names of the officials who were responsible for the edict's issuing, which proves that this document was the product of administrative proceedings. From the discrepancy of the styles and changes in the thickness of the brushstrokes, the calligraphy of this edict has reaffirmed that the character *chi* here was neither executed by the same hand nor by the same brush as the main content. The calligraphy of the main content of the edict was carefully and neatly done in regular script, a style which identifies the author as a calligrapher who had studied and followed the style of Chu Suiliang, characterised as it was by a strict sense of order. The characters of the main content of the imperial edict are perfectly defined and consistent in size with a fixed number of eleven characters per line. In contrast, the character *chi*, that is supposed either to have been written by Emperor Ruizong or to have faithfully reproduced that emperor's handwriting,

appears in the concluding section, in semi-cursive script, and is much larger and bolder.

Combining the institutional regulations with this physical evidence discovered in Dunhuang, we may gain a new perspective from which to examine Tang emperors' handwriting held in the Song dynasty imperial collections. A group of Tang-era imperial edicts that had been authenticated by Song dynasty court curators as the handwriting of Emperor Taizong, Emperor Zhaozong, and Emperor Xuanzong, are seen in the in the imperially issued *Chunhua getie* 淳化閣帖 [Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the *Chunhua* Period]<sup>198</sup> and *Chunxi xu mige tie* 淳熙續秘閣帖 [Sequence of Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the *Chunxi* Period].<sup>199</sup> These imperial edicts were traced, carved onto woodblocks, from which rubbings were made. The Qing dynasty scholar and calligraphy critic Wang Chang 王昶, who was the author of *Jin shi cuibian* 金石粹編 [Collection of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions], expressed his doubt about the inconsistency of Emperor Xuanzong's calligraphy as seen in the imperial edicts in the Song dynasty imperial repositories. In the entry on “Emperor Xuanzong's Reply to the Memorials of Pei Yaoqing” 玄宗批答裴耀卿等奏 in

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<sup>198</sup> For more information about the *Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*, see Patricia Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture – The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press 2008), 208. He Biqi 何碧琪, “Guoli gugong bowuyuan cang chunhua zutie yanjiu” 國立故宮博物院藏淳化祖帖研 [A Study of *Chunhua zutie* in the National Palace Museum], in *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly*, vol. 21, 2004, 57-110.

<sup>199</sup> In the twelfth year of the *Chunxi* era (1185), Emperor Xiaozong of Southern Song Period ordered all of model letters held in the imperial repository carved onto wood blocks. The collection of these rubbings made based on these wood blocks were named *Chunxi getie* 淳熙閣帖 [Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the *Chunxi* Era]. In the same year, ten volumes of *Chunxi xu mige tie* 淳熙續秘閣帖 (Sequence of Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the *Chunxi* Period) were made as well. The latter includes calligraphic works of the Jin and Tang dynasties that were collected after the Song Imperial house retreated south of the Yangtze river and established its capital at Lin'an.

*Sequence of Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunxi Period*, Wang Chang noted:

There is a hand-drafted edict by Emperor Xuanzong carved into the *Sequence of Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunxi Period*. The diameters of the characters are around seven *cun*. The brushwork is grand and imposing. Is it a regulation that edicts be hand-drafted? However, not all of the other edicts look the same. Why? <sup>200</sup>

In the paragraph above, Wang Chang raised the question of why not all imperial edicts attributed by Song court connoisseurs to Emperor Xuanzong resemble one another or follow a single format. Although Wang did not give an answer to this question, this question itself directs us to discuss the diversity of the production processes applied to imperial edicts. An examination on the imperial edicts attributed to Emperor Taizong and Emperor Gaozong reveals a similar inconsistency in calligraphy. In *Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*, many of the two emperors' imperial edicts are written in semi-cursive script, the most commonly used script for letter-writing, and end with *chi* characters which in terms of calligraphic style and the thickness of the brushstroke are consistent with the content, for example Emperor Taizong's "Zuori tie" 昨日貼 [Letter of Yesterday] (Fig. 2.2). In the meantime, there are several others, similar to the format of the *Imperial Rescript to Neng Changren*, in which the main content has been written in rigid regular script but where the ending *chi* characters (and in some cases the dates too) are in bolder semi-cursive script, such as Emperor Gaozong's "Dongdu tie" 東都貼 [Letter of East Capital] (Fig.2.3) and

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<sup>200</sup> 一為玄宗批答手敕。刻入淳熙續秘閣貼中。手敕字徑七寸許。筆勢雄偉。豈當時手敕之制如是耶。然他敕又不皆如是者。何也。JSCB, 78.1378.

“Wenguan tie” 文瓘貼 [Letter of Wenguan] (Fig.2.4), among others.<sup>201</sup> I argue that in the latter two imperial edicts what Emperor Gaozong contributed was only the calligraphy of the *chi* characters and the dates, while the rest of the edicts were written by officials serving at the Secretariat or other institutions. There are two main reasons for supporting this assertion. First, we cannot rule out the possibility that the Song dynasty court curator deliberately cut off the colophons that would have been added to the edicts and which indicated the participation of the officials in their production. Second, if the emperor had written the entire work with his own hand, it seems that there would have been no need to change brush, script and calligraphic style during the writing process.

The prominent presence of the character *chi* can first be interpreted as the emperors’ individualised design, an element that functioned as an anti-counterfeit label for imperial edicts, and second as the visible pronouncement of the emperors’ supreme authority. Since the *chi* characters in the imperial edicts might initiate the audience’s association with the monarch’s physical presence, from the level of administrative operation, the emperors’ individualised handwriting of *chi* could authenticate the content of the texts, declaring that the orders derived from the emperors’ own intentions. A comparison of the character *chi* in the rubbing of Emperor Taizong’s “Letter of Yesterday” with the rubbing of Emperor Gaozong’s “Letter of East Capital”, Emperor Ruizong’s “Imperial Rescript to Neng Changren”, and Emperor Xuanzong’s “Eulogy of Wagtail” reveals how distinct the same

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<sup>201</sup> In *Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*, “[Letter of East Capital]” was attributed to Emperor Taizong, however, according to Wang Zhuanghong’s 王壯弘 research, this work should be written by Emperor Gaozong. Wang Zhuanghong 王壯弘, *Tie xue juyao* 貼學舉要 [Key Points for Rubbing Studies] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2008), pp. 2-3.

character *chi* could be when written by different emperors (Fig. 2.5). The character *chi* 敕 is composed of two components; the left *shu* 束 and the right *li* 力. In the four emperor's designs for the character, the brushstrokes that compose the relatively simple right component 力 are generally the same, while the ways in which the four emperors structured the left component *shu* 束 are tremendously diverse, especially proved by the contrast between Emperor Gaozong's minimalism and Emperor Xuanzong's complexity. (Fig.2.5. a, d) Stylistically speaking, the brushstrokes of Emperor Xuanzong's *chi* are more forceful and distinguished by a dynamic interaction lacking in that executed by the Emperor Ruizong (Fig.2.5. c, d). In comparison, the *chi* characters written by the same emperor in different works demonstrate tremendous similarities. For instance, from the way in which the brushstrokes run and the form of the character, the two *chi* that are seen in Emperor Gaozong's "Letter of East Capital" and in his "Letter of Wang Guan" are strikingly similar, if not identical (Fig.2.6).

It is also noteworthy that, when in some cases the calligraphic style alone could not verify the authenticity of an imperial edict, for double insurance the emperors might also make special marks on the *chi* characters. An earlier example can be seen in the Sui dynasty, when, after Emperor Wen's death, his successor Emperor Yang of Sui sent the general Qutu Tong 屈突通 to Taiyuan, using an imperial edict in the name of Emperor Wen, to summon Prince Han Yang Liang 楊諒. When Emperor Wen was alive, he had secretly told Yang Liang that: 'If I summon you by imperial edict, I will add a dot in the side of the character *chi*. And, after making sure that the jade *fu* carved with a *qilin* is also matched, [only] then

can you carry out the summons.’<sup>202</sup> The result was that Yang Liang identified the edict as a forgery and launched a rebellion against Emperor Yang, traditionally believed to be Emperor Wen’s murderer.

From the perspective of administrative process, the presence of a *chi* 敕 that was believed to be written in the emperor’s handwriting could endow imperial edicts with the force that they were expected to carry. The character hence gained the status of a talisman, and as a token of imperial power, even coming to be treated as a taboo character. Those who practised these characters might be suspected of a longing for the throne, but, *vice versa*, exercising caution about writing these characters was a way of showing reverence to the supreme authority. The ninth-century collection *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 [A Miscellany of Morsels from Youyang] mentions an anecdote about Tang Emperor Gaozong and the character *chi*:

When Emperor Gaozong was first learning how to walk, he was about to play with a writing-brush. After the attendants placed papers in front of him, he doodled across the whole paper. He drew a *chi* character in cursive script in the corner of a sheet. Emperor Taizong ordered the paper be burned and warned people not to disclose this matter to outsiders.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> 若璽書召汝，於敕字之傍別加一點，又與玉麟符合者，當就征。 *JTS*, 59. 2320.

<sup>203</sup> 高宗初扶床，將戲弄筆。左右試置紙於前，乃亂畫滿紙。角邊畫處成草書敕字，太宗遽令焚之，不許傳外。 Duan Chengshi 段成式, *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 [A Miscellany of Morsels from Youyang] (Jinan: Qilu shu she, 2007), 1.

Similarly, *yi* 依 was also a character that was often signed by the Tang emperors to express consent to the ministers' reports. The *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 [*Essential Documents of the Tang Dynasty*] records that:

In the tenth year of the *Yuanhe* era (815), Reader-in-waiting to the Heir Apparent and concurrently Grand Master of Remonstrance Wei Shou made a report to the emperor: The Heir Apparent practised calligraphy of the character *yi* without writing the radical *ren*. I asked him why. He replied: 'My imperial father wrote this character to approve the memorials from the world. As a subject of the monarch, it is inappropriate for me to write this character.'<sup>204</sup>

From the two cases mentioned above, we can deduce that, due to the functional uses of the characters *chi* and *yi* as indications of the emperors' approval for the enforcement of imperial edicts, the writing of these characters gained meaning as an execution of imperial power. It is worth mentioning that these characters' auras did not come from their own literary meaning, but from the officials' consensus on their functions in the administrative process and as the embodiment of emperorship.

### 1.1 *Mochi* 墨敕 [Ink Edicts]

Besides the signature characters that indicate the ruler's approval, there is a particular genre of imperial edicts, *mochi* 墨敕 [ink edicts], that were supposed to have been written by the

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<sup>204</sup> 元和十年，皇太子侍讀，諫議大夫韋綬奏：皇太子學書至依字，輒去其傍人字。臣問其故，答曰：君父每以此字可天下之奏，臣子豈合書之。上深嘉嘆之。 *THY*, 4.52.

emperors in person. *Mochi* refers to edicts that were issued directly from the inner court without the red impressions of the Secretariat and Chancellery seals.<sup>205</sup> Nakamura Hiroichi suggests that *mochi* is a synonym for some designations of imperial edicts that are often seen in records, such as *mozhao* 墨詔 [Ink Edict], *shouzhao* 手詔 [Hand-drafted Decree], *youzhao* 優詔 [Honour-bestowing Decree] and *shouchi* 手敕 [Hand-drafted Edict].<sup>206</sup> You Ziyong's research indicates that *mochi* functioned as a supplement to the Three Departments system.<sup>207</sup> The Three Departments is a reference to the three topmost agencies of the central government: The Secretariat, the Chancellery, and the Department of State Affairs. First, *mochi* operated alongside the Three Departments, facilitating and securing the quick implementation of imperial orders. Second, *mochi* also provided an approach through which the emperors were able to send private messages and express kindness to the ministers who were the documents' recipients.<sup>208</sup> This section attempts to approach the issue of *mochi* from a rarely adopted prism of calligraphy. It examines the production and reception of the imperial edicts that bear the emperors' handwriting. I argue that what made ink edicts special to the recipients included not merely the unconventional issue and delivery procedures, but also the textual content, the symbolic meaning of the emperors' behaviour of writing in

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<sup>205</sup> Wang Shizhen 王使臻, Wang Shizhang 王使璋, and Wang Huiyue 王惠月, *Dunhuang suo chu Tang Song shudu zhengli yu yanjiu* 敦煌所出唐宋書牘整理與研究 [*The Study on the Tang Song Manuscripts and Bamboo Slips Discovered in Dunhuang*] (Chengdu: Xinan jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2016), 89.

<sup>206</sup> Nakamura Hiroichi 中村裕一, *Zui To ogen no kenkyu* 隋唐王言の研究 [*Research on the King's Words of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*] (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 2003), 354.

<sup>207</sup> It is noticeable that You Ziyong points out that *mochi* were not necessarily written by the emperors in person, as especially after the establishment of the Hanlin academy the Academicians might also have brushed the *mochi* on the emperors' behalf. You Ziyong 游自勇, "Mozhao, Mochi yu Tang Wudai de zhengwu yunxing" 墨詔, 墨敕與唐五代的政務運行 [*Mozhao, Mochi and the Administrative Operation of the Tang and the Five Dynasties*], *Lishi Yanjiu* 歷史研究 2005(5): 32-46. 46.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.



person, as well as the distinctly personal calligraphic styles employed. All of these factors can enhance the uniqueness of these imperial edicts and strengthen the personal bonds between the emperors and their subjects. In addition, being extra cautious in executing the calligraphy of edicts that were sent to particular subjects was utilised by Tang rulers as a means of presenting themselves as ‘men of letters’, which often required the recipient subjects to contribute their compliments on the imperial calligraphy in memorials, thereby completing the emperors’ performances. In this way, a tacit understanding, or even an ideal relationship based on mutual responsibility and reciprocity between monarch and minister, could be achieved.

Mount Qingcheng, in Sichuan Province, has long been regarded as one of the most important centres of Daoism and is still a host to many Daoist temples. *Datang Kaiyuan Shenwu Huangdi chishu bei* 大唐開元神武皇帝敕書碑 [The Stele of the Imperial Edict of Kaiyuan Shenwu Emperor of the Great Tang, at a size of 1.4 x 0.6 x 0.1m, stands in the Tianshi cave 天師洞 on Mount Qingcheng. The establishment of this stele was caused by a conflict between Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. Initially, a Daoist temple named Changdao 常道 was built on Mount Qingcheng. Later, a group of monks of the Buddhist temple Feifu seized the Changdao temple and kicked the Daoist priests off the mountain. To resolve the conflict, Emperor Xuanzong sent the eunuch Mao Huaijing 毛懷景 and the Daoist priest Wang Xianqing 王仙卿 as messengers to instruct the local official Zhang Jingzhong 張敬忠, who was in charge of the local affairs of the Yi prefecture, to uphold justice for the Daoist priests. An imperial edict was carried by the messengers and handed over to Zhang Jingzhong. This imperial edict is *Ci Yizhou zhangshi Zhang Jingzhong chi shu* 賜益州長史

張敬忠敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs to the Administrator of Yi Prefecture Zhang Jingzhong] (hereafter *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong*). Later, the edict was carved on the front side of *The Stele of the Imperial Edict of Kaiyuan Shenwu Emperor of the Great Tang* (Fig. 2.7).

There are three points to note about this edict. First, there is a line of inscription in front of the text of the edict, that is supposed to have been added when the edict was carved on the stele. It reads ‘Kaiyuan Shenwu Emperor of the Great Tang writes,’<sup>209</sup> which informs us that this edict was executed by Emperor Xuanzong in person. When we compare the calligraphy of the *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong* with that of *Eulogy of Wagtail* that has been attributed to Emperor Xuanzong, the unique mixture of regular script and the semi-cursive script throughout the two pieces, the right-upward tendency, and the ways of running brushes of the same characters, such as 成 and 道, reveal the tremendous similarity between these two works (Fig. 2.8, Fig. 2.9, and Fig. 2.10). Consequently, it is reasonable to believe that in this imperial edict, not only was the character *chi* executed by Emperor Xuanzong himself, but the main content of the edict was also written by the emperor. Second, the colophon mentioned in the last section, as seen in the *Imperial Rescript to Neng Changren*, which indicates the participation of the officials of the Three Departments in the production and issue of imperial edicts, is missing in the *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong*. Conversely, both the *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong* and the reply of Zhang Jingzhong, which has been carved on the reverse of the stele, mentioned the role that the eunuch Mao Huaijing 毛懷景 played in the liaison between the emperor and the minister.

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<sup>209</sup> 大唐開元神武皇帝書.

For these reasons, we can tell that the imperial rescripts did not go through the regular administrative proceedings, but rather were written by Emperor Xuanzong in person and issued directly from the court. Third, it is noteworthy that in the *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong*, apart from ordering Zhang Jingzhong to deal with this government affair, Emperor Xuanzong praised Zhang Jingzong's achievement as a capable local administrator for Yi prefecture and offered him a suit of clothes as a gift to demonstrate this imperial favour.<sup>210</sup>

These three points summarized above through the examination of the case of *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong* are the most fundamental characteristics of *mochi*. The last one in particular may lead us to the dual qualities of *mochi* as both official documents that conveyed government orders and as private letters that facilitated communication between rulers and their subjects. A careful examination of known *mochi* that were supposed to have been written by the emperors in person reveals that their texts deal not only with state affairs but also private matters, such as reporting and enquiring about someone's health, praising or offering gifts to the subjects, etc. What else could make recipients feel that they were appreciated and treated with respect by the emperor, if not a letter personally executed by the emperor? In the "Letter of Yesterday" that had been attributed to Emperor Taizong and collected in the *Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*, the emperor wrote:

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<sup>210</sup> For the text of the "Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong", see Gao Wen 高文 and Gao Chenggang 高成剛, *Sichuang lidai beike* 四川歷代碑刻 [*Stele Inscriptions of Successive Dynasties in Sichuan*] (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1990), 102.

Since yesterday my health and the ability to walk have recovered. I just heard that you are out of sorts. How is it now? Decreed.<sup>211</sup>

Although we cannot identify the recipient of the letter, the textual information of the edict alone presents to us a harmonious and warm emperor-subject relationship that is reflected through exchanging personal health details as might be seen among friends or relations.

According to Bai Qianshen's research, as early as the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), letters had come to be appreciated and collected as calligraphic works.<sup>212</sup> Driven by a love of outstanding calligraphy, people copied the letters and made them into rubbings. Through these processes, texts intended for a private readership reached large audiences. Bai Qianshen argued that this phenomenon is a culture of letter writing specific to China.<sup>213</sup> With specific reference to the Tang dynasty, as a passionate admirer and collector of the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi (306-361), Emperor Taizong had built up a huge collection of works. It is noteworthy that the majority of these works were Wang Xizhi's personal letters.<sup>214</sup> Within this cultural context, the Tang cultural elites, including the emperors, would have been aware that their own letters might be collected and appreciated where they showed excellence in calligraphy, so it is understandable that they might both put conscious effort into executing calligraphy in letter-writing and expect positive feedback on their calligraphic achievements from the letters' recipients.

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<sup>211</sup> 昨日來體履似漸可。始聞卿不佳。旦來何似。敕。

<sup>212</sup> Bai Qianshen, "Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public," in *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collections*, eds. Robert E. Harrist, Jr and Wen C. Fong (Princeton, NJ: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 381-399.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

After receiving an imperial edict, ministers were supposed to submit *biao* 表 [report] or *Zhuang* 狀 [memorials] as a response to the emperor's order. If an imperial edict was written in the emperor's own hand and delivered to a close official, in addition to replying to any particular issues that might have arisen on state affairs, the recipient would often comment on the emperor's calligraphic performance as shown on the edict. In this reciprocal administrative communication, the emperor's calligraphy created a dialogue distinct from the discussion on state affairs, enabling the emergence of a layer of private relationship between the emperors and the ministers that deviated somewhat from the daily interactions oriented towards public affairs. For instance, in the first year of the *Changqing* era (821), a revolt erupted in Zhen Prefecture 鎮州, and the Military Commissioner 節度使 Tian Hongzheng 田弘正, along with his family members and subordinates, were killed by the rebel army.<sup>215</sup> Emperor Muzong (795-824) sent an imperial edict of twenty-three characters written in his own hand to Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) who at that time occupied the official positions of Drafter in the Secretariat 中書舍人 and Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts 翰林學士承旨.<sup>216</sup> The imperial edict briefly informed Yuan Zhen that the emperor was planning to appoint Ma Yuanyi as the new Military Commissioner of Zhen Prefecture to conquer the rebellion. In response, in the “Xie yuzha zhuang” 謝御札狀 [Expression of Gratitude for the Imperial Edict], after replying to Emperor Muzong's political decision, Yuan Zhen shifted topic to express his admiration to the emperor's excellent calligraphy,

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<sup>215</sup> *JTS*, 16.490.

<sup>216</sup> See Yuan Zhen's “Xie yuzha zhuang” 謝御札狀 (Expression of Gratitude for the Imperial Edict), in Zhou Xianglu 周相錄, ed. and comm., *Yuan Zhen ji jiaozhu* 元稹集校注 [Annotations on the Collection of Yuan Zhen's Literary Works] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 952.

acclaiming that: ‘The imperial writing arrives suddenly. The words from heaven shine and glow. Dancing phoenix flies back and forth around the arms and sleeves. Flying dragon looks around the light-yellow silk.’<sup>217</sup>

Since it had become a common practice among the cultural elites in the Tang dynasty to appreciate letters with excellent calligraphy for aesthetic value, emphasizing that edicts were executed by their own hands and putting cautious effort into executing calligraphy in the writing of these edicts functioned as a showcase for the emperors to manifest their cultural achievement. We can interpret the compliments made by ministers (as the recipients of the edicts) as an integral component of the showcase, which could not only satisfy the emperors’ vanity but also further encourage them to stick to their roles as patron and practitioner of culture. In the *Collection of Liu Yuxi’s Literary Works*, there is a *Xie shouzhao biao* 謝手詔表 [Report of Gratitude for A Hand-drafted Edict]. The *biao* mentions how, on the back of the imperial edict, the emperor wrote three characters “zhen zi shu” 朕自書 indicating that this imperial edict had been written by the emperor in person. In the *Report of Gratitude for A Hand-drafted Edict*, Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-843) wrote to the emperor:

The Imperial Commissioner Yan Zhongxin arrived, announcing the imperial edict, greeting and granting me the hand-drafted edict. (I) bowed down to hold the purple mud and knelt down to receive the golden letter... In your sagacity and wisdom Your Majesty condescended to wield the writing brush in person. (The imperial edict)

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<sup>217</sup> 宸翰忽臨，天章煥發，舞鳳回翔於懷袖，飛龍顧盼於縑緇。Zhou Xianglu 周相錄, ed. and comm., *Yuan Zhen ji jiaozhu* 元稹集校注 [*Annotations on the Collection of Yuan Zhen’s Literary Works*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 951.

descends from the heaven of the ninth level, shining with five colours. At first glance, I am delighted in seeing the image that lights the sky as the flashing glory of a distant candle. Then I am surprised by the trace of the dropping dew that extends the bounty. The cranes spiral in a variety of postures, the clouds flow high and low to present exquisiteness. The gorgeous writing, overflowing with colour, refreshes minds and pleases eyes.<sup>218</sup>

In the paragraph above, Liu Yuxi recounted the situation in which he received the emperor's imperial edict and raved about the emperor's calligraphy with a group of rhetorical metaphors. It is reasonable to assume that, regardless of the real quality of the monarch's calligraphy, Liu Yuxi's compliments were also made through his possibly speculative estimation of the emperor's expectations.

What could make these compliments more meaningful for an emperor was the recipient's attempt to relate the emperor's calligraphic achievements to their qualification as a competent ruler. In *Xie chishu ji cailing biao* 謝敕書及綵綾表 [Report of Gratitude for an Imperial Edict and Colourful Silk Twill], Li Yong 李邕 (764-746) claims that: 'Your Majesty is the master of both the pen and the sword, ravelling out the principle of governance. (Your Majesty) is both deity and saint, clarifying the essence of nature.'<sup>219</sup> Li

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<sup>218</sup> 中使閭忠信至, 奉宣聖旨存問, 兼賜臣手詔。拜捧紫泥, 跪伸金簡...特紆睿思, 親灑仙毫; 降自九重, 粲然五色。初喜麗天之象, 遠燭輝光; 旋驚垂露之蹤, 曲覃霈澤。鸞鶴迴翔而變態, 煙雲舒捲以呈姿。賦彩飛文, 聳神蕩目。Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-843), *Liu Yuxi Ji* 劉禹錫集 [Collection of Literary Works by Liu Yuxi] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), 104.

<sup>219</sup> 八體神變。迴龍鳳之殊姿。五色暈開。動雲霞之仙氣...伏惟陛下一武一文。廓彌綸之道。乃神乃聖。疏造化之元。Li Yong 李邕 (764-746), *QTXB*. 261.2952.

Yong extended his praise for Emperor Xuanzong's calligraphic achievement to include an acknowledgement of the virtues of the emperor as a capable and legitimate ruler in possession of the mandate of heaven. Hence a tacit understanding between the monarch and the minister was achieved through the emperor's effort to present himself as a 'man of letters' and the minister's compliment on the former's cultural achievement, represented by calligraphic talent. Through this kind of interaction, an ideal ruler-minister relationship emerged, a relationship that was defined by mutual responsibility or reciprocity between the two parties, with the latter effectively acting as an equal partner.

At first glance, this relationship develops because of the aesthetic value of the calligraphy, but in essence, it was due to its symbolic meaning as the manifestation of imperial favour. The edicts that bear the imperial calligraphy were collectable objects for the recipients and their descendants, regarded as the most precious items in the family collections. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, after more than a hundred years, Li Yanfang, the fifth-generation descendant of Li Jing's brother Li Keshi, could still present four rolls of imperial edicts bearing the handwriting of Emperor Taizong to Emperor Wenzong.<sup>220</sup> Similar discourse can also be read in the *Report of Gratitude for a Hand-drafted Edict*, where Liu Yuxi claimed that '(Such a masterpiece) should be a national treasure. What a privilege it is (for me) to preserve it at home'.<sup>221</sup> Yuan Zhen even said that: 'It is not enough

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<sup>220</sup> *JTS*, 67. 2482-2483.

<sup>221</sup> 恭惟國寶，何幸家藏？Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-843), *Liu Yuxi Ji* 劉禹錫集 [*Collection of Literary Works of Liu Yuxi*] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), 104.



to merely pass (the imperial edict) on to descendants. It should be engraved onto my skin and bones. (I), your humble servant, feel extreme happiness and supreme glory.<sup>222</sup>

The receipt of an imperial edict, especially an Imperial Hand-drafted Edict, was not merely an abstract token of imperial power or a signifier of prestige relating to social status, but rather something that could, in some occasions, bring real benefits or protection to ministers and their families. Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697-781) was a general who ended the Anshi Rebellion and participated in a series of expeditions after that. During the reign of Emperor Suzong, Guo Ziyi achieved great victories against rebels and was in charge of a large army. When Emperor Suzong's son Emperor Daizong ascended the throne, the new emperor was cautious about Guo's growing power, and the eunuch Cheng Yuanzhen 程元振 suggested he should strip Guo of his command over the military and send him to guard Emperor Suzong's mausoleum.<sup>223</sup> After coming to know of the ruler's intent, Guo Ziyi submitted a memorial that expressed his loyalty to and sacrifices for the Li imperial house. At the end of the memorial Guo made special mention of Emperor Suzong having bestowed on him more than a thousand imperial edicts, that manifested his success in the short term and would be treasures handed down within his family for generations.<sup>224</sup> Along with the memorial, Guo Ziyi submitted twenty scrolls of Imperial Hand-drafted Edicts 手詔 that were written by Emperor Suzong. After receiving Guo's memorial and his father's Imperial Hand-drafted Edicts, Emperor Daizong replied that:

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<sup>222</sup> 豈獨傳之子孫，便可鏤於肌骨。微臣無任踴躍光榮之至。Zhou Xianglu 周相錄, ed. and comm., *Yuan Zhen ji jiaozhu* 元稹集校注 [*Annotations on the Collection of Yuan Zhen's Literary Works*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 951.

<sup>223</sup> *JTS*, 120. 3454.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

Being neither virtuous nor wise, I have made the minister distressed and anxious. This is my fault. I feel very guilty about this. Please do not worry about it.<sup>225</sup>

Besides Guo Ziyi's sincere words in his memorial, Emperor Suzong's Imperial Hand-drafted Edicts would also have played a major role in prompting Emperor Daizong to change his attitude, even to the point of making such a serious confession to Guo. For Emperor Daizong, demonstrating respect to the Emperor Suzong's Imperial Hand-drafted Edicts was not only relevant to the shaping of his image as a filial son, but ultimately to the legitimacy of his rule as a successor of the throne. To some extent, these imperial edicts believed to be written by the hands of emperors functioned as 'privilege protection' in the interest of the recipients and even of their descendants, the effectiveness of which continued throughout the whole dynasty. Hence, it is not surprising to see that, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, after the passing of more than a hundred years, Li Yanfang could still present four rolls of imperial edicts to Emperor Wenzong that bore the handwriting of Emperor Taizong.<sup>226</sup>

### ***Zhushu yuzha* 朱書御札 [Vermilion Writing Imperial Letter]**

Apart from the *mochi* 墨敕 [Ink Edict], there is another particular genre of imperial edict that was likewise supposed to have been written by Tang emperors in person. This is *zhushu yuzha* 朱書御札 [Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing], a form emerging in the late years of

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<sup>225</sup> 朕不德不明, 俾大臣憂疑, 朕之過也。朕甚自愧, 公勿以為慮。 *JTS*, 120.3455.

<sup>226</sup> *JTS*, 67. 2482-2483.

the Tang dynasty when the central government was weak and power was in the hands of the military at the local level. Very different from the Ink Edict form that was often adopted by emperors to show imperial favour to their subjects, sending an Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing was more of a desperate measure taken at particularly dangerous times by emperors seeking support from ministers or warlords. The Song scholar Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020) mentioned that: ‘In the late Tang, the Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing was used to request military force from provincial commands. Hence, during the years of danger, (the emperors) utilised this to prove authenticity.’<sup>227</sup> During the reign of Emperor Zhaozong, with the disappearance of imperial government authority, the central administrative system collapsed. The information exchange between emperors and their subjects could no longer be guaranteed in terms of either timeliness or authenticity. In the edict sent to Wang Jian 王建, Emperor Zhaozong, who had been imprisoned by Zhu Wen, complained that: ‘Letters and edicts cannot be exchanged normally. Some of the regional governors and feudal princes believe in forged imperial edicts.’<sup>228</sup> In this Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing genre, since the emperors’ priorities lay in authenticating the text of the letters and sending out the message that the situation was an emergency, rather than in demonstrating their calligraphic achievements, in the interpretation of these works the aesthetic value of imperial handwriting usually gave way to its symbolic confirmation of the presence of the emperor.

The most renowned imperial edict that functioned similarly to the Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing is Emperor Zhaozong’s (867-904) *Yi jin shu* 衣襟書 [Letter on Clothing],

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<sup>227</sup> 唐末有朱書御札，徵兵方鎮。蓋危難中以此示信。Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020), *Yang Wengong tanyuan* 楊文公談苑 [Garden of Conversation with Yang the Literatus] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 23.

<sup>228</sup> 雖有書詔。不可復通。藩鎮諸侯。或信偽詔。QTWXB, 91.1081.

that was composed and issued in times of emergency. ‘Emperor Zhaozong wrote an edict on his vest, which was made of Wu brocade, asking Qian Liu about the future direction and informing him of the national crisis.’<sup>229</sup> During the Song dynasty, the *Letter on Clothing* became part of the imperial calligraphic collection, and the entry on Emperor Zhaozong in the *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* records:

Tang Emperor Zhaozong, name Ye, the seventh son of Emperor Yizong. Being wise and intelligent, he was fond of calligraphy. Initially, holding the ambition to restore Tang power, he craved talented men who could assist him in designing a strategy for ruling the state, but pathetically no one came to help him. During that period, Qian Liu ruled over Zhexi as Military Commissioner. Even though nominally he bowed his head to the emperor and made tributes, he was a real hero who ruled by force in the region. Emperor Zhaozong, who opened his heart sincerely, was able to befriend (Qian Liu) and keep him under control. Until the end of the Tang household, Qian Liu remained loyal and did not develop any rebellious intentions. It is truly understandable why Emperor Zhaozong was able to make people to follow him. When he granted the *Letter on Clothes* to Qian Liu, he must have had special intentions for him. Emperor Zhaozong’s calligraphy is not renowned in the world, but his determination to restore his power can be observed in this work.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> 昭宗以吳綾汗衫寫詔，問道與錢鏐，告以國難。Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020), *Yang Wengong tanyuan* 楊文公談苑 [*Garden of Conversation with Yang the Literatus*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 23.

<sup>230</sup> 唐昭宗諱曄，懿宗第七子也。為人明倩，多喜作書字。初有志興復，慨然思得非常之材，相圖回治具，惜無以助之，當是時錢鏐以節制領浙西，雖稱臣不乏貢賦。而實霸有一方，信英雄也。然昭宗於此乃能籠絡駕馭，推赤心置人腹中，使鏐終唐室而不二心者，昭宗實有以歸之也。觀其以衣襟書賜鏐，當時不能無意。其書雖不稱於世，而興復之志於斯可見矣。XHSP, 1.17.

The above paragraph claims that Qian Liu responded to the sincerity expressed by Emperor Zhaozong in the *Letter on Clothes* and repaid this with loyalty. Ebrey suggests that in the *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* the entries for twelve rulers express recurring themes, with strong calligraphy usually accompanying strong personalities, and some of the best emperor-calligraphers being men with real accomplishment and military talent.<sup>231</sup> Here, in the entry on Emperor Zhaozong, the Song court critics, or the curators serving Emperor Song Huizong (1082-1135) also attempt to link Emperor Zhaozong's calligraphic performance in a positive way to his political ambitions of restoring Tang power. The political function of the emperor's Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing thus appears to have been exaggerated and glorified by the Song curators. We must also note, however, that in reality Qian Liu neither prevented another warlord Zhu Wen (later Emperor Taizu (852-912) of the Later Liang) from killing Emperor Zhaozong nor protested against the establishment of the Later Liang regime. On the contrary, soon after the death of the emperor, Qian Liu submitted himself to Zhu Wen's rule and was granted the title King of Wuyue.<sup>232</sup>

Similar to the correlation between official-calligraphers' calligraphic accomplishments and their performance in official careers, as reflected in the tradition of calligraphic criticism, the aesthetic qualities of Emperor Zhaozong's calligraphy were not necessarily poorer than those of other Tang rulers at the dynasty's prime (such as Emperor Taizong and Emperor Xuanzong). There is, however, no record mentioning that any late Tang minister or general

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<sup>231</sup> Patricia Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture – The Collections of Emperor Huizong*, (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press 2008), 232-233.

<sup>232</sup> Xue Juzheng, *Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史 [*Old History of the Five Dynasties*] (960), (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1976), 133: 1768.

who had received the Imperial Letters in Vermilion Writing replied to Emperor Zhaozong with compliments on the ruler's calligraphic achievements. What was worse, in some cases, not to mention demonstrating cultural attainment or arousing recipients' emotions of gratitude, this special genre of imperial edict failed to fulfil even its most basic goal of issuing orders. According to the *Old History of Tang*, in the third year of the *Tianfu* era (903), Emperor Zhaozong was worried that a secret collaboration between two warlords, Li Maozhen 李茂貞 and Zhu Wen, might threaten his rule. The emperor, therefore, successively sent four imperial edicts and three Imperial Letters in Vermilion Writing to ask minister Cui Yin 崔胤 for help.<sup>233</sup> Despite how privileged this genre of imperial edict was supposed to be and how desperate Emperor Zhaozong was, Cui refused to respond to the emperor's call on the pretext of illness.<sup>234</sup> Here I may argue that it was the loss of power that caused Emperor Zhaozong's calligraphy to lack appropriate respect and compliments from his subjects as the recipients of imperial edicts. In terms of an evaluatory mechanism of the emperors' calligraphy during and after the Tang dynasty, other processes and factors were in play alongside the aesthetic quality of the calligraphy. Only when imperial calligraphy worked with real political power and military force could an emperor's brush play an effective role in building direct links to subjects and fostering the emperor's public image as a civilised ruler.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The investigation of the role that calligraphy played in administrative textual culture reveals not only the pervasive coexistence of functional needs and aesthetic requirements in the

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<sup>233</sup> *JTS*, 177. 4586.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

production of written pieces, but also the fundamental importance of political power to the effectiveness of imperial calligraphy in mediating relations between emperors and ministers. In the process of the production and reception of imperial edicts, the Tang emperors were first patrons of calligraphers through providing positions to those officials who possessed calligraphic talent. Alongside increasing political influence and ascent through the official ranks, the official-calligraphers' calligraphic fame could increase further among their contemporaries and critics of later periods, which largely explains why the most renowned Tang calligraphers were often high-ranking politicians at the same time. As the Song dynasty critic Zhao Mingcheng said, 'it is virtue rather than skill that can immortalise a gentleman's fame'.<sup>235</sup> Many cases have proved that an official-calligrapher's virtue could only be perceived and magnified through a prominent official career.

Second, in some occasions, instead of assigning the task of drafting imperial edicts to official-calligraphers serving in the Secretariat or to a variety of scholarly academies, the emperors were themselves prepared to act as calligraphers who executed imperial edicts in person. The Tang emperors' calligraphy was subject to the evaluation of ministers as connoisseur recipients who might send back memorials including their comments on the imperial brushwork. The imperial edicts that bore imperial calligraphy were not only supposed to be able to motivate the recipients to recompense the emperors with their loyalty and service, but also often prompted the recipients to respond with lyrical praise of the emperors' calligraphic and intellectual achievements. Beyond that, those imperial edicts that bore traces of the imperial brush could usually gain preservation within their recipients' families, or were even copied and carved into steles, thereby reaching a wider audience, as

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<sup>235</sup> 以此知士所以自著於不朽者，果在德而不在藝也。JSL, 25. 326.

both symbols of honour and objects of aesthetic appreciation in their own right. Accordingly, the practice of writing imperial edicts in person, executed with outstanding calligraphy, was conducive to the construction of the emperors' public image as benevolent and civilised rulers.

Third, another point to note is that, like other arts, the judgement of one's calligraphy was not solely determined by the aesthetic performance of the brush, but also intertwined with other socially constructed ideas. As Wolff suggests, 'Judgements and evaluations of works and schools of art, determining their subsequent place in literary and art history, are not simply individual and "purely aesthetic" decisions, but socially enable and socially constructed events.'<sup>236</sup> In the tradition of Chinese calligraphic criticism, the evaluation of one's calligraphy has been often related to the calligrapher's personality and achievements. Amy McNair has summarized this idea as "characterology."<sup>237</sup> Specific to the evaluation of calligraphy by official-calligraphers and emperor-calligraphers, the calligraphic fame of the former has been often associated with their official careers; likewise, what determined the commentary on an emperor's calligraphy and the effectiveness of their calligraphy in mediating relationships with their ministers was the assessment of their military and political achievements. The Imperial Letter in Vermilion Writing appeared frequently during the reign of Emperor Zhaozong and Emperor Xizong when imperial power existed in name only. Writing this genre of imperial edict in person was no longer a means by which

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<sup>236</sup> Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, (Houndmills and London: The Macmillan Press, 1993), 40.

<sup>237</sup> In Amy McNair's words, 'characterology is based on the belief that because the style of the inner being and the outer person is unitary, moral character can be deduced from an examination of a person's external manifestations, such as appearance, behaviour, or aesthetic endeavour.' Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 1.



emperors manifested their calligraphic achievement, but rather a last resort for requesting support from ministers or warlords. It is undeniable that, in any sense, the emperors' acts of executing imperial edicts in person to particular subjects were ways of humbling themselves and attempts to build personal bonds with their subjects. In comparison to real political and military strength, calligraphic achievement can only be regarded as an additional benefit to the achievement of a competent ruler. Hence, if an emperor's political performance was weak, the application of his calligraphy to imperial edicts was less likely to gain praise from its recipients, not to mention fair judgement from critics of later periods.

## CHAPTER THREE: CALLIGRAPHY AND DEATH RITUALS AT THE TANG COURTS

Funerary writing is a highly appropriate focus for a discussion of the social uses of calligraphy in establishing and retaining kinship ties at the Tang courts. The belief that brushwork is an external manifestation of the emotional state under which a calligrapher executed a piece has contributed considerably to the charisma of calligraphy as an expressive form of art. Of all the human emotions, sadness and sorrow at the loss of a loved one seems most likely to bring forth an audience's empathy. In the Tang period a complete funeral cycle would have been expected to include three components: mourning, burial, and sacrifice.<sup>238</sup> Combining textual records and archaeological discoveries, we can detect the presence of calligraphy in each of these three stages, associated with a variety of existing forms of funerary writings, ranging from handwritten pieces placed before coffins to stone inscriptions on tomb steles and entombed epitaphs. Some of these exist only as textual records without material remains, while others might be recovered through archaeological excavation. Those funerary writings that were executed by relatives of the deceased may provide a unique window into the calligraphic representation of emotions provoked by the loss of family members.

Among the several thousand Tang funerary inscriptions, around twenty are known to be written in the hands of one or other of the Tang emperors. The identities of the tomb owners to whom these *yushu* 御書 'imperial writing' inscriptions were dedicated include imperial

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<sup>238</sup> Qi Dongfang, "Funerary Perception and Ritual Institution of Imperial Tang," *Chinese Archaeology*, Jan. 2007, 170-176. 170.

family members, high-ranking officials, and even favoured ministers' ancestors. In an examination of Tang imperial tombs and the 'accompanying burials' that were designed to reward meritorious ministers by permitting burial alongside the emperors, Howard Wechsler put forward the concept of the 'political family' and argued that through it the Tang rulers expanded the concept of the 'family' beyond blood or marriage ties, creating a more inclusive and politically-oriented group.<sup>239</sup> Like the size, shape and siting of a tomb that together function to indicate the occupant's relative standing in the political family, the presence of 'imperial writing' on a tomb stele manifests the superior status of the deceased. The tomb occupant might be a sister of Emperor Xuanzong like Grand Princess Liangguo 涼國長公主, a prestigious minister like Pei Guangting 裴光庭, or the father of a favoured minister like Yang Yuanyan 楊元琰. Investigation of the historical context and social relations behind the production of those funerary inscriptions for which calligraphy was executed by the Tang rulers in person can advance our understanding of the mechanism through which Tang courts operated as an 'extended family'. The connections between members of this 'extended family' might not be blood or marriage ties, but rather common political interests under the auspices of Confucian ethics that acclaim the convergence around ministers of an emperor's roles as both 'father' within a family and 'ruler' within the realm.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the traditional belief suggesting that it is difficult to infer emotions of mourning or grief from calligraphy alone. Some of the most renowned calligraphic works, such as Yan Zhenqing's *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming*, are known for their emotional expressiveness. However, the point to note here is that the effort invested in

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<sup>239</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 160.

reading emotion through the visual effects offered by calligraphy may only pay off in works of semi-cursive and cursive scripts, and not those executed in regular, seal, or clerical scripts, all of which are characterised by strict rules for wielding the brush. Given that, I suggest that what is fundamental in discerning the emotions of calligraphic works for mourning and their social functions is not the mystical belief that calligraphy is an external manifestation of the writer's inner world, but rather the textual content, interpersonal relationships behind the making and reception of these works and the identities of the figures involved in these processes.

In the second section, this chapter moves to the examination of three groups of imperial court members' tomb writings. The main findings in this section include: First, the personal relationships functioning in the commission, production and reception processes of the funerary writings served as a window from which we can peer into a human side of the interaction at Tang courts seldom mentioned in previous research on Tang history, such as affinities between sister and brother, husband and wife, mother and son. Second, almost all known calligraphic works by Tang Emperors that are relevant to death rituals exist in the form of inscriptions on the tomb steles, rather than epitaphs buried within tombs, which signifies the public nature of the presence of 'imperial writing' in death rituals. The public exhibition of 'imperial writing' made these tomb steles powerful political statements at the time of their erection. They acted as a symbolic vehicle for the emperors' public presence, as well as gave imperial sanction to the inscriptions' comments, on both the tomb occupants and the historical events in which they had been involved. Third, the presence of 'imperial writing' on the tomb steles of court members was, on the surface, a dramatic demonstration of the noble social status enjoyed by the tombs' occupants, a manifestation of imperial

favour, and a proof of the emperors' devotion to Confucian family values, but often, on a deeper level, served more specific and concrete political agendas of those rulers involved in the tomb steles' commission or production.

### 3.1 Emotional Expression in Calligraphy

Bernard Bosanquet claimed that the central problem of the aesthetic attitude is “how a feeling can be got into an object.”<sup>240</sup> The point of the aesthetic attitude therefore rests with ‘the adequate fusion of body and soul, where the soul is a feeling, and the body is expression, without residue on either side’.<sup>241</sup> Almost all calligraphic works are meaningful writings expressing the calligraphers' feelings with particular functions within the context of their production. When we read a calligraphic work's text as an explicit statement of the feeling (the soul) and regard calligraphy as the visual expression (the body), what's interesting about this is the degree to which the calligraphy has agreed with, or confirmed, the feeling stated in the texts. With specific regard to the genre of funerary writings, how can we understand the emotional character of calligraphy applied to the transcription of funeral inscriptions on tomb steles ostensibly bearing the mourning of kith and kin for the deceased? To explore this question, I shall begin with a discussion of the traditional theories that address the expressiveness of calligraphy. I argue that interpreting mourning works through the reflection of emotions supposedly embodied by calligraphy is problematical. This is especially clear when one considers that the vast majority of known Tang funerary writings, such as inscriptions on tomb steles and entombed epitaphs, were executed in regular, seal, and clerical scripts. These scripts are

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<sup>240</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetic* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1915), 74.

<sup>241</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetic*, 75.

marked by highly regulated brushwork and strict character structures, which on the one hand limit the possibility of reading emotions through calligraphic performance, and on the other reflects the Tang aesthetic pursuit of a solemn and restrained demonstration of grief in funerary writing. Having disassociated these works, therefore, from the traditional belief that calligraphy is the manifestation of one's inner world, examination of the identity of the calligraphers and their interpersonal relationships with the recipients to whom these funerary writings were devoted may provide more evidence for discerning the emotions and meanings carried by these works.

The 'three perfections' – poetry, calligraphy and painting – have long been regarded as intimately connected expressive arts in the Sinitic context.<sup>242</sup> In a discussion of the legitimacy of the three perfections, Damien Freeman argues that they do not achieve unity in one work by illustrating or imitating each other, but rather each element expresses emotion in its own way through a different artistic medium.<sup>243</sup> In this regard, a masterpiece should bring together all of the elements of the expressive arts and offer its audience a harmonized expressive experience.<sup>244</sup> Robert Harrist suggests that, of the three perfections, 'poetry and calligraphy, as vehicles of linguistic communication, share a unique bond in their mutual dependence on a conventionalised system of spoken and written signs.'<sup>245</sup> The alliance of calligraphy and literature within one work should not

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<sup>242</sup> Michal Sullivan has examined the intimate relationship among poetry, calligraphy, and painting in Chinese culture, with the illustrations of thirty-four works dating from the fifth century CE to the People's Republic. Michal Sullivan, *The Three Perfections: Chinese Painting, Poetry and Calligraphy* (New York: George Braziller, 1980).

<sup>243</sup> Damien Freeman, *Art's Emotions: Ethics, Expression and Aesthetic Experience* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2012), 2.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Robert Harrist, "The Two Perfections: Reading Poetry and Calligraphy," 281.

merely lie in the fact that a poem endows calligraphy with textual meaning and at the same time calligraphy gives a poem visual representation, but also in the synchronization of the two arts' respective expressiveness of the feelings and emotions of the author. Indeed, there is no lack in the acclaim for the achievement of emotional unity expressed by texts and calligraphic forms in the Tang dynasty discourse of calligraphy. Another Tang calligrapher and critic Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (646-691) in his famous work *Treatise on Calligraphy (Shu Pu)*, took Wang Xizhi as an example, and illuminated the intimate relationship between the calligrapher's mental states when he executed certain works, the themes of the works' texts, and the calligraphic performance:

When Wang Xizhi wrote *The Eulogy of Yue Yi*, his feelings were mostly melancholy; when he wrote *The Poem Praising Dongfang Shuo's Portrait*, his mind was dwelling on unusual matters; in *The Yellow Court Classic*, he revelled in vacuity; in *The Exhortations of the Imperial Tutor*, he twisted and turned in response to conflicting views; in writing about the happy gathering at the Orchid Pavilion, his thoughts roamed and his spirit soared; in *The Formal Notification*, his feelings were predominantly sad. This is what is meant by the statement "When dealing with pleasure one laughs; when writing of sorrow one sighs."<sup>246</sup>

Sun Guoting enumerated six of Wang Xizhi's best-known works and related them to corresponding emotions conveyed by the content of each text, indicating how, through twisting and turning the brushes, the calligrapher achieved emotional unity between

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<sup>246</sup> Sun Guoting, *Shu pu* 書譜 [*Treatises on Calligraphy*], Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy: Introduced, Translated, and Annotated by Chang Ch'ung-ho and Hans H. Frankel. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 10-11.

calligraphy and literature. In some senses, Sun's theory explains why Xizhi's works could express deep feeling and harmony, successfully arousing audiences' sympathies. The correlation between Xizhi's calligraphic representation and the emotions his works claimed to embody might have inspired later calligraphers to pursue the same unity between feeling, hand, and brush in their practice. Once acknowledging that emotional expression is critical to the validity of calligraphy as an artistic form and a criterion for the judgement of a work's excellence, I cannot help but ask in what ways a calligrapher's feelings could be made visible through his handwriting and how to distinguish between genuine artistic sensitivity and mere sentimental display.

The Tang dynasty calligrapher Yan Zhenqing's *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming* 祭姪文稿 [Ji zhi wengao] might serve as an exemplary case responding to the two questions mentioned above. As one of the most renowned calligraphic works expressing grief, the *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming* is a haunting eulogy written by the great master calligrapher Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709-785) for his late nephew Yan Jiming 顏季明. After the outbreak of the An-Shi Rebellion, Yan Jiming and Yan Zhenqing's cousin Yan Gaoqing 顏杲卿, who served as commandery governor of Changsha, were successively executed by the rebels. Eventually, one of Yan Gaoqing's surviving sons, Yan Quanming 顏泉明, was released from the rebels' prison with the head of his brother Jiming, planning to bury it after returning to Chang'an. Within this context, Yan Zhenqing wrote a eulogy for his nephew, phrasing the work in a way that is full of emotional expression, as seen below:



A traitorous official [Wang Chengye] failed the rescue and so the orphaned city was besieged and compelled to submit. The father was taken and the son killed, the nest tipped and the eggs overturned. Heaven has no regret for this calamity, but who else could cause such suffering? I remember how you met with your cruel death, but how could we ransom all those people? Alas, how I grieve!<sup>247</sup>

Amy McNair suggests that the enduring appeal of this work lies in ‘the immediacy inherent in the draft form, the simplicity of the calligraphic manner, the monumental yet personal events it describes, and the emotion in Yan Zhenqing’s voice.’<sup>248</sup> It is not hard for us to observe the distress and grief that Yan Zhenqing expressed convincingly and powerfully through both its literary composition and calligraphic representation. While the majority of this work is written in a relatively calm semi-cursive script, it ends with several lines of dramatic cursive script, reflecting the increasing intensity of Yan Zhenqing’s emotions as the draft progressed.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, the constantly changing and uneven ink colour was caused by the urgency of the writing process, some characters written with a brush that had not been fully charged with ink, revealing the calligrapher’s eagerness in expressing his indignation at the disastrous experience and the cruel treatment of his beloved nephew and cousin. (Figure 3.1) In any sense, Yan Zhenqing’s *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming* is an extraordinary work that has achieved harmonious unity between the calligraphic representation and the emotional distress expressed in the text. However, we have to admit that, to a large extent, it is the dramatic historical context

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<sup>247</sup> Translated by Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing’s Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>248</sup> Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing’s Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 47.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

in which these works were executed, the exemplary loyalty shown by the Yan family and the relatively flexible and expressive forms of cursive and semi-cursive scripts that combined to enable such an extended interpretation of this alliance of calligraphy and emotion.

Examining the calligraphy on a large number of Tang dynasty tomb steles and entombed epitaphs, I find that the scripts most commonly adopted to transcribe funerary inscriptions are regular, seal and clerical scripts, rather than cursive or semi-cursive forms. The regular, seal, and clerical scripts are usually governed by strict rules on wielding the brush and character structure, which limits the calligraphy's potential for expressiveness and the possibility for reading emotion through visual effect. Even in those rare cases where funerary inscriptions were executed in semi-cursive script, conspicuous features of the *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming* such as the partial blotting out of characters and constantly changing ink colour are not seen in any of the funerary inscriptions, whether tomb stele or entombed epitaph. Correspondingly, we may presume that what the Tang people pursued in the genre of funerary inscriptions was a solemn and restrained demonstration of grief instead of fierce and dramatic emotional expression through calligraphic effects. For most of the Tang funerary writings that survive to the present, we cannot make any effective links between the calligraphic forms and the sentimental statements made by the texts' content, not to mention distinguishing between genuine emotional expression and sentimental display. This may partially explain why the *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming* achieved such prominence in the history of calligraphy, being acclaimed 'Second Best Semi-Cursive Script under Heaven' 天下第二行書.<sup>250</sup> The rest

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<sup>250</sup> The Yuan dynasty calligrapher Xianyu Shu 鮮於樞 (1257-1302) was probably the first

of this chapter concentrates on a number of tomb steles and entombed epitaphs that bear the ‘imperial writing’ and other Tang imperial family members’ calligraphy. Relating these to the social context of their production, it further proves that what is fundamental to the interpretation of these works is not the problematic traditional belief that calligraphy is an external manifestation of the inner world, but rather the interpersonal relationships behind the making and commission of the inscriptions.

### **3.2 Dedicated to the Dead but Made for the Living - Tomb Steles and Entombed Epitaphs as a Historical and Calligraphic Source**

In funerary studies, a notion has been widely accepted that the core of funerary activities is not the deceased, but rather a reflection of the ideology and behaviour of the living.<sup>251</sup> Each tomb can thus be interpreted as ‘an embodiment of social relations, history and memory, cosmology and religious beliefs.’<sup>252</sup> In the *Analects of Confucius*, the philosopher Zengzi said: ‘Let there be a careful attention to performing the funeral rites to parents, and let them be followed when long gone with the ceremonies of sacrifice – then the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence.’<sup>253</sup> Zengzi’s description reveals the significance of funeral rites in Confucian ideology as tools for cultivating moral values and regulating human

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connoisseur to comment that the *Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming* is the “Second Best Semi-Cursive Script under Heaven” 天下第二行書. Traditionally, Wang Xizhi’s *Preface to the Poems Collected from the Orchid Pavilion* has been acclaimed the “Best Semi-Cursive Script under Heaven” 天下第一行書. Xu Bangda 徐邦達, *Gu shuhua guoyan yaolu: Jin Sui Tang Wudai Song shufa* 古書畫過眼要錄: 晉隋唐五代宋書法 [*Ancient Calligraphy and Painting Passing before One’s Eyes: the Calligraphy of the Jin, Sui, Tang, Wudai, Song Dynasties*] (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1987), 77.

<sup>251</sup> Qi Dongfang, “Funerary Perception and Ritual Institution of Imperial Tang,” 175.

<sup>252</sup> Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 9.

<sup>253</sup> Translated by James Legge, in *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean*, New York: ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2012, 141.

relationships. This section proves that, although both entombed epitaphs and tomb steles were dedicated to the deceased, their primary target audiences, especially for the latter, were the living. From the texts of eulogies carved into them to their formats as physical objects, all of these elements were closely associated with the dominant social ideology around the time of their production; these monuments and inscriptions carried messages that their commissioners and authors wished living audiences to receive.

As Wu Hung argues, stone became analogue to immortality and eternity because of its natural characteristics of strength, plainness, and endurance. Since the second and first centuries BCE, stone had been used in funeral art and architecture, a practice that stemmed from the Han-era popular imagination of the afterlife and which was grounded in the link between death and immortality.<sup>254</sup> Since the early Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE), stone slabs, carved with inscriptions recording the virtues and deeds of the deceased, had become an essential component of funeral rites, and were widely used in the construction of tombs.<sup>255</sup> This tradition was, however, largely impeded by the ‘Ban Stele Order’ 禁碑令 that was first proposed by Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220) and lasted through the Jin Dynasty (265-420) and the Southern Dynasties (420-489). This ban aimed to damp down a luxury custom, and the conspicuous grave steles placed in front of the tombs were gradually replaced by *muzhiming* 墓誌銘 entombed epitaphs.<sup>256</sup> In the Tang dynasty, the ‘Ban Stele Order’ was

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<sup>254</sup> Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 122.

<sup>255</sup> Ma Heng 馬衡, *Fangjiang zhao jinshi conggao* 凡將齋金石叢稿 [*Manuscripts of Fangjiang Studio on Inscriptions on Ancient Bronzes and Stone Tablets*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1977), 69

<sup>256</sup> Jin Qizhen 金其楨, *Zhongguo bei wenhua* 中國碑文化 [*The Culture of Chinese Steles*] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2002), 164-166.

removed, and the grave stele re-emerged as another system for marking tombs in parallel with the entombed epitaph. With the inheritance and development of burial rites from the Northern Wei (386-534), the Tang era witnessed a tremendous increase in the production of funerary writings.<sup>257</sup> Since the establishment of the earliest tombs, burials and burial goods had been supposed to more or less conform to a hierarchical order indicating the status of the deceased.<sup>258</sup> Due to their high production cost, entombed epitaphs and tomb steles were closely linked to the ruling classes and social elites. Despite the two markers often being included in the same tomb and both intended to provide permanent testimony to the deceased's achievements, there are some differences between the situations in which they were used.<sup>259</sup> Epitaphs were used extensively in the tombs of Tang elites, but grave steles only appeared in a handful of high-profile tombs and were strictly institutionalized by Tang government documents.

An entombed epitaph tablet was usually composed of a cover on which the official title and name of the tomb occupant were inscribed, as well as a base carved with a full biographical inscription. The length of the biographical inscription may range in extent from several

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<sup>257</sup> Mary Fong has investigated the evolution of burial practices from the late Northern Wei to the early Tang, suggesting that the Northern Wei was more a transmitter of Chinese traditions formulated under previous dynasties and introduced from the south than an innovator of the burial practices that were prevalent through its later years and several subsequent decades. Mary Fong, "Antecedents of Sui-Tang Burial Practices in Shaanxi," *Artibus Asiae*, No. 3/4 (1991), 147-198. 148.

<sup>258</sup> Mu-chou Pu suggests that with the disintegration of the Zhou feudal system the burial objects gradually lost their meanings that reflected the social and political status of a person. However, as the Zhou ritual system was idealised within Confucian ideology and thus placed at the heart of Chinese imperial ideology, the Zhou death ritual still exerted an influence on rulers of later times. Mu-chou Pu, "Preparation for the Afterlife in Ancient China" in Amy Olberding and Philip J. Ivanhoe ed., *Morality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, New York: State University of New York Press (2011), 13-14.

<sup>259</sup> Timothy M. Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-2.

dozen to several thousand characters. According to the *New Tang History*, epitaph tablets were carried in funeral processions together with other burial objects.<sup>260</sup> After that, they would remain in the sealed tomb. Functioning as both a memorial to the dead and a component of the burial rite, an entombed epitaph was believed to be able to transmit an account of the deceased to the gods and ancestral spirits.<sup>261</sup> It is worth mentioning that although burial with the dead has greatly reduced the visibility of entombed epitaphs, some scholars have noted that some entombed epitaphs circulated as manuscripts or rubbings among a broad reading audience.<sup>262</sup>

In comparison with entombed epitaphs, the tomb stele, constituting the above-ground marker of a tomb, was supposed to have a wider audience among the living public of the time and posterity, and hence received more attention from their commissioners. The origin of the practice of establishing tomb steles can be traced back to those Han dynasty tombstones that ‘standing in the open, spatially marked the location where the deceased was buried.’<sup>263</sup> A tomb stele is usually composed of three parts: the head of the stele, the main body, and a base. Beside the eulogy carved on the main body of the stele, its height and decoration were also crucial in preserving the hierarchical political and social realities of the living. The *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 [*Essential Documents of the Tang Dynasty*] clearly records that: ‘The stele of an official above the fifth rank, with the head of a dragon and a tortoise pedestal, should not

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<sup>260</sup> *XTS*, 20.451.

<sup>261</sup> Nicolas Olivier Tackett, “The Transformation of Medieval Chinese Elites,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Columbia, 2006), 12.

<sup>262</sup> See Alexei Ditter, “The Commerce of Commemoration: Commissioned *Muzhiming* in the Mid- to Late Tang,” *Tang Studies*, 32:1 (2014): 21-46. 35. David McMullen, “Boats Moored and Unmoored: Reflections on the Dunhuang Manuscripts of Gao Shi’s Verse,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, (June 2013), 83-145.125.

<sup>263</sup> Dorothy C. Wang, *Chinese Steles* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 30.

be higher than nine *chi*. The stele of an official above the seventh rank, with the head of a *gui* and square pedestal, should not be higher than four *chi*.<sup>264</sup> Not only did the eulogy texts carved on the main bodies of tomb steles publicly proclaim the merits and virtues of the deceased; the physical attributes of the tomb steles, such as height and decoration, could also display the achievements of the deceased in public service.

According to Qi Dongfang, a complete Tang funeral cycle should include three components: mourning, burial, and sacrifice.<sup>265</sup> If the function of entombed epitaphs was supposed to have ended after burial with other ritual objects in the tombs, tomb steles may continuously play important roles in declaring the significance of the deceased and advocating the values espoused by their commissioners to participants in subsequent sacrificial ceremonies. Even though, according to archaeological evidence, such sacrificial ceremonial can be traced far back to the Shang dynasty (1700-1027 BCE), the Tang dynasty is an important period for the canonisation and institutionalisation of this practice from court to folk society.<sup>266</sup> The *New Tang History* records that the imperial mausoleums would receive sacrificial offerings on a periodic basis many times throughout a year.<sup>267</sup> For officials and civilians whose ancestors were not granted the honour of burial in accompanying tombs within imperial mausoleums, regular visits to ancestral tombs was also a crucial element in their ritual lives. This can be seen from the fact that the Tomb-Sweeping Festival 清明節 – when families visit ancestors’

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<sup>264</sup> *Chi* 尺 was a unit of measurement, of about 30.7 cm. *Gui* 圭 was a jade ritual object with a round top and rectangular body. 五品以上立碑. 螭首龜趺. 上高不過九尺. 七品以上立碑. 圭首方趺. 趺上不過四尺. *THY*, 38. 691.

<sup>265</sup> Qi Dongfang, “Funerary Perception and Ritual Institution of Imperial Tang,” *Chinese Archaeology*, Jan. 2007, 170-176. 170.

<sup>266</sup> Liu Deqian 劉德謙, “Saomu suyuan” 掃墓溯源 [The Origin of the Practice of Sweeping Tombs], *Social Science Front*, Mar. 1986, 322-328.

<sup>267</sup> *XTS*, 14.362.

tombs to pay reverence to them, make ritual offerings and clean the graves – was ritualised under an imperial edict of Emperor Xuanzong in the twentieth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (732).<sup>268</sup>

In other words, alongside Tang imperial mausoleums, normal tombs were also regularly visited by the families and offspring of the deceased. In this way, tomb steles came to constitute an important visual spectacle in their own right within the daily life of the Tang populace. It is no wonder, therefore, that concerns over tomb steles extended beyond the surviving family members and friends of the deceased, with the government placing high value on their production and erection. The court strictly regulated the height, decoration and many other details of tomb steles to make sure that they accorded with tomb occupants' identities and deeds. In some special cases, we can even see that the Tang rulers personally composed texts or executed calligraphy in the production of tomb steles for ministers and members of the imperial family.<sup>269</sup>

The inscriptions carved on both entombed epitaphs and tomb steles are important, first, because they include eulogies with accounts of the deceased's life, their family history, and even the dates of their death and burial. Many historians have noted that such textual information functions as a precious historical source that can supplement and amend the records of official histories.<sup>270</sup> Second, given that few Tang calligraphic manuscripts for which authentication is unquestioned are extant today, the long-term physical survival of

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<sup>268</sup> *THY*, 23.439.

<sup>269</sup> For detailed discussion of the presence of imperial calligraphy on tomb steles see the following sections of this chapter.

<sup>270</sup> For more discussion of this issue, see Nicolas Olivier Tackett, "The Transformation of Medieval Chinese Elites" (Ph.D. diss., University of Columbia, 2006), 9-16.



these stone inscriptions makes them an extremely precious calligraphic source through which we can peer into the visual performance of Tang calligraphy and discern some features of calligraphic creation in funerary writings. Third, noting the existence of a broad audience and wide circulation for these funerary writings, we can view these stone inscriptions as public announcements made by their commissioners, as well as products of the social interactions behind their production.

Thanks to the last few decades of archaeological finds and the long tradition of epigraphical studies, we have access not only to the texts of several thousand Tang entombed epitaphs<sup>271</sup> and tomb steles,<sup>272</sup> but also in many cases images taken from rubbings. The existence of a

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<sup>271</sup> The literature on entombed epitaphs is extremely rich. The most comprehensive collections of Tang tomb epitaphs are *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編 [*The Collection of Tomb Epitaphs in the Tang Dynasty*] that includes 3,607 entombed epitaphs and *Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji* 唐代墓誌彙編續集 [*The Sequel of the Collection of Tomb Epitaphs in the Tang Dynasty*] that includes 1,564 entombed epitaphs. Besides these textual collections of entombed epitaphs, there is another group of collections that include not only the texts but also the images of the rubbings of Tang entombed epitaphs. The latter reveal what the calligraphy applied to Tang-era entombed epitaphs look like; see the series *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi* 新中國出土墓誌 [*Entombed Epitaphs Excavated after the Founding of the People's Republic of China*], *Datang xishi bowuguan cang muzhi* 大唐西市博物館藏墓誌 [*Entombed Epitaphs Held in the Datang Xishi Museum*], *Sui Tang Wudai muzhi huibian* 隋唐五代墓誌彙編 [*Compilation of Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties Entombed Epitaphs*], and *Xi'an Beilin bowuguan xincang muzhi huibian* 西安碑林博物館新藏墓誌彙編 [*Compilation of the New Collected Entombed Epitaphs of Xi'an Stele Forest Museum*].

<sup>272</sup> In comparison to entombed epitaphs, material on Tang tomb steles are sparser and more scattered. The earliest records are found in the Song dynasty catalogues of ancient bronze and stone, such as *Baoke leibian* 寶刻類編 [*Classified Compilation of Precious Inscriptions*], 陳思 Chen Si's *Baoke congbian* 寶刻叢編 [*Mixed Compilation of Precious Inscriptions*], 歐陽脩 Ouyang Xiu's *Jigu lu* 集古錄 [*Records of Collecting Antiquity*], 趙明誠 Zhao Mingcheng's *Jinshi lu* 金石錄 [*Records of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions*] and so on. The Song records are relatively brief, often merely including the name of the author and the stele title. Wang Chang's 王昶 Qing dynasty *Jinshi cuibian* 金石粹編 [*Anthology of the Essence of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions*] include complete transcriptions for some Tang tomb steles. Despite the low resolution of some images, *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本彙編 [*Collection of Stone Rubbings of Successive Dynasties in Beijing Library*] is

large visual corpus enables a calligraphic examination of Tang funerary writings. Focusing on Sui and Tang entombed epitaphs, Zhang Tongyin has situated the examination of the calligraphy of individual entombed epitaphs within the history of calligraphy to shed light on the development of funerary calligraphy and enrich the history of calligraphy.<sup>273</sup> Shi Zhecun has recorded inscriptions from a hundred Tang dynasty steles, each entry including an image taken from a rubbing of the inscription, its provenance, a bibliography and the author's commentary.<sup>274</sup> Among the one hundred Tang steles presented, dozens are tomb steles. The most prominent feature of Shi's research is his compilation of comments on each stele by previous famous calligraphic connoisseurs, going back to the Tang and Song dynasties. Although there is a growing interest in the calligraphy of inscriptions carved on entombed epitaphs and tomb steles, in comparison with the tremendous attention paid to the textual content of these inscriptions as historical source material, their calligraphic value still awaits the attention it deserves.

In addition, it is worth noting that what matters for the interpretation of funerary writing is not only textual content and calligraphic performance, but also authorship. The Tang dynasty was a crucial period for the development of calligraphy as an independent form of art and the reinforcement of aesthetic consciousness in calligraphic production, which can also be seen in the gradual normalisation of inscribing authorship in the production of funerary writings from the Southern and Northern dynasties to the end of the Tang. According to Hua Rende's research, it was in the later stages of the Southern and Northern dynasties (420-589)

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perhaps the most comprehensive compilation of stone rubbings up to now.

<sup>273</sup> Zhang Tongyin 張同印, *Sui Tang muzhi shuji yanjiu* 隋唐墓誌書跡研究 [*Study on Calligraphy of Sui and Tang Entombed Epitaphs*] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003).

<sup>274</sup> Shi Zhecun 施蛰存, *Tang bei baixuan* 唐碑百選 [*The Selection of One Hundred Tang Steles*] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

that people who contributed calligraphy or text to entombed steles began to inscribe their names onto these works, but this practice remained rare until the Early Tang (618-712).<sup>275</sup> Entering the High Tang era (712-775), the number of entombed epitaphs that bear the names of their inscriptions' authors increased greatly. Almost all of the entombed epitaphs dated after the Middle Tang (766-835) were carved with information identifying their texts' calligraphers and authors.<sup>276</sup>

Recognising the public prominence of the funerary writing genre and its significance as a source for both history and calligraphy, the following sections combine these factors to view funerary inscription calligraphy as a product of social relations. In this regard, authorship information can not only tell us directly who brushed the calligraphy, but also provide clues revealing social relations behind the commissioning and production of these funerary writings. Methodologically speaking, I argue that, beside the examination of textual content and calligraphic performance, investigation of the social relations within which authorship functioned can uncover the social roles played by funerary inscriptions within their specific historical contexts.

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<sup>275</sup> Hua Rende 華人德, "Wei, Jin, Nanbeichao muzhi gailun" 魏晉南北朝墓誌概論 [*Introduction to the Entombed Epitaphs of the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties*], in *Zhongguo shufa quanji* 中國書法全集 [The Complete Works of Chinese Calligraphy], Vol. 13, edited by Hua Rende, (Beijing: Rongbao zhai, 1991), 1-15, 8. In Tang studies, the most widely accepted periodization is that created by the Ming Dynasty scholar Gao Bing in his work *Tangshi pinhui* 唐詩品彙 [*A Critical Collection of Tang Poetry*]. He divided the history of the development of Tang poetry into four stages: The Early Tang (618-712), the High Tang (712-775), the Middle Tang (766-835) and the Late Tang (836-906). Luo Yuming, *A Concise History of Chinese Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 268.

<sup>276</sup> Hua Rende 華人德, "Wei, Jin, Nanbeichao muzhi gailun" 魏晉南北朝墓誌概論 [*Introduction to the Entombed Epitaphs of the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties*], 8

### 3.3 Calligraphy in Tang Court Members' Death Rituals

In the eleventh month of the twenty-ninth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (742), Emperor Xuanzong's older brother Prince Li Chengqi 李成器 died. During the reign of Emperor Ruizong, Li Chengqi had been installed as heir-apparent but gave up his succession rights to his younger brother, the future Emperor Xuanzong. It is said, that after Chengqi's death, Emperor Xuanzong mourned his dead brother and granted Chengqi the posthumous title of Emperor Rang 讓皇帝. To express his grief, the emperor produced a handwritten piece and placed this work in front of Chengqi's coffin during the mourning process. In the *Zhi Rang Huangdi lingqian shoushu* 置讓皇帝靈前手書 [*Handwriting Placed Before the Coffin of Emperor Rang*], Emperor Xuanzong extolled his brother's virtues and emotionally recalled the unforgettable memories that they had shared since childhood. The work ends:

With reverence, (I) do not give full expression. (I) am in a state of trance, feeling like he is still alive. Overwhelmed by extreme sorrow, (I) express my sadness through calligraphy.<sup>277</sup>

Placed before Li Chengqi's coffin, this handwriting that had flown from Xuanzong's brush not only glorified the status and accomplishments of the deceased, but also dramatically demonstrated the emperor's Confucian devotion to family alongside his grief at the death of his beloved brother. The presence of 'imperial writing' 御書 in the death ritual for Li Chengqi is a rare case in any sense. First, the placement of a handwritten text in front of a

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<sup>277</sup> 恭惟緒言, 恍焉如在, 寄以翰墨, 悲不自勝. *JTS*, 95. 3009.

coffin is rarely seen in either historical records or archaeological discoveries. In comparison, a great many commemorative writings exist as inscriptions on entombed epitaphs and tomb steles. Second, not all imperial family members or prestigious ministers had the honour of being bestowed with ‘imperial writing’ on the objects of their funeral rituals. Given that the practice of commissioning and writing inscriptions on entombed epitaphs and tomb steles usually took place within the social networks to which the deceased belonged, the social status of the tomb occupant was supposed to have corresponded to that of the inscription’s author. There does indeed seem to be a pattern linking lofty tomb occupants to high-status authors.<sup>278</sup> Despite this trend, however, even the tombs of the most prestigious aristocrats were not guaranteed to receive such ‘imperial writing’. This section examines a number of Tang court members’ tomb steles and entombed epitaphs, especially focusing on those bearing ‘imperial writing’. It tackles three main questions: under what circumstances could tomb occupants gain the privilege of the emperors’ calligraphy; to what extent do the identities of authors and commissioners matter in interpreting the meaning of calligraphy executed for death rituals; and finally how the personal relationships behind the making of these funerary writings can improve our understanding of the Tang imperial family and court society.

### **An Unusual Practice – Establishing Tomb Steles for Emperors and Empresses**

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<sup>278</sup> Alexei Ditter has examined the phenomenon of writing *muzhiming* 墓誌銘 [entombed epitaphs] on commission in the middle to late Tang. He remarks that the cost of commissioning *muzhiming* could be influenced not only by text length and quality, but also the social status of the author. Texts written by authors who enjoyed higher social status or a reputation for literary virtuosity could circulate more quickly and broadly. Although Ditter’s study focuses on the literary composition of entombed epitaphs, his point on the social status of texts’ authors should also apply to the identity and reputation of those who executed the inscriptions’ calligraphy. See Alexei Ditter, “The Commerce of Commemoration: Commissioned *Muzhiming* in the Mid- to Late Tang,” *Tang Studies*, 32:1 (2014): 21-46, 45.

In the second year of the *Kaiyuan* period (714), Emperor Xuanzong sent his maternal uncle Dou Xiguan 竇希瓘 to the Qiao Mausoleum 橋陵 to establish a commemorative stele for his mother, the Empress Zhaocheng 昭成皇后, who had been killed by Wu Zetian more than twenty years before. The emperor appointed Su Ting 蘇頲, *Zhongshu shilang* 中書侍郎 [Attendant Gentleman in the Secretariat], known for his erudition and literary achievement, to write the stele inscription. The emperor's proposal eventually came to nothing, however, due to fierce opposition from Su Ting. The latter remonstrated that:

According to the rites, the tombs of emperors and empresses should not have tomb-pathway steles. A few years ago, (even) Empress Zetian, who thought highly of family prestige, did not dare claim that which was erected under her commission as a 'stele'. Instead, it was carved (with the title) of *Narrating Wise Deeds*. Furthermore, without an ancient precedent to follow, this practice should be considered illicit. If a stele stands only in the Qiao Mausoleum, (Your Majesty) should have steles erected in all of the mausoleums of Your Majesty's ancestors. The emperor accepted (Su Ting's) advice and stopped his initial plan.<sup>279</sup>

Despite Su Ting's success in persuading Emperor Xuanzong, his argument was only partially correct. Although the founders of the dynasty – Emperor Gaozu and Emperor Taizong – had no tomb steles established in their own mausoleums, there are a group of Tang tomb steles dedicated to several imperial family members who might not be recognized

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<sup>279</sup> 帝王及後禮無神道碑。近則天皇后崇尚家代猶不敢稱碑。刻為述聖紀。且事不師古。動不合法。若靖陵獨建。即陛下祖宗之陵皆須追建。上從其言而止。 *THY*, 21.418.

by orthodox historians but nonetheless bear the titles ‘Emperor’ or ‘Empress’. This group includes the *Xiaojinghuangdi ruide bei* 孝敬皇帝睿德碑 [*Stele of Wisdom and Virtue of Emperor Xiaojing*], *Shusheng Ji bei* 述聖紀碑 [*Stele Narrating the Wise Deeds (of Emperor Gaozong)*], *Dazhou wushang Gao Huangdi bei* 大周無上高皇帝碑 [*Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Emperor Gao*] and *Dazhou wushang xiaoming Gao Huanghou bei* 大周無上孝明高皇后碑 [*Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao*]. Among these, the first two inscriptions bore calligraphy executed by Emperor Gaozong (628-683) and Emperor Zhongzong (656-710) respectively, while the calligraphy on the latter two was by the hand of Li Dan, Prince of Xiang 相王李旦, the later Emperor Ruizong.

An examination of the context in which these four steles were erected and the authorship of their calligraphy points to the same character: Wu Zetian, who, though she might not herself have executed the calligraphy on these steles, nonetheless played a crucial role in the steles’ commissioning. First, all four tomb occupants to whom these steles were dedicated were Wu Zetian’s close relatives – her son, husband, father and mother, respectively – and the calligraphy was executed by her husband and sons. Second, on the evidence of Su Ting’s remonstrance, we can tell that in the Tang dynasty Wu Zetian was regarded as the innovator responsible for establishing steles in the mausoleums of Emperors and Empresses. It is no coincidence that all four steles dedicated to those bearing the titles ‘Emperor’ or ‘Empress’ were established in the years when Wu Zetian was in power. For the interpretation of this group of tomb steles, besides the social relationships between tomb occupants and inscription authors named on the steles, the motivations and aspirations of Wu Zetian as a female politician should be taken to be the underlying cause for the production of these steles.

This section makes two key arguments. First, the presence of calligraphy by the emperors and the royal heir on this group of tomb steles was not only a guarantee of the tomb occupants' posthumous status, but also a means by which the inscriptions' authors expressed their mourning and demonstrated their devotion to Confucian family values. Second, Wu Zetian's political agendas were embodied in both her visible and invisible participation in the production and commissioning of these tomb steles, as either composer or patron. These tomb steles are only one of the many cases which demonstrate how this female ruler deftly exerted her influence and achieved her political goals in an indirect way through the manipulation of her male relatives.

(1) *Stele of Emperor Xiaojing's Wisdom and Virtue*

Both the text and the calligraphy of the inscription on this stele (6.03 x 1.94 x 0.65 m) were executed by Emperor Gaozong, dedicated to the Crown Prince Li Hong 李宏 (651-675), eldest son of Emperor Gaozong and Wu Zetian. The stele stands on the east side of the spiritual path at the Gong Mausoleum among pairs of stone officials modelled after the emperor's bodyguard (Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3). Although the majority of the characters carved on the stele are obscure and illegible, its title, written in flying-white script, is still visible, *Xiaojing Huangdi ruide zhi ji* 孝敬皇帝睿德之紀 [*The Narration of Emperor Xiaojing's Wisdom and Virtue*] (Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5). The interpersonal relationships behind this stele are particularly dramatic: the inscription was written by the hand of a father and dedicated to a deceased son whose mother was suspected of having poisoned him.



Li Hong had a reputation for kindness and diligence. It is said that his relationship with his mother Wu Zetian had deteriorated since a public dispute with her over the marriages of two princesses. One of Emperor Gaozong's concubines, Consort Xiao, had been brutally murdered by Wu Zetian, leaving two daughters Princess Yiyang 義陽公主 and Princess Xuancheng 宣城公主, respectively. Reportedly due to hatred for Consort Xiao, Wu Zetian secluded the two princesses in the palace for so long that at over forty years old they had not married yet. Taking pity on the two princesses, Li Hong pleaded for them and attempted to persuade Wu Zetian to allow them to marry.<sup>280</sup> Soon after the dispute, Li Hong died suddenly at the age of twenty-one, during a visit to his parents in the Hebi Palace 合璧宮 (Hebi gong), near Luoyang. Mourning the death of his son, Emperor Gaozong buried Li Hong according to the rites of burying an emperor and bestowed on him the posthumous title Emperor Xiaojing 孝敬皇帝.<sup>281</sup> The edict issued by Emperor Gaozong claimed that, being physically weak, the Crown Prince Li Hong had long been in poor health before his death.<sup>282</sup> Despite this official statement on the reasons behind Li Hong's death, there has been no lack of suspicion that the crown prince was actually poisoned by Wu Zetian. According to the records of the *Old History of Tang*, Li Mi (722-789), a trusted advisor to Emperor Suzong, once told the emperor that: 'The Queen of Heaven who was planning to ascend the throne poisoned Emperor Xiaojing to death.'<sup>283</sup> Responding to Li Mi's theory, the Song dynasty scholar Fan Zuyou 范祖禹 (1041-1098) commented that:

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<sup>280</sup> *JTS*, 86.2828-2830. *XTS*, 76.3477.

<sup>281</sup> Tonia Eckfeld, *Imperial Tombs in Tang China 618-907— The Politics of Paradise* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 59.

<sup>282</sup> *JTS*, 86.2829.

<sup>283</sup> 天後方圖臨朝, 乃鳩殺孝敬. *JTS*, 116.3385.

The Emperor is the one who owns the land under heaven, which cannot be achieved through bestowal. The father died, then the son succeeded. The living father honoured his deceased son (with the posthumous title of emperor), which violated the rules of etiquette. A reasonable explanation should be that Empress Wu, who was planning to usurp the throne, poisoned the Crown Prince but granted him an honorary title. She did this to cover her crimes. Li Mi's words are persuasive.<sup>284</sup>

It is no wonder that everything concerning Wu Zetian is surrounded by doubt, for the existence of a female ruler was itself regarded as a betrayal of the values of the Confucian scholar-official class. Hence, we should not deny the possibility that Li Hong had indeed died due to illness and that historians deliberately damaged the reputation of Wu Zetian to criticise feminine interference in public affairs. As the Qing dynasty scholar Wang Chang 王昶 (1724-1806) argued, in the later years of his life, Emperor Gaozong was fatigued and weary. It was Wu Zetian who was in charge of state affairs. Even had the crown prince ascended to the throne, it would not have been difficult for Wu Zetian to keep her son under control. She had no reason to go so far as to kill him.<sup>285</sup>

Like many other puzzles surrounding this remarkable woman, today we may not be able to find a final answer to Li Hong's death. It is not hard to imagine how, even in Wu Zetian's own day, there may have been people who did not hesitate to think the worst of this powerful woman. Related with the historical context in which it was produced, the *Stele of*

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<sup>284</sup> 皇帝者有天下之號，非所以為贈也。父歿而後子為立，今父在而追尊其子，豈禮也哉。蓋武后謀篡國，鳩太子而加之尊名，以掩其跡。李泌之言，信矣。JSCB, 58.1025.

<sup>285</sup> JSCB, 58.1025.

*Emperor Xiaojing's Wisdom and Virtue* could be interpreted as Wu Zetian's self-defence, carried out in the voice of Emperor Gaozong. According to the stele inscription, not only was the inscription text composed by Emperor Gaozong, but the calligraphy was executed in the emperor's own hand, too. The inscription constituted more than three thousand characters, but only about one thousand seven hundreds of these have been transcribed, and survive in the Qing Dynasty *Jinshi cuibian* 金石粹編 [*Selection of Writings on Epigraphy*]. As for the cause of Li Hong's death and Wu Zetian's response to her son's death, the inscription on the *Stele of Emperor Xiaojing's Wisdom and Virtue* claims that:

The medicine of the Western mountain could not save the spirit of the Eastern mountain. The doctor who blows the decoction could not rescue the life that runs with the streams of death...The heart of the Queen of Heaven [Wu Zetian] is haunted with mourning. Her grief is interwoven with deep love and kindness.<sup>286</sup>

The inscription states that Li Hong had died of illness and that Wu Zetian was in deep grief at the death of her beloved son, exonerating her from the suspicion of poisoning her own child, no matter whether or not this was the truth. To a certain extent, the emperor's calligraphy authenticated the text's content, sanctioning this imperial narration of Li Hong's life and death. In this sense, the inscription, written in person by father and emperor and carved on the deceased prince's tomb stele for a public audience, seems to be more eloquent than any other form of statement from the mouth of Wu Zetian or anyone else.

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<sup>286</sup> 西山之藥不救東岱之魂，吹湯之醫，莫返逝川之命...天後心纏積悼，痛結深慈。 *JSCB*, 58.1022.

(2) *Stele Narrating the Wise Deeds* (of Emperor Gaozong)

The 6.3-metre high *Shusheng Ji bei* 述聖記碑 [*Stele Narrating the Wise Deeds (of Emperor Gaozong)*] stands side by side with Wu Zetian's *Wuzi bei* 無字碑 [*Stele with No Inscription*] of the same height, flanking the spirit path to the Qian Mausoleum, the joint tomb for Emperor Gaozong and Wu Zetian. Dedicated to Emperor Gaozong, the calligraphy of the inscription on the *Stele Narrating the Wise Deeds* (of Emperor Gaozong) was executed by the Emperor Zhongzong, while its text was composed by Wu Zetian herself. It is said that the stone of the stele was transported from Yutian (in modern Xinjiang) and was filled with gold flecks from which light shone across the whole mausoleum. The stele was erected during a transitional period in which Wu Zetian stepped out of the background to claim the political centre stage.

Emperor Zhongzong, who reportedly died of poisoning after a conspiracy involving his wife Empress Wei and daughter Princess Anle, has traditionally been depicted by historians as fatuous and decadent.<sup>287</sup> The two extant calligraphic works believed to have been executed by him are *Ci Lu Zhengdao chi* 賜盧正道敕 [*Edict to Award Lu Zhengdao*] and the *Stele Narrating the Wise Deeds* (of Emperor Gaozong). Both were written in regular script. In contrast to his historical image, Emperor Zhongzong's calligraphy was praised by the Ming Dynasty scholar Zhao Han 趙函 as 'robust and vigorous, grasping the legacy of Ou and Yu, and distinct from the changes that appeared after the middle Tang.'<sup>288</sup> In the early Tang, Yu Shinan, Ouyang Xun and Chu Suiliang had established a paradigm for Tang standard script,

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<sup>287</sup> *XTS*, 4.113.

<sup>288</sup> 字法遒健, 深得歐虞遺意, 非中唐以後所辨也. *JSCB*, 58.

characterized by ‘well-formed square characters, with carefully articulated brushwork and balanced composition.’<sup>289</sup> Their styles also became the criteria by which later generations judged the execution of standard script. Affirming Emperor Zhongzong’s inheritance in any sense of Ouyang Xun and Yu Shinan’s styles is a remarkable compliment to his calligraphic achievement.

Excellent calligraphic skill was certainly not the main reason for Emperor Zhongzong’s taking up the brush to execute calligraphy for the *Stele Narrating the Wise Deeds* (of Emperor Gaozong). It had more to do with his identity as both the son of the tomb’s occupant and heir to the throne. Relating this to its corresponding political context, in all likelihood he was commissioned or at least permitted to perform the task by Wu Zetian, who was the real sovereign at that time. After the death of Li Hong, Li Xian 李賢, second son of Emperor Gaozong and Wu Zetian, was promoted to Crown Prince, but soon reduced to commoner status and some years later forced to commit suicide by Wu Zetian. Then, in 680, the third son Li Zhe 李哲 (later Emperor Zhongzong) became heir apparent. Subsequently, with the deterioration of Emperor Gaozong’s health, Wu Zetian came to play a dominant role in politics. At the time of Emperor Gaozong’s death, in the first year of the *Hongdao* period (683), it is said that the emperor made a last will commanding that: ‘Seven days later, lay my corpse in the coffin, then the Crown Prince should ascend the throne in front of the coffin... Any significant state affairs that cannot be decided (by the emperor) should be settled in consultation with the Queen of Heaven [Wu Zetian].’<sup>290</sup> Although Emperor

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<sup>289</sup> Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy 8<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 124.

<sup>290</sup> 七日而殯, 皇太子即位於柩前 ... 軍國大事有不決者, 取天後處分. *JTS*, 5.112.

Zhongzong ascended the throne in the twelfth month of 683 as his father had wished, only six weeks later he was deposed by his mother and replaced by his younger brother Li Dan 李旦 (the later Emperor Ruizong). This stele must have been produced and erected during Emperor Zhongzong's short reign from the twelfth month of 683 to the second month of 684.

Either for himself or for Wu Zetian, Emperor Zhongzong was the most suitable person to execute the calligraphy for the stele inscription. For Emperor Zhongzong, it was a physical expression of grief at the death of his father and a public declaration of his new identity as emperor. For Wu Zetian, allowing Emperor Zhongzong to execute the calligraphy demonstrated her sincerity in fulfilling Emperor Gaozong's last wish, a gesture which may have reassured those contemporaries who had no doubt that power was in her hands alone. In the meantime, through this tomb stele Wu Zetian also declared her own position in politics and revealed the ambitions she harboured. Although the time was not yet ripe for the declaration of her own dynasty, she did not want to step back and present herself as an honoured but impotent Empress Dowager, but explored further options to secure her position as the overt ruler of the dynasty in the public sphere. She designed her own public appearance on the stele as the author of the funeral inscription text. This time she did not exist as a figure incidentally mentioned by her male relatives but rather as an author who made an intellectual contribution in her own right to the stele's production.

*(3) Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Emperor Gao and Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao*

In 690, after the abdication of Emperor Ruizong (Li Dan), Wu Zetian set up her own Zhou 周 Dynasty (690-705). She then became the ‘Holy and Divine Emperor’ 聖神皇帝 of Zhou. Just as the Tang founder Emperor Gaozu refigured the lineage of the imperial family by honouring his father and grandfather with posthumous grants of imperial titlature, Wu Zetian awarded her parents the posthumous titles Xiaoming Emperor Gao 孝明高皇帝 and Xiaoming Empress Gao 孝明高皇後 to bolster the standing of the Wu clan. With this promotion, the graves of Empress Gao and Emperor Gao were upgraded to *ling* 陵 (mausoleum), the highest rank of aristocratic grave.<sup>291</sup> In 701 and 702, she successively commissioned the *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Emperor Gao* for her father and the *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao* for her mother. In 699, Empress Wu was seventy-six years old. Concern was continually growing that the Tang imperial Li clan and the Wu clan from which she derived would fight one another after her death. Under her command, Princess Taiping, Li Dan (then prince Xiang), Li Xian (then the Crown Prince) and several Wu clan princes swore an oath to one another at the Ming Hall in the name of heaven and earth.<sup>292</sup> The erection of the two steles was a part of Empress Wu’s project to enhance the legitimacy of the Zhou dynasty with the intention of improving the Li princes’ identification with the Wu ancestors and consolidating the alliance between the Li and Wu clans. The calligraphy of both steles was written by the hand of Li Dan, the most influential and honourable Li prince at that time. The arrangement of personnel for making these steles was not a random choice but reflected Empress Wu’s careful consideration. Li Dan’s calligraphy appeared on the two steles of the Wu ancestors and the adoption of the

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<sup>291</sup> See Tonia Eckfeld, *Imperial Tombs in Tang China 618-907* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 59.

<sup>292</sup> *ZZTJ*, 206. 6540.

Zetian characters sent out the message that this prince, whose surname was Li, recognised the legitimacy of the Zhou dynasty and the Wu ancestors.

Li Dan was among the Tang emperors known for their calligraphic talent. The *Old Tang History* mentions that Li Dan ‘was fond of learning, excelling at cursive script and clerical scripts.’<sup>293</sup> The Tang critic Dou Meng characterised his calligraphy as ‘upright and correct without a tendency to flashy glamour.’<sup>294</sup> The *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Emperor Gao* has been lost since the Ming Dynasty, but a rubbing of the *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao* is extant and provides us with a glimpse of the visual appearance of Li Dan’s calligraphy. According to the archaeological report, the *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao* might have been erected at the south gatehouse of the mausoleum’s inner wall. The ruins of a temple intended to protect the stele have been found 241 meters in front of the gatehouse.<sup>295</sup> Although the original stele was damaged during an earthquake in the forty-second year of the Ming *Wanli* era (1614), the remains of the stele were found in the Qing dynasty and rubbings made in the Qing *Qianlong* era (1711-1799) are now held in the Beijing Library.<sup>296</sup>

It is noticeable that Li Dan adopted some ‘Zetian characters’ in the writing of the *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao*, showing compliance with Wu Zetian’s

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<sup>293</sup> 好學, 工草隸. *JTS*, 1.151.

<sup>294</sup> 書法正體, 不樂浮華. Douji 竇泉, “Shu Shu Fu”述書賦 in *FSYL*, 6.161

<sup>295</sup> Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo, “Tang Shunling kanchaji” 唐順陵勘查記 [Notes on the Survey of Shun Mausoleum], *Wenwu*, 1964, 34-39:37.

<sup>296</sup> Beijing tushuguan jinshi zu 北京圖書館金石組, *Beijing tushu guan cang zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本彙編 [*The Collection of Stone Rubbings of Successive Dynasties in Beijing Library*], volume 19, (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chu ban she, 1989), 31.



dominance in the ritual, cultural and spiritual domains. According to the *Xuanhe Catalogue of Calligraphy*, Wu Zetian created nineteen characters by modifying the structures and shapes of standard characters.<sup>297</sup> This can be read as a part of the female ruler's enduring interest in symbolism and also as an act of propaganda declaring the independence of her rule. A closer look at the surviving part of the *Stele of Great Zhou Supreme Xiaoming Empress Gao* reveals that several modified versions of characters or the Zetian characters occur in the text, such as the characters 土, 星 and 初. For example, the character 'earth' in standard form would be 土, but this stele adopted Zetian character  that is composed of a 山 'mountain', a 水 'water' and a 土 'earth'. The Zetian character , an empty circle for 'star', would be 星 and  for 'beginning' would be 初 in standard form. These characters enjoyed wide currency in all forms of writings from government documents to commoners' tomb epitaphs.<sup>298</sup> During her reign, all texts, no matter whether they were memorials submitted by officials or other written materials used by ordinary people, were supposed to adopt the nineteen Zetian characters to replace the standard forms. The presence of Zetian characters might therefore be expected to indicate that a calligraphic work had been executed during Wu Zetian's reign.<sup>299</sup> However, by examining Dunhuang manuscripts, Galambos finds that the co-existence of Zetian characters and standard forms within a single piece is not rare, suggesting that the inconsistency reflected either an erratic use of Zetian characters or the ineffective enforcement of the policy.<sup>300</sup> Hence, the use of Zetian characters by Li Dan

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<sup>297</sup> *XHSP*, 1:18.

<sup>298</sup> Shi Anchang 施安昌, "Wu Zetian Zaozi zhi bian" 武則天造字之訛變 [Evolution of the Characters Created by Wu Zetian], *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, no. 4 (1992), 58-62.

<sup>299</sup> *XHSP*, 19.

<sup>300</sup> Imre Galambos, "Dunhuang Characters and the Dating of Manuscripts" in *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith* (London: British Library, 2004), 76.

on the one hand publicly demonstrates the prince's compliance with Empress Wu's sovereignty, and, on the other, might serve as an exemplar, popularizing the Zetian characters to the public.

### **A Group of Tang Princesses' Tomb Steles and Entombed Epitaphs**

The daughters of Tang emperors were born entitled to many privileges, bestowed with noble titles and granted fiefs for their maintenance. As members of the imperial clan, Tang princesses' fates were tied up with the fortunes of the Li imperial family. Their social identity made it almost impossible for them to adopt political neutrality, involving them in many aspects of politics, whether passively or proactively. Like all women, once married, the princesses became the wives and the mothers of their husbands' households. Despite marriage being the central avenue to most women's lives, Buddhism and Daoism offered alternative paths and provided a number of princesses with a liberal mode of life as member of the clergy. These various life trajectories and their noble status made the Tang princesses a group of distinct and (and sometimes controversial) figures, who have attracted considerable attention from modern scholars. Gao Shiyu has made a comprehensive examination of the regulations governing Tang princesses' fiefs and titles, lives and marriages.<sup>301</sup> Jia Jinhua has investigated the ordained princesses, focusing on their life journeys, and their political and religious activities.<sup>302</sup> Jowen R. Tung presents the fate of Tang princesses as being treacherous and full of bitterness, arguing that 'the Tang

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<sup>301</sup> Gao Shiyu 高士瑜, *Tangdai funü* 唐代婦女 [Women of the Tang Dynasty] (Xian: Sanqin chunbanshe, 1988), 30-40.

<sup>302</sup> Jia Jinhua, *Gender, Power, and Talent: The Journey of Daoist Priestesses in Tang China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

princesses' tracking by their patriarchs was but the most salient facet of the traffic in women, and the most complete conversion of female lives into marriage alliances.<sup>303</sup> However, the real relations between the princesses and their family members were very complex but had no lack of warmth that has been overlooked or seldom mentioned in previous scholarship. The production of calligraphy for the Tang princesses' death rituals is the epitome of the complex social relations surrounding these imperial daughters. Focusing on the identity of the people who executed the calligraphy for the inscriptions on tomb steles and entombed epitaphs produced for a group of Tang princesses', this section provides a unique angle revealing the multiple identities of Tang princesses and glimpses into their emotional world.

In the Qiao Mausoleum for Emperor Ruizong, there are four attendant tombs, for Grand Princess Jinxian 金仙, Grand Princess Xiguo 郾國, Grand Princess Liaoguo 梁國, and Grand Princess Daiguo 代國, respectively.<sup>304</sup> Only the sisters of the reigning emperor could claim the Grand Princess title, these four princesses, the daughters of Emperor Ruizong, died and were buried during the reign of their brother Emperor Xuanzong.<sup>305</sup> What the four tombs have in common is the presence of Emperor Xuanzong's calligraphy. Although there is little source material to indicate what the emperor had in mind when he executed the calligraphy for his sisters' tomb steles, it is worthwhile speculating why these steles are the only known inscriptions for Tang princesses' tomb steles to bear 'imperial writing'.

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<sup>303</sup> Jowen R. Tung, *Fables for the Patriarchs: Gender Politics in Tang Discourse* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 45.

<sup>304</sup> Shen Ruiwen 沈睿文, *Qiaoling peizang mudi yanjiu* 橋陵陪葬墓地研究 [Study on the Satellite Tombs of the Qiao Mausoleum], *Relics and Museology*, 2000(05), 63-70.

<sup>305</sup> Denis Twitchett, "The T'ang Imperial Family", *Asia Major*, No.2 (1994), 1-61, 49.

First, because of the absence of institutional regulation on granting ‘imperial writing’ to the death rituals of imperial family members, Emperor Xuanzong’s handwritten characters played a significant part in this action. It has been well acknowledged that Emperor Xuanzong was an extraordinary ruler, not only a patron and practitioner of many forms of art but also reportedly a man of great personal warmth, maintaining good friendships with his siblings and close attachment to family members.<sup>306</sup> The simplest explanation for his writing in the death rituals for his sisters would relate to the emperor’s personality, characterized by warmth and passion, and his confidence in the quality of his handwriting.

Second, the presence of ‘imperial writing’ on steles for these princesses, who were members of the imperial household, acted on the surface to endorse the tomb occupants’ posthumous positions, but could, at a deeper level, reinforce the legitimacy of the Li imperial family after decades of usurpation. Along with a series of tragedies in which a large number of Li royal family members were either killed or demoted, the prestige and authority of the Li Tang imperial household had become severely weakened. After the restoration of the Tang house, lavish resources were devoted to the production of tombs for members of the Li imperial family. Eckfeld argues that the three grand tombs for Crown Prince Li Xian, Crown Prince Yide, and Princess Yongtai, all of whom had suffered premature deaths during the reign of Wu Zetian, were political symbols of the restoration of Li family ascendancy.<sup>307</sup> The presence of ‘Imperial Writing’ on the tomb steles could also glorify the tombs of Emperor

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<sup>306</sup> Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (eds), *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 3 Sui and T’ang China, 589-906, Part one* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 332-333.

<sup>307</sup> Tonia Eckfeld, *Imperial Tombs in Tang China 618-907*, 57.

Xuanzong's four sisters, thereby bolstering the prestige and legitimacy of the Li imperial household.

Third, the presence of 'Imperial writing' on female family members' tomb steles might be a consequence of the 'proto-feminist' mentality that had been initiated by Wu Zetian and ended in the 760s with the rise of 'Confucianization'. Chen Ruoshui has observed that Wu Zetian took a series of actions promoting the social position of women in various ways. After the fall of Wu Zetian's regime in 705, she left a legacy of female domination in politics.<sup>308</sup> Up until the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the ruler and his ministers avoided direct attacks on Wu Zetian and Empress Wei's efforts to promote women, but rather supported some of their policies, such as Empress Wei's lengthening of the mourning period for a divorced mother.<sup>309</sup> Although none of the four princesses played a major role in court politics, presenting his own handwriting on their tomb steles may to a certain degree have showed the emperor's reverence for the female members of his family.

Table 3.1 "List of Inscription Authors on the Four Princesses' Tomb Steles" lists the people who contributed to the inscriptions on the four princesses' tomb steles. From this, we see that Emperor Xuanzong was not the sole contributor, but rather collaborated on the inscriptions with others. Almost all of the people, other than Emperor Xuanzong, who contributed their writing were high-ranking scholar-officials serving in the central government. Xu Qiaozhi signed his official title as the fourth-rank Grand Master of the

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<sup>308</sup> Chen Ruoshui, "Empress Wu and Proto-Feminist Sentiments in T'ang China" in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, Frederick P. Brandauer and Huang Chun-chieh, ed. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 77-116, 100.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

Palace Acting Chief Minister of the Court of Judicial Review 中大夫守大理寺卿. Both Zhang Yue and Su Ting had served as Prime Minister during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, together receiving praise from their contemporaries as the ‘Immense Hand-brushes from Yan and Xu’.<sup>310</sup> The participation of these high-ranking ministers in the production of inscriptions for the tomb steles not only shows the princesses’ lofty position, but also demonstrates that the death rituals of significant imperial family members were not merely the emperor’s personal family matters but also state affairs in their own right.

Among the four tomb steles, Princess Daiguo’s is the most distinguished. The text of the inscription and the identity of the figures who participated in its production highlight the princess’s multiple family roles, not only as a sister, but also as a dearly loved wife and mother. The head of the stele was from the hand of Emperor Xuanzong, while the text of the inscription was composed by the princess’s husband Zheng Wangjun 鄭萬鈞, and the calligraphy of the inscription was executed by Zheng Cong 鄭聰, the princess’s son (Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7). The participation of these close relatives in making the inscription distinguishes the stele as a public testament to the loving commitment of her husband and the filial piety of her son. In contrast to the formulaic inscriptions composed by scholar-officials who often had no personal contact with imperial family members, in this inscription, Zheng Wangjun expressed his affection for Princess Daiguo and movingly describes the situation of her final hour. He recalled that: ‘(the princess) holding my hand said that “This will be the end of our love, so if I have done something wrong, please forgive me.”’<sup>311</sup> This kind of detail is unknown in other funerary inscriptions, most of which

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<sup>310</sup> 燕許大手筆. *XTS*, 125.4402.

<sup>311</sup> 執蒙手曰. 恩愛斷也. 有不是處莫怪. *QWXB*, 279: 3153.

were commissioned from hired or appointed literati. Raised by the loving couple, the princess's son Zheng Cong, in his time, established a reputation for filial piety, with deeds recorded in the *Xiaoyou liezhuan* 孝友列傳 [Collective Biographies of People of Filial and Brotherly Conduct] in the *New Tang History*. It is said that when the princess was severely ill, Zheng Cong attended his mother at her bedside for more than three months without even washing his face, and wrote a letter in his own blood to pray for the gods to bless his mother with health.<sup>312</sup> Zheng Cong's calligraphy on the tomb stele has been described by the Qing dynasty scholar Wang Chang in glowing terms: 'The strokes are graceful and beautiful, which resemble the calligraphy of Henan [Chu Suiliang].'<sup>313</sup> The calligraphy of Chu Suiliang is characterized by vigorous and delicate strokes with a sharp angular contour and unified character configurations that are marked by a density inside and loosening outside. Zheng Cong may possibly have achieved his calligraphic accomplishment under the instruction of his father Zheng Wanjun. The Tang scholar-minister Zhang Yue claimed that the sophistication of Zheng Wangjun's calligraphy could match the achievement of the 'Sage of Cursive Script' 草聖 (*Caosheng*).<sup>314</sup> It is worthy of mention that, although it was not a common practice, the *Stele for Grand Princess Daiguo* is not the only Tang princess' tomb stele for which calligraphy was executed by the members of the princesses' husband's household. For example, according to the *Baoke leibian* 寶刻類編 [*Classified Compilation of Treasured Inscriptions*], the calligraphy of the inscription on the *Lanling zhang gongzhu*

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<sup>312</sup> In the *New Tang History*, the name of the princess' son is Zheng Qian Yao 鄭潛曜, whereas in the inscription on the tomb stele the name was signed Zheng Cong 鄭聰. The Qing dynasty scholar Wang Chang 王昶 noted that the two names, Zheng Cong and Zheng Qian Yao, referred to the same person, with Zheng Cong being his childhood name. *XTS*, 225. 5581. *JSCB*, 78.1377.

<sup>313</sup> 筆法婉麗, 極似河南. *JSCB*, 78.1376.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

bei 蘭陵長公主碑 [*Stele for Grand Princess Lanling*] was executed by the hand of the princess's husband, the Commandant-escort 駙馬都尉 Dou Huaizhe 竇懷哲.<sup>315</sup> Even though the *Stele for Grand Princess Lanling* is now lost and the visual image of its calligraphy is unknown to us, the authorship of the calligraphy upon it serves as a testimony to the devotion of a husband to his wife.

Compared with the close ties that Princess Daiguo and Princess Lanling maintained with their husbands and children, a number of Tang princesses chose a liberated life without the burden of husbands and children by acquiring Daoist clerical status. The calligraphy on the entombed epitaph for Princess Jinxian 金仙公主 is an extraordinary case (Figure 3.9). It not only reveals the appearance of Tang palace women's calligraphy, but also illustrates the love and friendship between the princesses, an aspect well beyond the domain of official histories and other forms of accounts made by men. According to Ping Yao's research, in the Tang dynasty, eleven princesses took a Daoist vow during early adulthood and lived as Daoist priestesses.<sup>316</sup> The most famous priestess-princesses are Princess Jinxian and Princess Yuzhen 玉真公主, the daughters of Emperor Ruizong and the younger sisters of Emperor Xuanzong. The two princesses were ordained in the same year, the first year of the *Taiji* period (712), at the ages of sixteen and eighteen respectively, and neither ever married.<sup>317</sup> The two princesses stuck together through their lives as Daoist priestesses until Princess Jinxian passed away in the eastern imperial capital in 732. After her death, Princess Jinxian was granted the honour of an 'attendant tomb' burial in the Qiao Mausoleum. A well-

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<sup>315</sup> *BKLB*, 700.

<sup>316</sup> Ping Yao, "The Daoist Investiture of Princesses Jinxian and Yuzhen and the Journey of Tang Imperial Daughters", *Tang Studies*, Jul 2013, 1-40. 1.

<sup>317</sup> *XTS*, 83.3656.



preserved entombed epitaph written for Princess Jinxian was excavated in 1974 at Pucheng 蒲城, Shaanxi Province.<sup>318</sup> It is the biggest known Tang dynasty entombed epitaph, with a size of 112 x 112cm.<sup>319</sup> While the calligraphy of the inscription on the tomb stele was executed by Emperor Xuanzong, the newly discovered entombed epitaph was transcribed by Princess Yuzhen in an excellent regular script. According to Chang Chun's research, her calligraphy demonstrates a tremendous resemblance to the calligraphy of the great early Tang calligrapher Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢.<sup>320</sup> The stiff strokes and highly-regulated structures of the characters not only bear testimony to the princess' calligraphic achievement, but might also mirror the profound but restrained grief felt as she personally transcribed the inscription for an entombed epitaph to a beloved sister.

### 3.4 Bestowing Imperial Writing on the Tomb Steles of Ministers

In the sixteenth year of the *Zhenguan* era (643), Wei Zheng 魏征, one of Emperor Taizong's most eminent officials, died at the age of sixty-four. Wei Zheng had a reputation as an exemplary and fearless remonstrator and moralist among both his contemporaries and later historians.<sup>321</sup> The emperor expressed profound grief over Wei Zheng's death. To mourn this upright minister, the emperor cancelled court gatherings for five days and decreed that Zheng

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<sup>318</sup> Chen Xiaoe 陳曉娥, "Datang gu jinxian zhanggongzhu zhishi zhi ming kaoshi" 大唐故金仙長公主志石之銘考釋 [Examinations and Interpretations on the Entombed Epitaph of Grand Princess Jinxian], in *Qianling wenhua yanjiu* 乾陵文化研究 [Studies on the Qian Mausoleum], second volume, ed. Fan Yingfeng 樊英峰 (Xian: Sanqin chubanshe, 2006), 177-180.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Chang Chun 常春, Tangdai gongzhu shufa yishu guankui 唐代公主書法藝術管窺 [A Brief Glimpse of the Calligraphic Art of Princesses in the Tang Dynasty], *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, Vol.42, No.3, May 2013, 91-96.

<sup>321</sup> Haward J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of Tang Taizong* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974),4.

should be buried with generous funeral supplies as an attendant tomb within the Zhao Mausoleum, which would be the emperor's own final resting-place.<sup>322</sup> After that, Emperor Taizong commissioned a tomb stele for Wei Zheng. He also composed the text and executed the calligraphy of the stele inscription in person. The tomb soon became a national sensation:

Officials, aristocrats, scholars and civilians poured in to copy and trace the inscriptions on the stele. Thousands of vehicles and horses carried people to come and visit the stele every day, which even caused traffic congestion. People termed the stele the “Two Excellences”, referring to the literature and the calligraphy.<sup>323</sup>

The stele dedicated by Emperor Taizong acclaimed Wei Zheng's exemplary deeds and illustrated the rapport between the minister and the emperor. It is noteworthy, however, that it was not merely the death of an admirable minister, but also the ‘imperial writing’ that drew national attention and brought waves of worshippers to the stele. The tomb stele displayed for public notice, was, on the one hand, a formal approval of the merits and achievements of its recipient; on the other hand, it served to construct the public image for its author (and at the same time its patron) as a wise ruler and a talented calligrapher. The appreciation of the emperor's writing can be correlated with the adoration of the virtues of the emperor himself.<sup>324</sup> The excellence of the writing on the stele could in turn contribute to the emperor's reputation and prestige.

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<sup>322</sup> *JTS*, 71.2561.

<sup>323</sup> 公卿士庶競來模寫，車馬填噎，日有數千，時人號其碑為二絕，文與書也。Li Fang, *Tai ping yu lan* 太平御覽 [*Readings of the Taiping Era*] (983) (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1966), 591: 2662 (a).

<sup>324</sup> Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 30.

To the surprise of Zheng's contemporaries, the most dramatic moment in the stele saga happened a few months later, after the monument's erection. Hou Junji 侯君集 and Du Zhenglun 杜正倫, who had received strong recommendations from Wei Zheng, were found to have participated in a plot headed by the crown prince Li Chengqian 李承乾 to overthrow Emperor Taizong. Junji was executed, and Zhenglun was exiled; thereafter, Emperor Taizong came to suspect Zheng of factionalism. Upon learning that Zheng had secretly recorded admonitory criticisms of Emperor Taizong and given them to the imperial historian Chu Suiliang, the emperor was infuriated further.<sup>325</sup> The emperor ordered the stele that he had commissioned be pushed over and commanded that the inscription on its surface be rubbed away. Today, the stele – without its inscription – still stands in front of the tomb of Wei Zheng, which is located in the present-day Liquan County, Shaanxi Province. The tomb stele publicized the emperor's ultimate evaluation of the deceased minister, functioning as a political barometer. Its establishment represented an extraordinary honour and demonstrated Emperor Taizong's initial regard for Wei Zheng, whereas the demolition symbolised the emperor's complete denial of the deceased's merit. Although Wei Zheng's is an extremely rare case, seeing a tomb stele demolished by its imperial commissioner, he was not the only Tang minister whose tomb stele bore the 'imperial writing'. Were there any institutional regulations guaranteeing that a meritorious minister occupying a lofty official position could gain this honour? What may it have meant for the minister himself and his family to be granted 'imperial writing' on his tomb stele? And what prompted an emperor to apply his own calligraphy to the tomb stele of a subordinate with whom he shared no kinship bonds?

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<sup>325</sup> *JTS*, 71:2562.

Death rituals played a vital role in maintaining social order among the living. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, according to records in *TLD*, the height and decoration of a tomb stele were determined by the rank or the achievements in public service of the tomb's occupant.<sup>326</sup> However, the correspondence between the identity of those people responsible for writing the inscriptions on the tomb steles and the official ranks of the tomb occupants is not found in Tang literature on institutional regulations. Hence, the writing of inscriptions in person for a subject's tomb stele was not an institutional requirement for an emperor, but rather a token of unusual imperial favour, a display of imperial patronage. The following cases show that a minister's attainment of high rank was not sufficient in itself to secure the posthumous honour of having 'imperial writing' on his tomb stele. This superior honour was often made based on the emperor's personal judgement of and relationship with a tomb's occupant and their offspring, which did not have to correspond to the latter's official positions, or even conform to public opinion. The presence of 'imperial writing' on one's tomb stele was not only an ostensible demonstration of the tomb occupant's status, but was also perceived as the manifestation of a family's prestige and a privilege of which the family members should be proud. Requests for 'imperial writing' were often made by the sons of the deceased. Such requests were not always fulfilled, even when the deceased minister had made a tremendous contribution and climbed to the top of the official hierarchy. In contrast, we find a group of people who had made no impressive achievement in their own lifetimes,

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<sup>326</sup> *TLD*, 4. 119-120. It is worth mentioning that, in reality, this regulation was not strictly enforced. It is not hard to find some examples where the height of a minister's stele did not conform to regulation. For instance, Li Ji 李勣, a grand councillor and successful general, had served three Tang emperors. He was bestowed with Emperor Gaozong's 'imperial writing' for the inscription of his tomb stele. The height of this tomb stele is 565 cm. That was more than twelve *chi* according to the Tang Dynasty unit of measurement, significantly exceeding the permitted height of nine *chi*.

but were granted ‘imperial writing’ on their tomb steles due to the feats of their sons. The provision of imperial calligraphy for the inscription on a minister’s tomb stele could serve multiple functions. First, as an exemplary model inspiring other subjects to serve the regime faithfully, it promoted values that the rulers aimed to advocate to a broad audience. Second, it generated gratitude among the minister’s family members and bound them more closely to the emperors. In this sense, we can regard this practice as a means by which the emperor manipulated public opinion and conducted effective rule.

### **(1) The Tomb Stele for Pei Guangting**

It is safe to say that an inscription on a tomb stele written by the emperor was an imperial endorsement of the tomb occupant’s merits, but it does not mean that those meritorious deeds had been unanimously recognized by the public at the time. Sometimes, the emperor’s opinions might have conflicted with the judgement of contemporary scholar-officials. Applying imperial calligraphy to the tomb steles of certain significant figures could publicly promote the emperor’s views on particular policies and people. Pei Guangting was a Prime Minister, and died in this position at the age of fifty-eight during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong.<sup>327</sup> The calligraphy of the inscription on his tomb stele was written in person by Emperor Xuanzong. In the case of Pei Guangting, this appreciation from the emperor and the negative opinions held by other scholar-officials are in conflict. Sun Wan 孫琬, the Erudite of the Chamberlain for Ceremonials 太常博士, a scholar-official in charge of choosing posthumous names, wished to give Pei the moderate posthumous name of “Pacify” (克, *ke*)

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<sup>327</sup> *JTS*, 84. 2807.

because of his renowned but controversial policy – the “Seniority-based Promotion System” 循資格.<sup>328</sup> Under this system, seniority rather than talent became the main consideration for the appointment and promotion of officials. This proposal faced a backlash from some officials of the time, and later court historians argued that the system impeded the promotion of young, talented officials.<sup>329</sup> Emperor Xuanzong overrode Sun Wan’s suggestion and bestowed on Pei the much more honourable posthumous name of “Loyal and Sage” 忠獻 along with his grant of ‘imperial calligraphy’ for the minister’s tomb stele.

Fortunately, both Pei Guangting’s tomb stele and entombed epitaph survive to this day. By combining the textual content of the inscriptions on his tomb stele and entombed epitaph with relevant records in the official histories, we can reconstruct the final years of his life and the funeral issues after his death. When Pei was severely ill, the emperor showed an earnest concern for his health. Prescriptions for medicine were sent in the form of imperial letters from the court; imperial physicians were sent to take care of Pei’s medicines, and groups of officials and eunuchs came to visit on behalf of the emperor.<sup>330</sup> When Pei died, court gatherings were suspended for three days to allow the emperor to grieve for his minister. Pei’s funeral was prepared and financially supported by the Tang government: The Director of the Ministry of Revenue 戶部尚書 Du Xie 杜暹 was sent to pay condolences; five hundred lengths of cloth and five hundred piculs of grains were granted to the Pei

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<sup>328</sup> *ZZTJ*, 213: 6789.

<sup>329</sup> *JTS*, 84:2806-2808.

<sup>330</sup> 及公疾亟之際, 天札傳方, 御醫護藥, 並走群望, 中使相望. For the full text of Pei Guangting’s entombed epitaph, see Li Zhengyun 李政雲, “Xinchu Pei Guangting muzhi chutan” 新出裴光庭墓誌初探 [Study on the New Excavated Entombed Epitaph of Pei Guangting], *Tang shi luncong* 唐史論叢 [Essays on Tang History], 2016, 229-248.

family.<sup>331</sup> Emperor Xuanzong appointed Secretariat Director 中書令 Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 to compose the text for the inscription on Pei's tomb stele and personally transcribed the text in semi-cursive script. The inscription on the reverse of the stele presents a biography of Pei Guangting with information on his genealogy, talents, and official achievements, ending with a lament written in verse. The obverse side, which was supposed to be read first, contains the emperor's edict on the establishment of the stele. It reads:

Bestowed on the Grand Preceptor Guangting: He committed to significant responsibilities, demonstrating loyalty and moral integrity. Passing away suddenly, only the legends about him are left on the earth. Guangting's son acclaimed his sincerity many times and petitioned me to establish a stele for Guangting. Buried in state affairs, I could not spare more time on this issue, so the litterateur serving the court (Zhang Jiuling) was commissioned to record his great deeds in words. By doing so, the marvellous literature work would be immortalized.<sup>332</sup>

The edict recounts the course of the making of Pei Guangting's tomb stele. It was a petition from Guangting's son, rather than written regulation, that prompted the emperor to establish the tomb stele and brush the inscription for it. The edict further explains that the emperor was overburdened with state affairs and thus had no time to compose the text for the

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<sup>331</sup> Zhang Shuo, "Pei Guangting Bei" 裴光庭碑 [The Preface of the Stele of Pei Guangting], in *Quan tang wen xin bian* 全唐文新編 [The New Complete Collection of Tang Period Literature], Zhou Shaoliang edit, (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chu ban she, 2000), 291. 3294.

<sup>332</sup> 贈太師光庭:嘗為重任,能徇忠節,忽雖化往,空存遺事。其子屢陳誠到,請朕作碑。機務之繁,是則未暇,朝廷詞伯,故以□卿。彼之行能,卿之述作,宛其鴻裁,因茲不朽耳。For the full text and an image of the rubbing of Pei Guangting's tomb stele, see Hedong Museum edit., *Hedong beike jingxuan* 河東碑刻精選 [The Best Selection of the Carved Steles of Hedong], (Beijing: Wenwu chu ban she, 2014), 41-44.

inscription. However, we should not conclude from the emperor's words that he did not expend much time and effort on the stele. Though he excused himself from the labour of composing the text, the emperor still personally transcribed approximately two thousand three hundred characters for the stele. It is noteworthy that a tomb occupant's high official position and his descendants' wishes could not secure a grant of 'imperial writing' for his tomb stele. About four years later, another Prime Minister, Song Jing 宋璟, died at the age of seventy-four in the twenty-fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* era (737). His tomb stele was established in the seventh year of the *Dali* era (772). Song Jing's grandson commissioned the great master calligrapher and minister Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 to compose the text and brush the calligraphy for the tomb stele inscription. In the *Side Note on the Spirit Path Stele of Song Jing* 宋璟神道碑側記 (Song Jing shendaobei ce ji) Yan Zhenqing mentioned that after the death of Song Jing, his third son Song Hun 宋渾, who at that time was in the official position of Palace Aide to the Censor-in-chief 御史中丞, made the plan of requesting the 'imperial stele and epigraph' 御製碑頌. The request ultimately failed, however, because soon after Song Hun was demoted and banished from the court.<sup>333</sup>

## (2) Tomb Steles for the Fathers of Three Prime Ministers

In some occasions, a requirement to win over the support of a tomb occupant's living family members might override the need to reward the merits of the deceased when an emperor bestowed his calligraphy on a tomb stele. One set of tomb steles bearing imperial calligraphy owed their erection to Emperor Xuanzong's desire to inspire gratitude in a group of

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<sup>333</sup> *JSCB*, 97.1669.



ministers who were the sons of the tomb occupants. This group of steles includes the *Zhang Zhi bei* 张鷟碑 [Stele for Zhang Zhi], the *Yang Xun bei* 楊珣碑 [Stele for Yang Xun] and the *Xiao Guan bei* 蕭瓘碑 [Stele for Xiao Guan]. None of these three recipients— Zhang Zhi, Yang Xun, and Xiao Guan— are recorded as having made great contributions or achieved high official positions while they were alive. What they have in common is that their sons served as Prime Minister, therefore ranking among the most eminent political figures of the time. After examining a large number of tomb stele records, I suggest that Emperor Xuanzong was the monarch who gave the fullest play to the practice of bestowing imperial calligraphy on tomb steles for meritorious ministers’ deceased parents. Examining these tomb steles as a group and placing them in the wider context of proliferating Confucian values, I argue that these monuments to ministers’ fathers granted ‘imperial calligraphy’, in addition to displaying imperial favour and patronage, should also be viewed as essential components of Emperor Xuanzong’s project to promote filial piety. By analysing the emperor’s own words, we can see how the Confucian notion of filial piety was thought to be conducive to the restoration of the Tang ruling order after decades of instability, and useful for the consolidation of the emperor’s own leadership at that time. In this sense, these steles are potent examples revealing how the emperor utilized his personal calligraphy in public spaces in service of political ideals.

Wu Hong has noted that, alongside China’s transformation from a clan-lineage society to a family-oriented society, the focus of ancestor worship shifted from a remote lineage ancestor to close family members, especially one’s father. ‘The father-son relationship became analogue to relations between Heaven and ruler and between ruler and subject; the practice of filial piety was no longer a private family business but one’s most important public

duty.<sup>334</sup> As reverence for one's family was considered as a necessity for the spiritual and moral cultivation of an "exemplary person" *junzi* 君子, filial piety was the foundation of all Confucian teachings.<sup>335</sup> In the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the concept of filial piety has been politicized and redefined to suit a monarchical system. In the first chapter of this work, it claims that 'filial piety begins with the serving of our parents, continues with the serving of our ruler, and is completed with the establishment of our own character.'<sup>336</sup> The value of filial piety outlined in this work was regarded by Emperor Xuanzong as applicable to his own political pursuits and ambitions. In the preface to the *Commentaries on the Classic of Filial Piety*, he noted:

Knowing that filial piety could be used to educate people, the sages illustrated the meaning of respect by referring to the dignity of one's parents and demonstrated the principle of love by referring to one's affection for one's parents. In this way, the approach of transferring one's obedience toward one's parents to a loyalty toward the emperor is revealed, then the righteousness of establishing oneself and making one's name renowned is manifested.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, 122.

<sup>335</sup> Henry Rosemont and Roger T. Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, 1.

<sup>336</sup> The sentence was originally cited and translated by Lee Cheuk Yin, "Emperor Chengzu and Imperial Filial Piety of the Ming Dynasty," in Alan K.L. Chan and Sor-hoon Tan edit, *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2012) 146.

<sup>337</sup> 聖人知孝之可以教人也, 故因嚴以教敬, 因親以教愛. 於是以順移忠之道昭矣, 立身揚名之義彰矣. *Shisan jing zhu shu: xiaojing zhu shu* 十三經注疏: 孝經注疏 [Notes and Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics: Notes and Commentaries on the Classic of Filial Piety], Beijing: Beijing daxue chu ban she, 1999, 11-15.

In this paragraph, filial piety was interpreted by Emperor Xuanzong as the instrument by which the ruling order – extending from the family to the state – was established and maintained. An official’s filial piety for their parents was believed to be transferrable into loyal devotion to their ruler. Therefore, extending far beyond merely addressing reverence within a family, the end goal of the doctrine of filial piety, in the emperor’s interpretation, should be to promote filial devotion to emperor and to state. After decades of instability and court intrigue, along with no little destruction and bloodshed, the authority of the Li imperial family was considerably weakened, and there was a perceived collapse in social morals. Within this context, the promotion of the value of filial piety can be viewed as Emperor Xuanzong’s effort to restore the Li ruling order and consolidate his leadership by resorting to Confucian scholarship and an idealised antiquity. In this way, an ideal social formulation could be achieved, encapsulated briefly in the phrase: “The emperor rules all under heaven with filial piety.”<sup>338</sup>

To promote the value of filial piety, the best-known efforts made by Emperor Xuanzong include his personal annotation of the *Xiaojing* 孝經 [*Classic of Filial Piety*] and his erection, in 745 CE, and within the precincts of the Grand Academy, of the *Shitai xiaojing* 石台孝經 [*Stele of the Classic of Filial Piety*] for which he personally executed the calligraphy in the *bafen* script.<sup>339</sup> This section shows how a series of imperial writing grants

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<sup>338</sup> Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 2.

<sup>339</sup> Many Ming and Qing critics commented on the the *Classic of Filial Piety on Stone Terrace*. See, for example, Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 (1849-1917), *Yu shi jiao zhu* 語石 [*On Stone Inscriptions*]; Zhao Han 趙岫 (1564-1618), *Shi mo juan hua* 石墨鐫華 [*Selected Lapidary Inscriptions*]. Twentieth and twenty-first century works on the *Classic of Filial Piety on Stone Terrace* include Chen Caijing 陳財經, “Shitai xiaojing kanke jingguo ji timing zhu chen kao” 石台孝經刊刻經過及題名諸臣考 [*Study on the Process of Making*

on grave steles for the deceased parents of meritorious ministers functions as another indication of Emperor Xuanzong's desire to advocate the virtue of filial piety. Considering why this practice should serve to promote filial piety and why it was a mark of such great respect to officials' fathers, we may find answers from the words of Confucius. Confucius instructed his disciple Zeng Shen on the different levels of performing one's filial piety by saying that:

Your physical person with its hair and skin are received from your parents. Vigilance in not allowing anything to do injury to your person is where family reverence begins; distinguishing yourself and walking the proper way (*dao*) in the world; raising your name high for posterity and thereby bringing esteem to your father and mother – it is in these things that family reverence finds its consummation.<sup>340</sup>

According to this statement, the noblest form of filial piety was to follow the right path and to bring esteem to one's parents. In this sense, commissioning a large and ostentatious tomb stele for one's deceased parents could be read as a demonstration of the patron's filial piety in two ways. The first is that the stele itself and the texts carved upon it usually explicitly express the patron's reverence for the deceased. The second is that the stele functions as a physical manifestation of the patron's economic and political clout, an exhibition of the glory that the offspring had brought to the family. In the production of the tomb stele, it is

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the Steles of the Classic of Filial Piety on Stone Terrace and the Nominated Officials on the Steles], *Bei lin ji kan*, volume 2, Xi'an: Sanqin chuban she, 1994, 82-86. Jing Yali 景亞鸞 and Wang Yuanyin 王原茵, Xi'an beilin cang tang shitai xiaojing shu lü 西安碑林藏唐石台孝經述略 [Study on the Classic of Filial Piety on Stone Terrace in the Forest of Steles of Xi'an], *Qianling wenhua yanjiu*, volume 8, Xi'an: Sanqin chuban she, 2014, 455-461.

<sup>340</sup> Henry Rosemont, and Roger T. Ames, *Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 105.

hard to imagine a more honourable component, for both the living and the dead, than calligraphy written by an emperor's own hand, and dedicated to the glorification of the deceased. In this sense, this special form of reward could perfectly fulfil the ministers' desire to bring honour to their families, dominated as they were by the father-son relationship. From the perspective of the emperor, bestowing 'imperial writing' on their fathers' tomb steles might not only reward the meritorious service of individual ministers, but also demonstrate his recognition of the value of filial piety.

Zhang Zhi 张鹭 died in the humble official position of Assistant Magistrate to Hong Dong County 洪洞縣丞. The only reason his name has come down to us is that he fathered Zhang Yue 張說, Duke Wenzhen of Yan 燕文貞公張說, who served as Prime Minister during the reigns of Emperor Ruizong and Emperor Xuanzong. Knowing that Zhang Yue had commissioned a stele for his father, Emperor Xuanzong personally inscribed a head-title for the stele which reads: 'Alas, a grave of the accumulated virtue.'<sup>341</sup> This phrasing might resemble the format of the epitaph for the ancient sage Yanling Jizi 延陵季子, which reads: 'Alas, the gentleman of Wu'.<sup>342</sup> It is said that Yanling Jizi took up farming as his livelihood after abdicating the throne in favour of his older brother.<sup>343</sup> Associating Zhang Zhi with the famous hermit had, to some extent, sanctified and moralised the former's mediocre official career. The stele inscription also includes Emperor Ruizong's edict regarding the conferment of posthumous office on Zhang Zhi as Regional Inspector to Dan Prefecture. The edict

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<sup>341</sup> 嗚呼, 積善之墓. *XTS*, 125: 4410.

<sup>342</sup> 嗚呼, 有吳君子. Liu Su (about 820 AD): *Da tang xin yu* 大唐新語 [*Tang Dynasty Historical Figures and Stories*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1984), 11:165.

<sup>343</sup> Sima Qian, *Shi ji* 史記 [*The Historic Records*], Changchun: Jilin da xue chu ban she, 2015, 31: 223.

relates the achievements of Zhang Yue together with the virtue and instructions of his father, reading:

The late official (Zhang Zhi), whose virtue and morality were lofty, applied his abilities in a humble position. Refinement and elegance continue from one generation to the next; integrity and purity are the family's heritage. When he assisted the district magistrate east of the river, the custom of honesty was promoted. When he reviewed lawsuits south of the mountain, the compliment of justice resounded. While death is eternal, the grave has no ornament. He illuminatingly instructed his virtuous descendants and industriously served the previous emperor. For the sake of commemorating the kindness of ancestors and fulfilling the aspiration of distinguishing oneself, Zhang Zhi is appropriately eligible to be conferred the posthumous office of Regional Inspector to Dan Prefecture.<sup>344</sup>

Despite the lyrical literary compliments regarding Zhang Zhi's virtues and deeds in a humble position, the edict lavishly praises on his illuminating instruction to virtuous descendants, in other words the accomplished Grand Minister Zhang Yue. Similar rhetoric can also be found in the inscriptions on the *Stele for Xiao Guan* and the *Stele for Yang Xun*. Xiao Guan 蕭瓘 died in the position of Administrator of Yu Prefecture 渝州長史, while his son Xiao Song

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<sup>344</sup> 故官某。毓德高邁。藏器下僚。代載儒雅。家傳清白。河東佐邑。長不欺之風。山南覆囚。溢無冤之聽。徂謝永久。邱墳不飾。啟茲令胤。貞事先朝。宜崇追遠之恩。以表揚名之志。唐贈使持節丹州刺史。Zhang Yue, *Zeng Danzhou cishi xian fujun bei* 贈丹州刺史先府君碑 [The Stele of the Posthumous Regional Inspector of Dan Prefecture], in *Quan tang wen xin bian* 全唐文新編 [The New Whole Collection of Tang Period Literature], compiled by Zhou Shaoliang, (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chu ban she, 2000), 228.2578.

蕭嵩 was Prime Minister during the *Kaiyuan* Period (713-741). Emperor Xuanzong's edict on the conferment of posthumous office on Xiao Guan declares: 'It is worthwhile to continue the benevolence of remembering the ancestors. It is rewarding to celebrate the glory of the Grand Minister. Hence, it is appropriate to bestow (Xiao Guan) posthumously with the office of Director of the Ministry of Personnel.'<sup>345</sup> By addressing the merits of Zhang Zhi and Xiao Guan as forebears who had exerted a positive influence on their accomplished descendants and emphasising the necessity of promoting ancestral worship, the two edicts justified these imperial bestowals on the deceased fathers of these distinguished ministers.

While the *Stele for Zhang Zhi* and the *Stele for Xiao Guan* are no longer extant, the *Stele for Yang Xun*, bearing more than a thousand characters in Emperor Xuanzong's own hand, still stands at the place of its original erection near the tomb of Yang Xun, located in present-day Fufeng County 扶風縣, Shaanxi province.<sup>346</sup> Among the three, this for Yang Xun was in many senses the most impressive. The imposing stele has a height of nearly seven meters (6.67 high x 2.19 wide x 0.65 m deep), thus creating a sense of majestic dignity as it towers over viewers who stand beneath the stele and look upwards at the inscription. Merely inscribing head-titles for the other two steles, Emperor Xuanzong personally composed the text and executed the calligraphy for the main content of Yang Xun's stele. The main text of the inscription is composed of twenty-six columns with fifty-seven characters per column, proclaiming the glorious history of the Yang family and the personal achievements of Yang

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<sup>345</sup> 宜承追远之庆. 俾崇冢宰之榮. 可贈吏部尚書. *QTWXB*, 228.2591.

<sup>346</sup> Qiu Fuke 丘富科, *Zhongguo wenhua yichan cidian* 中國文化遺產詞典 [*Lexicon of Chinese Culture and Heritage*], (Beijing: Wenwu chu ban she, 2009), 344.

Xun.<sup>347</sup> Correspondingly, the head-title of the stele, the work of the Crown Prince Li Heng (the later Emperor Suzong) in seal script, reads *Hongnong yangshi xianxian bei* 弘農先賢楊氏碑, which can be translated as ‘Stele for the Ancient Sage of the Hongnong Yang Clan’.

‘Ancient sage’ here refers to Yang Xun, identifying his status and praising his brilliance. The Hongnong Yangs claimed a record of political activity stretching back to the Western Han dynasty (202 BC-8AD). Many empresses and imperial concubines came from the clan, including Suzong’s birth mother and Xuanzong’s favourite consort, and it remained among the most notable families through the Tang dynasty.<sup>348</sup> Despite Yang Xun having neither performed great deeds nor made marvellous contributions during his lifetime, he was the uncle of Emperor Xuanzong’s favourite Consort Yang Guifei and father of the Prime Minister Yang Guozhong 楊國忠. The erection of the stele and the imperial writing upon it loudly proclaimed Emperor Xuanzong’s favour to the Yang family which had provided both his beloved consort and his right-hand man. In the early Tang, after centuries of aristocratic dominance, family origin was still often taken into account in the evaluation of an individual’s virtues and intelligence. This recognition afforded to the prominent ancestors of both Yang Guozhong and Yang Guifei was instrumental to the legitimisation of the Yang descendants’ earthly authority and prestige. According to Peter Bol, for most of the Tang

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<sup>347</sup> For the full text of the inscription of Stele of Yang Xun see Xuanzong, “Yang xun bei” 楊珣碑 [The Stele of Yang Xun], in Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良, *Quan tang wen xin bian* 全唐文新編 [The New Complete Collection of Tang Period Literature], (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2000), 41:551.

<sup>348</sup> Based on the examination of twenty tomb epitaphs for members of the Hongnong Yang Clan, Yang Weikang suggests that, although from the Han dynasty to the early Tang the Yang clan had maintained strong influence in Hongnong Prefecture, the clan’s place of origin, it was only in the middle and late Tang era when many clan members moved to the two capitals and successfully involved themselves in the transitions to centralisation and bureaucratisation. Yang Weikang 楊為剛, “Zhonggu Hongnong Yangshi guanwang yu juzang di kaolun” 中古弘農楊氏貫望與居葬地考論 [Study on the Place of Origin, Residences and Burial Sites of the Yang Clan of Hongnong in Medieval Times], in *Beilin jikan*, volume 15, 2009, 227-236.



period the socio-political elite denoted aristocratic clans whose social worth and right to govern were largely gained by virtue of birth.<sup>349</sup> Steles bearing emperors' 'imperial writing' spoke loudly of the ministers' feats and their ancestors' virtues. In this way, the ministers' contributions were rewarded in the form of awards to their forebears.

As for the reason behind this posthumous conferment of office on Yang Xun, in a parallel to the inscriptions on the steles for Xiao Guan and Zhang Zhi, Emperor Xuanzong himself wrote that: 'In this way the father's instruction and the son's loyalty can be rewarded.'<sup>350</sup> By reading the inscriptions on the three steles, we can observe that the sons' outstanding achievements in government service were attributed to the righteous instruction received from their fathers, whose rewards, gained after death, were not due to their own public deeds, but to their provision of this guidance. The steles, bearing the emperor's personal writing, stood as a glowing official notice to the public, proclaiming just how important and how admirable his ministers were. The ministers' achievements were commemorated by carving the steles, aiming at eternal endurance, and their contributions were further rewarded by bringing esteem to their parents. The ministers consequently achieved the consummation of filial piety in accordance with the spirit of the *Classic of Filial Piety*.<sup>351</sup> From this perspective, Emperor Xuanzong's patronage of the *Classic of Filial Piety* and his bestowals of imperial writing on the deceased ancestors of the Tang ministers, from establishing the canon to setting exemplary models, served a common goal of announcing the value of filial

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<sup>349</sup> On the transformation of aristocracy in the Tang dynasty, see Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours – Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 35-48.

<sup>350</sup> 所以彰父教子忠. *QTXB*, 41:525.

<sup>351</sup> In the *Classic of Filial Piety*, Confucius said: 'Rising your name high for posterity and thereby bringing esteem to your father and mother—it is in these things that family reverence finds its consummation.' Translated by Henry Rosemont, and Roger T. Ames, *Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press (2014), 105.

piety. These steles should be viewed as a whole as a systematic cultural and political project through which Emperor Xuanzong sought to re-establish a particular moral order in accordance with his own political needs.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the functions of calligraphy in the death rituals of imperial household members and prestigious ministers. Despite the mystical belief that it is calligraphy's possession of emotional expressiveness that enhances the form's charisma as art, this chapter demonstrates that interpreting mourning works by seeking visual reflections of embodied emotions is problematical. The majority of the extant Tang funerary writings carved on stones were written in the seal, clerical, and regular scripts that are characterised by strict regulations of brush movement, rather than the more spontaneous and more freely executed semi-cursive and cursive scripts. The choice of scripts in this genre of calligraphic production has on the one hand considerably limited the possibility of reading emotion through the visual effects of these works, and on the other reflects a Tang era aesthetic of solemn and restrained demonstration of grief in funerary writings. Hence, I suggest that what is fundamental in discerning the emotions of calligraphic works for mourning and their social functions is not visual performance, but rather the interpersonal relationships behind the making of these works and the identities of the figures who were involved in these processes.

A number of forms of funerary writings were made for the purposes of mourning, burial, or sacrifice, but some works, such as Emperor Xuanzong's *Handwriting Placed Before the Coffin of Emperor Rang*, are known only from textual records without physical evidence.

The funerary writings most commonly preserved in both historical records and archaeological discoveries are inscriptions on entombed epitaphs and tomb steles. The examination on the roles that these two kinds of funerary writings played in Tang death rituals, as well as their reception and circulation in the society in which they were created, reveals the extent of their public exposure. In other words, although these funerary writings were dedicated to the deceased, there is a potential audience that would have been taken into consideration by the patrons and authors of the text and calligraphy prior to and throughout the production process. Most notably, inscriptions on tomb steles constituted a significant visual spectacle in daily life under the Tang. Almost all of the known calligraphic works by Tang emperors that relate to death rituals are inscriptions on tomb steles, rather than on entombed epitaphs. The tradition of erecting tomb steles at the Tang courts, in this sense, served as a stage for political showmanship. Moreover, under the Tang dynasty, the practice of inscribing authors' names alongside the main text of the inscription had become normalised, which provides clues to the authors' relations with the deceased and the inscription's commissioners. In brief, the significance of entombed epitaphs and tomb steles lies not only in their great value as sources for historical and calligraphic studies; the social relations and interactions behind their making as social products are subjects worth exploring in their own right.

Three groups of Tang court members' tomb writings have been examined in this chapter. What these works have in common is that they are Tang emperors' own calligraphic works, the 'imperial writing'. Clearly, as shown in the discussion on each group of works, the reasons behind the Tang rulers' bestowal of their own calligraphy on the tomb steles for deceased court members were far from homogeneous. The politician Wu Zetian might deftly

manipulate her male relatives in the production of calligraphy on four tomb steles for Tang emperors and empresses to make these public inscriptions function as imperial versions of the narration of particular events. Wu's various political agendas were embodied in her visible or invisible participation in the production and commission of these tomb steles. The presence of Emperor Xuanzong's 'imperial writing' on the tomb steles for four princesses who were members of the Li imperial household on the surface endorsed the posthumous positions of the tomb occupants, but at a deeper level could function to reinforce the legitimacy of the Li imperial family after decades of usurpation. Bestowing imperial writing on the inscription of a minister's tomb stele was unquestionably a display of imperial patronage, which could not only generate gratitude among the minister's family members but also promote the values that rulers aimed to advocate to a broad audience. Not surprisingly, these different aspirations could only be fulfilled with the prerequisite of the public display of such tomb steles. Through these tomb steles, the Tang rulers' investment in their personal relationships with the deceased, members of the Tang courts in a broad sense, either directly or via close relatives, gained a public arena for display in accordance with the rulers' wishes. The utility of granting imperial writing to tomb steles was especially associated with the orthodox ideology of Confucianism, enabling rulers to project images of themselves as upholders of a particular set of family values. Not only does the text of inscriptions on tomb steles directly provide imperially sanctioned comment on the deceased and narration of particular events, the presence of the Tang rulers' calligraphy itself and its implication of an interpersonal relationship behind the production of these steles functioned as a political barometer, indicative of the political climate.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CALLIGRAPHY AND RELIGIOUS SCRIPTURE

In Tang China, thinkers tended to hold a ‘dualistic worldview’, observing the world as two dimensions that were dominated by distinct beliefs and behavioural patterns. The root of the first is orthodox Confucian ideology, while the latter is characterised by extramundane exploration.<sup>352</sup> These extramundane spiritual needs were signified by that the Daoism and Buddhism had become major philosophical and religious interests.<sup>353</sup> The Tang emperors’ gestures of support for literary culture and Confucian learning were not seen as being in conflict with concurrent support for Buddhist and Daoist religious beliefs.<sup>354</sup> These two religions, the most influential of the period, had permeated through life in all strata of Tang society. It is little wonder that the emperors, members of the imperial family and other officials all patronized and participated in various religious practices. Sutra copying was one of the most commonly seen of these activities.

As a fusion of religious literature and calligraphic visual culture, scripture copying was not merely an integral component of religious studies, but had evolved into a genre of calligraphic creation in the Tang period. According to the doctrines of Buddhism and Daoism, copying scriptures, either personally or via patronage, is believed to be a way of demonstrating religious devotion, and an act that produces merit.<sup>355</sup> Owing to the abundance

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<sup>352</sup> Chen ruoshui 陳弱水, *Tangdai wenshi yu zhongguo sixiang de zhuanxing* 唐代文士與中國思想的轉型 [*Literary Men and the Intellectual Transformations in Tang China*] (Nanning: Guangxi shifandaxue chubanshe, 2009), 122-123.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Patricia Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2008), 31.

<sup>355</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion on the relationship between the notion of merit and the production of Buddhist material culture, see John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on*

of textual records and the discovery of a large number of Tang scriptures in Dunhuang in the early twentieth century, there has been a good deal of scholarship on Tang scripture copying, much of which focuses on the religious meaning of this practice and concentrates on a particular group of scriptures that were transcribed by humble scripture scribes commissioned under Tang court.<sup>356</sup> Viewed as religious objects made by artisans, scripture written by scribes and scripture calligraphy have long been denigrated in calligraphic criticism.<sup>357</sup> Historically, however, even within the court setting, the practice of scripture transcription was not exclusive to scripture scribes. Those people who involved in this

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*Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 164-176.

<sup>356</sup> Campany has studied the symbolic functions of the sutra and the religious value attached to sutra copying. See Robert Campany, “Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of Sutra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies,” in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 14, (1991): 28-72. Wang Yuanjun has examined the Tang Dynasty sutra scribes and tried to give a fair assessment of their calligraphic achievements. See Wang Yuanjun 王元軍, “Cong Dunhuang xiejing juanzi kan tangdai de xiejing shufa” 從敦煌寫經卷子看唐代的寫經書法 [Examination of Tang Dynasty Sutra Calligraphy through the Scriptures of Dunhuang], *Dunhuang Studies*, 1995(1), 306-321. Focusing on the manuscripts of Dunhuang and Turfan, Mao Qiujin has examined the formats and calligraphy of Buddhist sutras, and the official institutions responsible for sutra copying from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) to the *Guiyijun* period (851-1036). See Mao Qiujin 毛秋瑾, “Guanfang yu fojiao xiejing – Yi Dunhuang Tulufan xieben wei zhongxin” 官方與佛教寫經—以敦煌吐魯番寫本為中心 [Authority and Buddhist Sutra Copying – Centred on Manuscripts from Dunhuang and Turfan], in *Yishuxue yanjiu* 藝術學研究 [Art Studies], ed. Huang Dun 黃惇 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2007), 226-261. Zhao Heping teases out the personnel, locations, and motivations of the sutra copying project sponsored by the court from the *Xianheng* period to the *Yifeng* era during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, focusing on those Buddhist Diamond Sutra and Lotus Sutra copies produced by professional scribes under Tang court commission that survive in Dunhuang. See Zhao Heping 趙和平, “Tangdai Xianheng zhi Yifeng zhong de Changan gongting xiejing” 唐代咸亨至儀鳳中的長安宮廷寫經 [Sutra Copying at the Changan Court from the Tang Dynasty *Xianheng* to Mid-*Yifeng* Eras], in *Shoujie Changan fojiao guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 首屆長安佛教國際學術研討會論文集 [Symposium of The First Changan International Conference on Buddhism] volume 3, ed. Zeng Qin 增勤 (Xi’an: Shanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 319-337.

<sup>357</sup> The renowned calligrapher and connoisseur Qigong stated that: ‘Sutra writing 寫經 has been regarded as vulgar writing, so (this calligraphic genre) has long been underrated by enthusiasts and its value is extremely low’. Qigong 啟功, *Qigong congkao* 啟功叢稿 [Collected Essays of Qigong] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 298.

practice were diverse in their identities, ranging from emperors to palace women, from ministers to scribes. As discussed in the previous chapters, from the production to the reception of any form of calligraphic work, the underlying functional mechanism was never a matter of pure aesthetic consideration, but rather a combination of social and aesthetic factors. Indeed, the lack of an angle on social elites' participation in scripture transcription and the assumption that utilitarian money-making motives lay behind professional scribes' scripture transcription practice may lead to discrimination against sutra-writing calligraphy. Emphasizing the wide participation of court elites and the multiple qualities of sutra transcription (as religious object, calligraphic work, and social tool), this chapter first rectifies some misperceptions on sutra-writing calligraphy, and next sheds light on how members of the Tang court utilised sutra copying to serve practical needs in the secular world, especially how this practice impacted upon social relations within the court and functioned in the building of court members' public image.

This chapter illuminates how, within the Tang courts, sutra transcription was not a simple act of copying texts but a practice performed by court members wishing to realize various secular ambitions that were embodied in the prayers appended to colophons and reflected in the calligraphy seen in the sutra transcriptions. It argues that by utilising and magnifying the dual attributes of sutra transcriptions, the Tang rulers were not only able to present themselves as loving relatives, accomplished calligraphers, and sage rulers within court society, but also gained a means of radiating charisma to local society more broadly via the distribution of scriptures transcribed on their behest. Although transcription of religious scripture was the physical media in the process of facilitating these political agendas, the

underlying functional ideology was a combination of religious ‘merit making’ doctrine and secular Confucian family and political ethics.

This chapter is composed of three sections. In the first section, I discuss the dual attributes of sutra copying as both a religious practice and calligraphic creation. It has been shown that, by the Tang era, sutra transcription had developed into a genre of calligraphic creation. This notion is essential to understanding the roles that sutra transcriptions played in the social life of Tang courts, an issue discussed throughout the whole chapter. The second section focuses on specific Tang court members’ personal employment of exquisite calligraphy in copying scripture. With reference to Emperor Xuanzong’s transcription of the Daoist *Scripture of Laozi* to pray for blessings for his brother, I demonstrate that transcribing scripture not only enabled the emperor to express personal sorrow on the demise of his beloved brother but also allowed the public display of his brotherly kindness, religious preference and calligraphic achievement in a public manner. This section also highlights the fact that almost all known calligraphic works executed by Tang palace women are religious scriptures. It argues that transcribing scripture was associated with Tang palace women’s earthly ambitions, employing calligraphy to increase their own influence within the imperial household and to engage in self-presentation as filial daughters and virtuous wives. The third section is devoted to the religious scriptures that were commissioned by the Tang rulers. These scriptures have been divided into two groups according to the identities of their copyists: high-ranking official-calligraphers on the one hand and professional scribes on the other. As a response to the long-term discrimination against the aesthetic value of professional scribes’ *xiejing ti* 寫經體 [Sutra Writing Style], this section argues that, in a phenomenon specific to these two groups of scriptures created under imperial commissions,



the differences between them did not only relate to their critical reception, but were determined by their production processes and initial social functions in accordance with the motives behind the Tang rulers' commissions.

#### **4.1 The Dual Attributes of Sutra Copying**

Under the theology of merit, sutra copying has long been thought of as a means of merit-making, an essential component of Buddhist and Daoist practice. John Kieschnick argues that the innovation of printing was related directly to the production of Buddhist material objects such as books and sutras.<sup>358</sup> Before the invention of printing, the transcription and propagation of religious texts required the skill of expert calligraphers sponsored by courts, temples, or private patrons. After the development of printing, the production of religious texts continued as an act of devotion.<sup>359</sup> It seems that from the perspective of religious practice there were two main motivations behind the practice of sutra transcription: the first was to proliferate the influence of religious canons, the second to accrue merit by demonstrating religious piety. Another incentive for sutra transcription, that has been less widely mentioned but will be stressed here, is the aesthetic driving force associated with sutra copying as a genre of calligraphic creation. Given that exquisite calligraphy was thought capable of enhancing a sutra's religious efficacy, the extra attention paid to sutra transcriptions' aesthetic quality and the participation of exemplary calligraphers in the practice gradually converted sutra copying into an aspect of calligraphic art. Furthermore,

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<sup>358</sup> John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 181.

<sup>359</sup> Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection* (Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 225-239, 225.

the wide circulation and popularity under the Tang of copies of some masterpieces, such as Wang Xizhi's *Scripture of the Yellow Court*, quickly accelerated this process. Hence, I argue that the connoisseurship of sutra copying as a genre of calligraphic creation existed within both calligraphic practice and criticism during the Tang period. The dual attributes of religious sutras transcribed by distinguished calligraphers as both sacred writing endowed with divine power and calligraphic works bearing aesthetic merit are central to understanding the multiple roles that sutra transcription played in social interaction at the Tang courts as discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

### **The Religious Meaning of Sutra Copying Defined in Daoist and Buddhist Doctrines**

Since the Shang dynasty (about 1600-1046 BCE) when the oracle bone script was carved onto shell or bone for divination, writing had been regarded as an approach through which humans could achieve communication with the gods. Daoism inherited this archaic belief in divine writing's power to establish a relationship between mankind and heaven.<sup>360</sup> In Daoist doctrine, the meaning of copying sutras lies not only in preserving and propagating divine texts, but also in accumulating blessings and eliciting miraculous responses. Unlike the Daoist traditional obsession with writing, Indian sects preferred recitation from memory as the method of instruction.<sup>361</sup> In the initial stages, the transmission of Buddhism in India was primarily oral. While the original texts of Buddhism originated from India, the impact of local customs can be identified through the ways in which the scriptures were interpreted

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<sup>360</sup> Nie Qing 聶清, *Daojiao yu shufa* 道教與書法 [*Daoism and Calligraphy*] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2012), 162.

<sup>361</sup> John Stevens, *Sacred Calligraphy of the East* (Boulder, Colorado and London: Shambhala, 1981), 98.

and transmitted in China. In John Stevens' words, 'not until Buddhism arrived in China, Japan, and Tibet did the written word assumed equal authority to the spoken.'<sup>362</sup> In medieval China, reciting, owning, transcribing, and displaying Buddhist sutras were regarded as acts capable of advancing one on the path toward faith and enlightenment.<sup>363</sup> One typical example is seen in the Buddhist *Lotus Sutra*. It asserts that:

If there is anyone who preserves, recites, correctly remembers, practices, and copies the *Lotus Sutra*, they should know that they will meet the Buddha Sakyamuni and hear this sutra from the mouth of Buddha.<sup>364</sup>

A Daoist parallel can be found at the end of the *Taishang dongxuan lingbao furi miao jing* 太上洞玄靈寶福日妙經 [*Marvellous Scripture of the Heavenly Sacred Treasures of Blessing Day*], believed to be composed during the Sui-Tang period. It claims that:

If a person personally transcribes this scripture for ten volumes, he would be cleansed of sins and be saved from tens of thousands of disasters. If a person personally transcribes this scripture for a hundred volumes, he will receive the protection of the demon lord. For those who personally transcribe the scripture for a thousand volumes, flying evil spirits, monsters, demons and plagues will never enter their doors; the benign gods in charge of the area will come to visit them frequently and bring them

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Robert Campany, "Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of Sutra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies", *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 14, (1991): 28-72.

<sup>364</sup> Translated by Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama, *The Lotus Sutra* (Taisho Volume 9, Number 262) (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), 315.

good fortune; the sins that cause disasters of yesterday and today will be cleansed completely. Those who transcribe scriptures for good people will receive endless karmic merits.<sup>365</sup>

This paragraph above promises Daoist practitioners that transcribing this scripture will bring them good luck and help them ward off calamities. It also notes that the scale of the karmic reward that he is promised is in accordance with the number of the scriptures that a person transcribed. The underlying idea of this mathematical equation might contribute to the proliferation of religious scriptures in the Tang dynasty. Quantity is not the only priority in scripture copying, however. Daoist doctrines also emphasize the quality of the calligraphy applied to scripture production. The *Scripture of Dongzhen taishang taixiao langxiao* 洞真太上太霄琅書 says:

When transcribing scriptures, all participants should practice the doctrine of the vegetarian diet. Practitioners should write the versions of scriptures that they are given by their mentors. There are people undertaking labour service who have no time to transcribe scriptures in person, those who are not familiar with brushes and ink, those who are clumsy and not sufficiently sophisticated. The wealthy amongst those people can hire scribes with gold and silk. Those who are impoverished are permitted to accumulate money by selling their labour (to hire scribes). The calligraphy applied

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<sup>365</sup> 若複有人, 自能書寫此經十卷, 除罪萬劫. 百卷, 魔王護念. 千卷, 飛行, 眾邪魍魎, 五部瘟疫不過門戶, 當境善神, 常來利益, 前劫今劫, 罪皆除滅. 能為善人書寫受持者, 福報無窮. Lu Guoqiang 陸國強, ed., *Dao zang* (hereafter DZ) 道藏 [*The Daoist Canon*] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, Tianjin: Tianjin guju chubanshe, 1988), 24:749.

must be excellent, rather than hasty and ugly. False characters and distorted pictures will incur punishment instead of good fortune.<sup>366</sup>

Hiring scribes to transcribe scriptures is permitted with the prerequisite that their calligraphic presentation must be excellent. Only proper calligraphy that is neither hasty nor ugly was thought to possess the power to bring blessings and enhance religious efficacy. Daoism's insistence on fine calligraphy in scripture copying is also seen in a famous story of the 'Sage of Calligraphy' Wang Xizhi. It is said that Xizhi was fond of geese. One day, he visited a Daoist priest who raised many geese, intending to buy them. The Daoist priest told Xizhi: 'I have long wished to have the *Daode jing* 道德經 [*The Book of the Way and of the Virtue*] copied. The silk to transcribe it has been prepared for quite a while, but no one is capable of writing properly. If you condescend yourself to transcribe the *Daode jing* for me, I would like to give you all my geese in exchange.'<sup>367</sup> In this story, Wang Xizhi was hired to transcribe scripture by a priest who revered scripture copying but did not excel at calligraphy. For the recipient of the scripture – the Daoist priest – the underlying logic was that fine calligraphy from the hand of an established expert was better able to enhance religious efficacy than inferior work.

### **The Transition of Wang Xizhi's *The Scripture of the Yellow Court***

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<sup>366</sup> 寫經之時, 皆修清齋法, 當手書與師易本. 或在門伏膺雜役. 不暇自書, 或未閒筆墨, 或遲拙不精, 富者可以金帛顧人, 貧者聽得佣夫聚直, 必借妙跡, 不可苟營. 文字訛謬, 圖像失形, 並有考罰, 福豈爰臻. *DZ*, 33:663.

<sup>367</sup> *JS*, 80: 2100.

The section above has examined the religious significance of scripture copying, from which we can tell that, according to Buddhist and Daoist doctrine, what matters for scripture copying's sacred merit-producing capability is not only the quantity of the volumes transcribed, but also the quality of the calligraphy. I next discuss the transition in emphasis of scripture transcription's social meaning from focus on the creation of a religious object bearing sacred power to the production of a calligraphic work valued for aesthetic achievement. This is undertaken by the examination of Wang Xizhi's transcription of the Daoist scripture *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 [*The Scripture of the Yellow Court*]. It has been demonstrated that, along with the establishment of the canonical status of Wang Xizhi's tradition in the Tang era, the work's aesthetic achievement came to surpass its religious significance, becoming the main stimulus for the reproduction and circulation of the piece.

Critics and scholars have observed the connection between Wang Xizhi's calligraphy and his religious beliefs.<sup>368</sup> An examination of Xizhi's belief and practice may serve as a point proving that the story of exchanging calligraphy for geese is neither a groundless fabrication nor an accident of history. The *History of Jin* mentions that the Wang family had traditionally practiced the *Daoism of the Five Pecks of Rice* 五斗米道, one of the earliest Daoist movements, launched in the second century. Wang Xizhi himself reportedly also actively practiced the doctrine of dietetics with the Daoist master Xu Mai and travelled across the country to search for medicinal stones.<sup>369</sup> In addition to that, two of Wang Xizhi's most renowned works written in regular script contain Daoist textual content, namely

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<sup>368</sup> Nie Qing 聶清, *Daojiao yu shufa* 道教與書法 [*Daoism and Calligraphy*] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2012), 102-132. Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," *T'ung Pao*, Vol. 70, 4/5 (1984), 246-278. 268-270.

<sup>369</sup> *JS*, 80: 2103.

*Dongfang Shuo huazan* 東方朔畫讚 [*Eulogy on a Painting of Dongfang Shuo*] and *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 [*The Scripture of the Yellow Court*]. *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* is a classic of the Highest Purity School 上清派 of Daoism. It comprises two parts, the External Scenery Scripture and the Internal Scenery Scripture, containing instructions on meditational and breathing practices.<sup>370</sup> Relating Wang Xizhi's transcription of the Daoist *Scripture of the Yellow Court* with his personal religious adherence, we can still regard this scripture as a product of a Daoist-calligrapher's religious practice of scripture copying through which the accumulation of religious merit was expected.

Beyond this, an examination of the collection and circulation of *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* will provide insights into the formation of the aesthetic perception of appreciating religious scripture as a genre of calligraphic creation within the secular world. Lothar Ledderose has examined the association between the tradition of sacred manuscripts in the Maoshan 茅山 school of Daoism and the aesthetic achievements with which Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi are credited. He argues that the former works were primarily treasured for their texts, while in the latter the text is only of secondary value, the handwriting itself being more esteemed.<sup>371</sup> In the following, what I aim to emphasize is a distinct phenomenon that followed the unprecedented acclaim for the aesthetic achievements of Wang Xizhi's *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* in the Tang era. The work accrued authority to the extent that it inspired a trend for learning Wang's brushwork through the reproduction of this work, which in turn facilitated the piece's circulation, in terms of both its text and its calligraphic

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<sup>370</sup> For more discussion about the date, versions, and gist of the scripture, see Wang Ming 王明, *Daojia he Daojia sixiang yanjiu* 道家和道教思想研究 [*Research on Daoists and Daoist Thought*] (Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 1984), 324-371.

<sup>371</sup> Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," 278.

style. Under the impact of Wang's exemplary role and the increasing influence of Buddhist and Daoist religious practices, more and more among the educated elite took part in the practice of scripture transcription.

As we have seen, although Wang Xizhi had been admired by his contemporaries during his lifetime, it was the Tang Emperor Taizong whose patronage kickstarted the spread of Wang's style and his status as the 'Sage of Calligraphy', around three hundred years after the calligrapher's death.<sup>372</sup> In the Tang Dynasty, *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* was one of the most important calligraphic works by Wang Xizhi within the imperial collection. To sort out the imperial collection of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy, Emperor Taizong (598-649) assigned a group of leading experts to appraise his holdings. Chu Suiliang, one of these experts, compiled the earliest imperial catalogue of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy.<sup>373</sup> In the catalogue, he ranked *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* as the second best piece of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy in the regular script, next only to *Yue Yi lun* 樂毅論 [*Essay on Yue Yi*]. In the fifth year of the *Kaiyuan* era (717) of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, Wu Pingyi 武平一 re-examined the works of the 'Two Wangs' in the imperial collection. This time, notably, Wu Pingyi ranked *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* as the best work of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy in regular script.<sup>374</sup> In this context, the aura of appreciated value lies in the

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<sup>372</sup> On the early collection and critical appraisal of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy before the Tang Dynasty, see Robert E. Harrist, Jr., "A Letter from Wang Hsi-chih and the Culture of Chinese Calligraphy", *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the Jone B. Elliott Collection*, ed. Harrist and Wen C. Fong, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 247-248.

<sup>373</sup> *FSYL*, 72.

<sup>374</sup> According to Wu Pingyi's records, Princess Taiping was fond of the *Yue Yi lun* 樂毅論 [*Essay on Yue Yi*] and took it out of the palace into her own possession. After the princess was forced to commit suicide and her property was confiscated, the *Essay on Yue Yi* was sneaked out by an old lady from Xianyang. On the run from local officials, the lady was so scared that she burned the *Essay on Yue Yi* in an oven to cover her traces. In this light, the reason for Wu



calligraphy from the hand of the renowned calligrapher Wang Xizhi, rather than relating to the religious text or the spiritual power that Daoist practitioners believed it to possess.

Throughout history, *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* was one of the most esteemed calligraphic works for calligraphers and collectors, a popularity which considerably stimulated the production and circulation of further copies of the piece. The Song dynasty scholar Zhou Bida (1126-1204) reported:

It is said that the External Scenery piece of *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* was composed by a certain Daoist of the Wei and Jin Dynasties. Since Wang Yishao (Wang Xizhi), all superiors and worthies have been fond of writing it out.<sup>375</sup>

With regard to the consequences of this craze for making copies of Wang Xizhi's works, Robert Harrist argues that the power associated with the original and unique calligraphic art of Wang Xizhi was actually increased and created by the dissemination of copies.<sup>376</sup>

Technically, the reproductions that are believed to be most valuable and most faithful are

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Pingyi's replacement of *Essay on Yue Yi* with the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* as the best example of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy in regular script was probably due to the absence of the former in the imperial collection. Unfortunately, *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* could not escape its fated loss in the catastrophes brought about by political and military chaos. In the An-Shi Rebellions, after Tongguan 潼關 was taken by the rebel forces, Emperor Xuanzong had no choice but to flee to Sichuan, abandoning the imperial collection in the capital Chang'an. Thus, along with much other artwork in the imperial collection, *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* was eventually lost and could not be recovered after the rebellions, a fact which has further enhanced the legendary glamour of this work. *FSYL*, 99-100.

<sup>375</sup> 黃庭外景一篇，世傳魏晉時道家者流所作。自王逸少以來，高人勝士，皆喜書之。Zhou Bida 周必大, *Wenzhong ji* 文忠集, Wenyuange si ku quan shu 文淵閣四庫全書 1147 (Taipei: Taipei shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 180.

<sup>376</sup> Robert E. Harrist Jr., "Copies All the Way Down: Notes on the Early Transmission of Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi", *East Asian Library Journal*, X/1 (2001), 176-196:191.

those that were based on the original piece of scripture held in the imperial collection. Although it is believed that the original scripture was kept secretly in the palace with limited accessibility for a period, its reproduction and circulation also played a crucial role in the history of the court's ownership. In the seventeenth year of the *Kaiyuan* era (729), together with other calligraphic works by the Two Wangs, *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* was taken out from the Inner Storehouse. Twenty rubbings were made as reproductions in the Academy of Scholarly Worthies 集賢院. The rubbings were taken from engraved inscriptions made by tracing the outline of the original brushstrokes of this work. Fu Shen explained that this technique, known as “carved reproductions” referred to the rubbings taken from carved surfaces of either stone or wood.<sup>377</sup> Later, these rubbings were bestowed upon the crown prince and other princes for their calligraphic training.

If the rubbings that were granted to the princes by the court were targeted at a small group of aristocrats, another kind of copy with a wider audience could exert a more significant influence on the transmission of scripture and acceptance of scripture as calligraphy. Many famous Tang official-calligraphers, including Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596-658), Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), Xu Hao 徐浩 (703-783), and Wu Tongwei 吳通微 (flourished around 782), are known to have made freehand copies of *The Scripture of the Yellow Court*. Dozens of versions of the reproduced *Scripture* have come down to the present day, and include both manuscripts and rubbings. (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2)

Alongside members of the imperial family, high-ranking official-calligraphers were those

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<sup>377</sup> Fu Shen in collaboration with Marilyn W. Fu, Mary G. Neil, Mary Jane Clark, *Traces of the Brush – Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 3.

most likely to have had the opportunity to view the original piece.<sup>378</sup> The reproductions made by these figures embody the dual value of both preserving Wang Xizhi's original creativity and of presenting the recreation of the Tang masters whose calligraphy itself was acclaimed and collectable in its own right. The Qing Dynasty catalogue of the imperial collection of religious painting and calligraphy *Mi dian zhu lin* 秘殿珠林 states:

*The Scripture of the Yellow Court* is the best of Yishao's (Wang Xizhi) calligraphy in regular script. The rubbings that I saw previously are either too fat or too thin. Today I examined the copy that was brushed by Ouyang Shuaigeng (Ouyang Xun). Its brushstroke is forceful and expressive, brimming with the beauty of nature. From this copy we can imagine that Youjun (Wang Xizhi) moved his wrist like an actor doing a superb performance.<sup>379</sup>

The comments are written under the item *Tang Ouyang Xun lin Huangting jing yijuan* 唐歐陽詢臨黃庭經一卷 [One Volume of the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* Copied *lin* by Ouyang Xun of the Tang]. Here the character *lin* 臨 has been translated by Fu Shen as “to copy in a freehand manner”, which is a common copying technique in calligraphy.<sup>380</sup> Making a high-quality work by the *lin* method requires the copyist himself to be proficient with the brush. According to the paragraph above, the scripture reproduction brushed by the

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<sup>378</sup> For more about the access to imperial calligraphic works as a privilege, see the chapter one of this thesis.

<sup>379</sup> 黃庭經為逸少楷書第一，向從拓本究竟未免肥瘦之嫌。今觀歐陽率更摹本，毫鋒雋發，天趣盎然，從此想象右軍運腕若優孟衣冠。Zhang Zhao 張照 (1691-1745), *Mi dian zhu lin* 秘殿珠林, Si ku quan shu version 四庫全書本, 16:2.

<sup>380</sup> Fu Shen in collaboration with Marilyn W. Fu, Mary G. Neil, Mary Jane Clark, *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 3.

esteemed Tang calligrapher Ouyang Xun in a freehand manner was thought much better than any of the copies that the scholar Zhang Zhao 張照 (1691-1745) had previously seen, reaching a high level of quality in its vigorous brushstrokes and its attainment of spontaneity.

The distribution of copies of the scripture from the court to civil society occurred simultaneously with the popularization of the calligraphic scripture style. *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* even became a byword for the calligraphic style seen in this scripture and those later calligraphers' styles that are similar to it. The Yuan Dynasty scholar Wang Yun 王惲, for example, mentioned that he saw a work executed in seal script by the Tang calligrapher Li Yangbing 李陽冰. According to Wang's records, at the end of this work, the Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 had inscribed a postscript, the calligraphy of which was strikingly similar to that of *The Scripture of the Yellow Court*, alongside a date indicating that this postscript was written in the third year of the *Kaicheng* period (838).<sup>381</sup> Instead of identifying Li Shangyin's calligraphy with that by Wang Xizhi, Wang Yun specifically pointed out the similarity between Li's calligraphy and that of Wang's transcription of *The Scripture of the Yellow Court*, which demonstrates both the uniqueness of the calligraphic style employed for writing this work and the tremendous influence exerted by it.

After a brief examination of the reception history of Wang Xizhi's *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* in the Tang dynasty, we can tell that it was worshipped as a masterpiece of calligraphy, and that in most instances it was this calligraphy that served as the main

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<sup>381</sup> Wang Yun 王惲 (1227-1304), *Yu tang jia hua* 玉堂嘉話 [*Excellent Words from the Jade Hall*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 66.

incentive for the work's dissemination, instead of the religious text it ostensibly transmitted. Vicky Coltman suggests that: 'Meaning is a rather opaque concept. It emerges from the relationship between objects and people, but such relationships exist at the personal and individual level as much as they do at the public and collective level.'<sup>382</sup> In the initial making stage, given that Wang Xizhi himself was not only a calligrapher but also a Daoist practitioner, his behaviour of transcribing the scripture was inseparable from its religious colour and remained a means for Daoist practice with a primarily religious aim. In the circulation process, however, the calligraphic style seen in Wang Xizhi's *The Scripture of the Yellow Court* was without doubt an ideal stylistic reference for calligraphers of later ages, and one that represented the highest calligraphic achievement of the 'Sage of Calligraphy' in standard script, hence embodying the authority of the past. Together with the development of Wang's tradition as a result of imperial patronage, through continuous reproduction and circulation this scripture gained a wider audience which was not necessarily bound to religious Daoist beliefs but rather admired the aesthetic quality of this work. Eventually, the impact of this scripture exceeded the boundary of the dissemination of the physical reproductions of this scripture and gained eternal life through its continuous study and re-creation by later calligraphers.

### **Scripture Transcription as a Genre of Calligraphic Creation**

Through the effect of exemplary calligraphers' demonstration and the production of a large number of religious scriptures, not only did a particular calligraphic style become

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<sup>382</sup> Vicky Coltman, "Material Culture and the History of Art," in *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

generalised in association with scripture transcription, but, by the Tang dynasty, scripture copying had also become a genre of calligraphic creation in itself. Frederic Mote notes that: ‘A distinct style of standard script developed, as skilled copyists, whose names we usually do not know, standardized the copying of scriptures. The style of their calligraphy is often called “*xiejing ti*” or sutra-writing style. It has its own logic, stressing smooth uniformity, varying in artistic quality but recognizably of one genre.’<sup>383</sup> Actually, throughout history, despite some similar characters that can be detected in the scriptures transcribed in a given period, a variety of calligraphic scripts and styles were used in the transcription of religious scriptures, which can be seen in the calligraphic diversity of the manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang.<sup>384</sup> As the term is employed by calligraphic critics, the so-called ‘sutra-writing style’, often generalised, refers more to those scriptures that were transcribed by anonymous professional scribes than a single persistent calligraphic style. Aside from their inconstant qualities, religious scriptures transcribed by professional scribes have long been belittled due to the humble social positions occupied by the scribes who depended on employment as copyists or on undertaking scripture transcription projects for their livelihood. What I want to clarify and emphasize here is that religious scripture transcription was not merely performed by professional scribes for the sake of financial compensation, but rather had evolved into one of the most commonly seen subjects of Tang cultural elites’ calligraphic creation.

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<sup>383</sup> Frederick Mote and Chu Huang-lam, *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*, ed. Howard Goodman (Boston and Shaftesbury: Shambhala Publications, 1989), 52.

<sup>384</sup> Fujieda Akira, “The Tunhuang Manuscripts, a General Description,” in *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, ed. Susan Whitfield (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2000), 103-114.

Table 4.1 demonstrates that it was far from rare to see some of the most renowned Tang calligraphers also transcribing religious scriptures. Since the growth in importance of Daoism and Buddhism to the philosophical and religious interests of many among the Tang cultural elites, religious inclination was certainly an important impulse behind their sutra-copying practice. Alongside that, a distinctive aesthetic interest related to scripture transcription also exerted a substantial influence. *The Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* includes an item on the Tang dynasty figure Zhang Qinyuan 張欽元, who served as Court Gentleman for Ceremonials 奉禮郎. It comments:

(He) wrote standard script and was fond of transcribing Buddhist and Daoist scriptures, but did not degrade himself to the school of the scribes. He emulated the (calligraphy) of the ancient Zhong Yao. All he was worried about was distorting (Zhong's calligraphy).<sup>385</sup>

From these words by the Song dynasty court calligraphic connoisseur, we can see both the emergence of religious scriptures as an attractive and separate subject for the calligrapher-official Zhang Qinyuan's calligraphic practice, as well as a hint at his aesthetic awareness and the efforts he made to distinguish his own scripture copies from those executed by professional scribes. As Amy MacNair argues, when literati-amateur calligraphers transcribed religious scriptures, they added the authority of antiquity to their copies through scholarly allusions to the styles of canonical masters from the past.<sup>386</sup> The sutras that were transcribed by literati calligraphers and by professional scribes have been intentionally

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<sup>385</sup> 作真字, 喜書道釋經, 然不墮經生之學. 其遠法鐘繇, 唯恐失真. *XHSP*. 5.91.

<sup>386</sup> Amy MacNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," 238.

distinguished in both practitioners' own calligraphic production and critical perceptions. As is seen in this case, the Tang calligrapher Zhang Qinyuan made a stylistic reference to the calligraphy of Zhong Yao 鐘繇 (151-230), a reference that embodied the authority of the past both in order to enhance the prestige of his own sutra writing and to avoid being associated with the 'school of scribes' or the 'tradition of sutra-writing style'. When literati calligraphers transcribed religious sutras, as with other kinds of calligraphic works transmitting the textual contents of poems, letters, etc., they incorporated calligraphic creation and re-creation in the making of these works. As we will see in Table 4.1 and more examples in the following sections, another noticeable difference between the scriptures produced by official-calligraphers and those executed by professional calligraphers such as sutra scribes is that the calligraphic scripts used by the former show a diversity and flexibility extending from clerical script to cursive script, while the latter group is closely bound to standard script.<sup>387</sup>

A discussion of the dual attributes of sutra copying, with reference to both their religious context and their place in calligraphic creation and criticism, is crucial for us to understand the social function of this practice in Tang court society. In the following cases, we will see that, on the one hand, by involving Confucian ethical ideologies with religious notions of sutra transcription's 'merit making' power, calligraphers or patrons of sutra copying projects could engage in self-presentation, express their care and love for intimates and exert real influence upon social relations in the secular world. On the other hand, sutra copying had

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<sup>387</sup> For more detailed discussion of the meaning of the difference in calligraphic script choices between scriptures by official-calligraphers and those by professional calligraphers, see section 4.3 of this chapter, "Religious Scripture Transcriptions Commissioned by the Tang Courts".



evolved into a genre of calligraphic creation, as a result of the Tang-era convergence of religious developments with the role model effect of exemplary calligraphers. The identification of sutra transcription as a genre of calligraphic creation provided members of the court with a way through which they could improve their cultural prestige and engage in social interaction via the medium of calligraphic appreciation.

#### **4.2 Religious Scriptures Transcribed by Tang Court Members**

As mentioned above, from the religious perspective, it is the belief that transcribing sutras could generate merit that makes this practice worthwhile. As an extension of the religious ‘merit-making’ belief, the doctrine of the ‘transfer of merit’ is often seen in the prayers appended to sutra copy colophons. It is common to see prayers expressing the transcriber’s or donor’s intention to pray for blessings on behalf of others, often close relatives.

According to John Kieschnick, under the ‘transfer of merit’ doctrine not only can one gain merit for oneself by donating objects to religious institutions, but one can also transfer this merit to another.<sup>388</sup> In the following cases, we will see that Tang court members incorporated this religious doctrine of ‘transfer of merit’ in the performance of their earthly roles by converting the practice of sutra copying into a means of demonstrating love and piety to their intimates. What makes this kind of observation more meaningful is that when we relate the earthly virtues embodied in one’s religious sutras transcription practice to the traditional belief that calligraphy is an external manifestation of a person’s inner being, we can see more clearly how virtue and calligraphic performance combined to enhance charisma in the discourses of calligraphic criticism.

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<sup>388</sup> John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, 158.

In the examination of a memorial shrine inscription dedicated to the Han Dynasty Confucian gentleman An Guo by his surviving brothers which claimed that Guo's brothers served him (in keeping with Confucian tradition) as if he were still alive, Martin Powers suggests observers should step back a bit and view the inscription in the context in which it was produced. He remarks that:

No one can say that people who wrote the inscription did not sincerely grieve for the dead brother—one hopes that they did. But we cannot ever know what they really felt. We can, however, determine with some assurance that the surviving sons needed to establish a reputation for piety if they ever hoped to get a job in the local bureaucracy. We can also demonstrate that contemporaries assumed funeral rites and monuments could enhance a man's reputation for piety.<sup>389</sup>

In the following discussion of the social and political meanings of sutra transcriptions made by the hands of various court members with the stated intention of 'transferring merit' to their intimates, we detect a similar association between what people claimed and what they wanted in the prayers added to scriptures. Although the motives behind various court members' sutra transcriptions might never be known with unquestionable certainty and are open to interpretation on a case-by-case basis, transferring merit to intimates such as parents and husbands could certainly help in promoting the transcribers' reputations in terms of virtue and filial piety. In some cases, such reputations could bring certain practical benefits to the Tang imperial transcribers, such as facilitating Emperor Xuanzong's political agenda

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<sup>389</sup> Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 13.

or increasing the influence of palace women within the imperial family. Like the Han shrine dedicated to a dead brother mentioned by Powers, the construction of which might not have purely reflected piety to Confucian tradition, I argue that the practice of copying religious sutras was not necessarily a simple religious gesture driven by sincere religious belief, but rather related to the transcribers' needs in the secular world.

### **Emperor Xuanzong and the *Scripture of Laozi***

Li Fan 李範 (668-726), the Prince of Qi 岐王, was Emperor Ruizong's fourth son and younger brother of Emperor Xuanzong. He was posthumously bestowed the title of Crown Prince Huiwen 惠文太子 and was granted the honour of burial in the Qiao Mausoleum with Emperor Ruizong. According to the *Old History of Tang*, after the death of Li Fan, Emperor Xuanzong suspended his involvement with state affairs at the court and personally transcribed the Daoist classic *The Scripture of Laozi* 老子經 (or the *Scripture of Daode* 道德經) to pray for the salvation of Li Fan.<sup>390</sup> This section situates Emperor Xuanzong's transcription of the Daoist *Scripture of Laozi* in the analysis of the corresponding political context and in the examination of the impact of imperial patronage upon the development of Tang calligraphy. It reveals that, by utilising the dual attributes of sutra transcription as both a religious object and a calligraphic work, Emperor Xuanzong at once cultivated a public image as a loving brother with close bonds to his siblings and as a distinguished calligrapher who creatively incorporated artistic innovation in sutra transcription. Further, his production

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<sup>390</sup> *JTS*, 95:3017.

of the work promoted the *bafen* clerical script, which embodied the cultural and political values that the ruler aimed to advocate at that time.

After finishing his transcription of the *Scripture of Laozi*, Emperor Xuanzong ordered this work, written in *bafen* script, to be shown in the Academy of Scholarly Worthies 集賢院, regarded as a place where virtuous and erudite intellectuals served to provide advice and to process imperial edicts. This deliberate extension of the creation of a token of personal relationship into a public presentation demonstrates that the emperor's sutra copying, though dedicated to family members, was more a public performance than a private matter. In responding to the emperor's presentation, the Prime Minister Zhang Yue 張說 composed and submitted the *Jixian yuan xie shi daojing Zhuang* 集賢院謝示道經狀 [*Statement on the Academy of Scholarly Worthies' Gratitude for the Presentation of the Daoist Scripture*] to the emperor, expressing thanks for having the honour to see this scripture executed in the imperial calligraphy:

I had the honour of seeing two volumes of Daoist scripture that were written by your majesty in golden character *bafen* script. They were made to pray for blessings on the ritual of the Third Seven Days after Crown Prince Huiwen's death. The heavenly brush glows with colour. Your majesty's handwriting shines with light. Its beauty is more gorgeous than wind and cloud. Its light shines more brightly than sun and moon. Your Majesty's perfect fulfilment of filial piety and fraternity can achieve contact with the divinities. You sincerely concern yourself with the natural bonds and ethical relationships between family members, and hence earn support from the deities. Your Majesty performed such a laborious task in the intense heat of summer, something

which is unknown throughout history. Bearing the normative Confucian moral standards in mind, I occupy a significant position without capability. After examining the deeds of previous rulers, I find that none can compete with you in terms of demonstrating love for kinsfolk and attaining the beauty of the standard and clerical scripts. (Your achievement) is great enough to be left as an example for all generations, handed down to endless descendants. May I plead that Your Majesty announce this to the Office of History to glorify the records.<sup>391</sup>

In this statement, Zhang Yue not only extolled Emperor Xuanzong's close bond with his brother Li Fan but also enthusiastically praised the emperor's calligraphic achievement in the *bafen* script that he had employed in transcribing the *Scripture of Laozi*. On the surface, a well-presented scripture transcribed in exquisite calligraphy expressed the emperor's love for his deceased brother. After taking the target audience, the emperor's cultural and religious policies at that time and his complex relationships with his brothers into consideration, we will find that the emperor was driven by multiple reasons to make the sutra transcription and exhibit it.

The two administrative institutions involved in this case – the Academy of Scholarly Worthies 集賢院 and the Office of History 史館 – reveal that the target audience for this scripture not only included the most prestigious men of culture of the time at court, but also people of later generations, the future readers of the Tang histories. According to religious

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<sup>391</sup> 臣伏見聖札金字八分寫道經兩卷. 以為惠文太子三七追福. 天毫發彩. 宸翰騰輝. 色麗風雲. 光逾日月. 伏惟陛下孝弟之至. 通於神明. 俯念天倫. 用資幽讚. 當茲炎暑. 服此勤勞. 事絕古今. 感深名教. 臣忝司右職. 載考前王. 未有親親之至. 楷隸之美. 如此之備也. 足以作則貽範. 垂之無窮. 伏望宣付史館. 以光典策. *QTW*, 224:2539.

doctrine, in the practice of copying scripture for merit-making, once the transcription is finished, a scripture's mission is supposed to have been completed, as the merits have been achieved. However, in this case, after finishing transcribing the scripture, the emperor did not put it aside but ordered its display to a specific audience. During Xuanzong's reign, this institution was the centre of imperially-patronized scholarly and literary activities, staffed with litterateurs and academicians who 'were in charge of editing and compiling the ancient and modern classic works to discern the grand rituals and traditions of the state, awaiting to be consulted.'<sup>392</sup> With the change of location and audience, the meaning of this scripture hence shifted from a purely merit-making religious product to a public announcement of the emperor's grief and mourning for his deceased brother.

To praise the emperor's deeds, Zhang Yue proposed informing the Office of History, responsible for compiling or revising the National History, in order that the event be recorded for posterity. The *Six Codes of the Tang Dynasty* records:

The portents of heaven, earth, sun and moon, the distribution of mountains and rivers, fiefs and cities, the precedence between junior and senior lines of descent, ritual and military affairs, changes of reward and punishment, between prosperity and decline, all should be first recorded. The historians should base themselves on the Court Diary and the Record of Administrative Affairs to make a Veritable Record, setting this out in chronological form and incorporating the principles of praise and blame. When this is completed it is to be stored in the official storehouse.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> 學士掌刊緝古今之經籍, 以辨明國之大典, 而備顧問應對. *TLD*, 9:280-281.

<sup>393</sup> *TLD*, 9: 296. Cited and Translated by Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History Under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13-14.

Although the Emperor's reply to Zhang Yue's proposal is not extant today, the record of the emperor's transcription of the *Sutra of Laozi* seen in the biography of Prince Qi of the *Old History of Tang* effectively verifies the emperor's approval – or even encouragement – of the proposal to report this act of sutra transcription to the Office of History. Another similar case is seen in Zhang Jiuling's 張九齡 *Shang wei Ningwang xie Yiqiejing qing xuanfu Shiguan Zhuang* 上為寧王寫一切經請宣付史館狀 [*Statement on Requesting the Emperor's transcriptions of All Daoist Scriptures Dedicated to Prince Ning to be Announced to the Office of History*]. In this statement, the minister Zhang Jiuling mentioned that he was ordered by imperial edict to offer incense in the Daoist temple of Anguo 安國觀, a shrine that had initially been established by Princess Yuzhen and which was located in the eastern capital, Luoyang. In the imperial Daoist temple, he saw four volumes of *All Daoist Scriptures* that had been transcribed by Emperor Xuanzong to pray for blessings for his four siblings, Prince Ning 寧王, Crown Prince Huixuan 惠宣太子, Princess Daiguo 代國公主, and Princess Jinxian 金仙公主.<sup>394</sup> Zhang Jiuling declared that he was deeply touched by the emperor's sincere love and devotion to his siblings and hence proposed that this event be reported to the Office of History.<sup>395</sup> In response to Zhang Jiuling's proposal, Emperor Xuanzong emphasized the earnest and sincere feeling behind the act of transcribing sutras in his own hand to pray for blessings for his siblings and expressed consent to Zhang's proposal.<sup>396</sup> In these two cases, the ministers' proposal to report the emperor's sutra

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<sup>394</sup> Zhang Jiuling 張九齡, *Qujiang ji* 曲江集 [Collected Works of Qujiang] (Guangzhong: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 534.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> “Da Zhang Jiuling qingwei Ningwang xiejing xuanfu shiguan pi” 答張九齡請為寧王寫經宣付史館批 [Reply to Zhang Jiuling's Proposal on Reporting (Emperor Xuanzong's) Sutra

transcriptions to the historiographical offices certainly catered to the latter's wish that his public image as a loving brother would be memorized and commemorated forever through the records of historians.

Bearing in mind the emperor's efforts and his wish to reach a large audience, the next question would concern exactly what information it was that he wanted to release. Firstly, one point to note is that what the emperor transcribed were Daoist scriptures, the *Scripture of Laozi* and *All Daoist Scriptures*, which evidently signalled imperial patronage of Daoism. Since both Buddhism and Daoism were doctrines of salvation and had large populations of believers, there was considerable rivalry between the two. Throughout history, Emperor Xuanzong was by no means the only emperor who transcribed religious sutras in his own hand, but he was a rare example of a monarch who transcribed Daoist scriptures. Due to the prevalence of Buddhism in the Northern and Southern dynasties, many of the rulers preceding Tang Xuanzong had transcribed Buddhist sutras. According to the records of the Liao Dynasty monk Feizhuo 非濁, there is a distinct group of emperors of the Southern and Northern dynasties who transcribed Buddhist scriptures.<sup>397</sup> Emperor Xuanzong was an exception in promoting the Daoist religion and taking important steps to promote a close

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Transcriptions Dedicated to Prince Ning to the Office of History], *QTWXB*, 469.

<sup>397</sup> Emperor Ming Gaozong of Qi transcribed the Buddhist Canon. Emperor Wu Gaozu of Chen transcribed twelve sets of the Buddhist Canon. Emperor Wen Shizu of Chen transcribed fifty sets. Emperor Xuan Gaozong of Chen transcribed twelve sets. Emperor Daowu Taizu of Wei transcribed the Buddhist Canon. Emperor Xiaoming Suzong of Qi, praying for blessings for the deceased emperor, transcribed twelve sets of the Buddhist Canon. In total, there are 38,047 volumes. 齊高宗明帝寫一切經。陳高祖武帝寫一切經一十二藏。陳世祖文帝寫五十藏。陳高宗宣帝寫一切經一十二藏。陳世祖文帝寫五十藏。陳高宗宣帝寫十二藏。魏太祖道武皇帝寫一切經。齊肅宗孝明帝為先皇寫一切經十二藏。合三萬八千四十七卷。Takakusu Junjirō and Ono Genmyō (eds), *Dazheng zang* 大正藏 [The Dazheng Canons] (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1983), 848.



identification between the imperial Li family and the Daoist founder.<sup>398</sup> Although the Daoist scripture was made out to a family member and presented as a token of kinship, choosing a Daoist scripture instead of a Buddhist text was surely a gesture of imperial favour to Daoism.

Secondly, according to Zhang Yue's statement, the *Scripture of Laozi* was transcribed in 'golden character *bafen* script'. As mentioned in the last section, the most commonly seen script style among professional calligraphers' sutra transcriptions is standard script. In transcribing the *Scripture of Laozi*, Emperor Xuanzong's adoption of the *bafen* script instead of standard script is a choice that can be read in two ways. First, it was a calligraphic innovation that challenged the traditions of sutra transcription. Second, it was an indicator reflecting the emperor's political motivation, seizing upon an idealised antiquity as the ideological foundation for his governance. *Bafen* script is a distinctive style of clerical script. Peter Sturman has described this style as follows: 'the late form of the clerical script, also known as *bafen*, is characterised by flexed and modulated strokes, including a broadly flaring type called the "breaking wave," that reflect a growing interest in the expressive potential of the brush in the latter half of the Han dynasty.'<sup>399</sup> The Tang calligrapher and critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 asserted that the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BCE) calligrapher Wang Cizhong 王次仲 had invented the *bafen* script, and that the Eastern Han calligrapher Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192) had perfected this art.<sup>400</sup> Along with Wang Cizhong and Cai

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<sup>398</sup> Victor Xiong, "Ritual Innovations and Taoism under Tang Xuanzong", *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 82, no. 4/5 (1996): 258-316.

<sup>399</sup> Peter Charles Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, 14.

<sup>400</sup> Zhang Huaiguan, "Shu duan" 書斷 [Judgements on Calligraphy], in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選, ed. Huang Jian (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chu ban she, 1979), 160-

Yong, Emperor Xuanzong was also a crucial figure in the development of the *bafen* clerical script. The *Old History of Tang* praised him in terms that highlighted this specific skill: ‘being brilliant and decisive, excelling at music and the *bafen* script.’<sup>401</sup> The first major revival of the clerical script occurred in the Tang dynasty, and was largely due to Emperor Xuanzong’s patronage.<sup>402</sup>

Emperor Xuanzong’s artistic innovation is not only seen in his adoption of a rarely used *bafen* script in sutra transcription but also reveals itself in the emperor’s decision not to stick to the configuration of the Han dynasty *bafen* clerical script, instead modifying it to develop a new Tang style. Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 noted that: ‘In Emperor Xuanzong’s imperial writing, the square structure of characters was supplanted by a squat and extensive one, which renovated the *bafen* script of that time.’<sup>403</sup> The emperor extended the structure of Cai Yong’s Han dynasty characters, changing them from square to squat form, and introduced advanced standard script brush techniques to this clerical script style. In this way, he invented a magnificent style of Tang *bafen* clerical script, imbued with the emperor’s own personality and the confidence of the Tang dynasty heyday. When we compare Cai Yong’s *Xiping shijing* 熹平石經 [*Xiping Stone Classics*] (Figure 4.1) with Emperor Xuanzong’s *Classic of Filial Piety on the Stone Terrace* (Figure 4.2), the distinctions between the styles of the Han and Tang clerical scripts are clearly visible. Standard script is regarded as the last

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<sup>401</sup> 性英斷多藝, 尤知音律, 善八分書. *JTS*, 8:165.

<sup>402</sup> Shen C. Y. Fu in collaboration with Marilyn W. Fu, Mary G. Neil, Mary Jane Clark, *Traces of the Brush – Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 55.

<sup>403</sup> 明皇宸翰, 變方整為寬博, 當時八分書體一新. Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 (1849-1917), *Yu shi* 語石 [*On Stone Inscriptions*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1994), 34.

of the formal script types in the evolutionary sequence, and had become highly stabilized by the Tang era, differing from the archaic clerical style derived from the ancient small-seal script.<sup>404</sup> Emperor Xuanzong borrowed techniques from the standard script such as its complex movements and variations in pressure on the brush, and extended the width of his characters, all the while maintaining the typical flaring brush movements of the Han dynasty clerical script. For example, although the same character *de* 德 in the two works demonstrates a similar structure and almost the same tendency towards flaring descending strokes, the brushwork of Emperor Xuanzong is livelier and more complex, with dots achieved through a sequence of motions whereby the emperor moved his brush back to the left then around to the right (Figure 4.3). The emperor's combination of the ancient Han dynasty clerical script and the Tang dynasty standard script demonstrated his pragmatic attitude towards tradition. As with his adoption of *bafen* script in the transcription of the *Scripture of Laozi*, Emperor Xuanzong was not a slave to tradition, but rather adjusted it into his production in accordance with his own needs and ambitions.

Including the *Scripture of Laozi* and the *Classic of Filial Piety on the Stone Terrace*,<sup>405</sup> on many occasions Emperor Xuanzong deliberately exhibited his calligraphic works in *bafen*

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<sup>404</sup> Shen C. Y. Fu in collaboration with Marilyn W. Fu, Mary G. Neil, Mary Jane Clark, *Traces of the Brush – Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 138.

<sup>405</sup> The *Classic of Filial Piety on the Stone Terrace* 石台孝經 is a stele engraved with the *Classic of Filial Piety* for which calligraphy was brushed personally by Emperor Xuanzong in *bafen* script. It now stands in the pavilion named *Xiaojing ting* 孝經亭 [Pavilion of the Classic of Filial Piety] on a three-layered stone terrace, at the entrance to the Forest of Steles Museum. The stele was originally at the Grand Academy 太學 in 745, commissioned by Emperor Xuanzong. Chen Caijing 陳財經, “Shitai xiaojing kanke jingguo ji timing zhu chen kao” 石台孝經刊刻經過及題名諸臣考 [A Study of the Process of Making the Steles of the Classic of Filial Piety on the Stone Terrace and the Nominated Officials on the Steles], *Bei lin ji kan*, volume 2, (Xi'an: Sanqin chuban she, 1994), 82-86. Jing Yali 景亞鸞 and Wang Yuanyin 王

script in front of a public audience, as a visible demonstration of the imperial taste in calligraphy. Influenced by this imperial favour, a group of Tang calligraphers had, since the *Kaiyuan* period of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, begun to practice the *bafen* script. The Tang poet Du Fu chanted that: 'There is Han Zemu of the Secretariat, and Cai Youlin of the Horse Guard—reckoning *bafen* since the Kaiyuan reign.'<sup>406</sup> Reading this account of calligraphers beginning to practice the *bafen* clerical script under Xuanzong's influence, we are reminded that it was under Emperor Taizong's patronage that Wang Xizhi had gained his status as the 'Sage of Calligraphy', and it was Xizhi's style had subsequently become the leading model for the calligraphers of the early Tang dynasty.

Calligraphic styles epitomise corresponding values and ideologies, with particular reference to the period in which they were invented and to the calligraphers who practiced them. In Chapter One I have argued that one of the reasons for Emperor Taizong's patronage of the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi was that Wang's style combined the orthodoxy of mainstream culture in the Central Plains before the Eastern Jin dynasty with the southern tradition formed after the Eastern Jin. The way Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was able to combine attributes of north and south met Emperor Taizong's political need to resolve cultural discrepancies between the south and the north and to re-establish a cultural unity within the newly unified empire. However, until the time of Emperor Xuanzong, as new political imperatives emerged, each ruler made corresponding changes to his calligraphic policy. As the *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* recounts:

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原茵, "Xi'an beilin cang tang shitai xiaojing shu lü" 西安碑林藏唐石台孝經述略 [A Study on the Classic of Filial Piety on the Stone Terrace in the Xi'an Forest of Steles], *Qianling wenhua yanjiu*, volume 8, (Xi'an: Sanqin chuban she, 2014), 455-461.

<sup>406</sup> Du Fu, "Song for Li Chao's Bafen Small Seal Script," translated and edited by Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, Volume 5 (Boston and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 13-15.

Initially, Emperor Xuanzong saw that the calligraphic style of the Imperial Academy stuck to the vulgar tastes of the world. He then firmly made up his mind to rejuvenate the *zhang* cursive script and the *bafen* script. The former schools were consequently abandoned.<sup>407</sup>

According to Pan Liangzhen's 潘良楨 study, during the early years of Emperor Xuanzong's reign the dominant calligraphic style in the Imperial Academy, characterised in the above paragraph as 'the vulgar tastes of the world,' refers to that of Chu Suiliang, who belonged to Wang Xizhi's tradition.<sup>408</sup> Emperor Xuanzong did not follow his grand-grandfather Taizong's advocacy of the Wang Xizhi tradition, characterised by elegance and fluid brushwork, but chose to patronize the more ancient *zhang* cursive script and *bafen* script. This contrast demonstrates the distinct moral values, epitomised by the different styles of calligraphy, that were promoted by the two Tang emperors.

The main problems that Emperor Xuanzong faced during the early years of his reign were no longer those that had troubled Emperor Taizong, but rather how to restore the authority of the Li imperial family and how to re-establish Confucian moral values after decades of chaos following Wu Zetian's rulership as regent and emperor of her own Zhou dynasty. In contrast to the modern and elegant style of Wang Xizhi's tradition, the *bafen* script, which was seen as a simplification of the ancient small seal script, was regarded as closer to 'glorious'

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<sup>407</sup> 初見翰苑書體狃於世習，銳意作章草八分，遂擺脫舊學。XHSP, 1.8.

<sup>408</sup> Pan Liangzhen 潘良楨, "Ping shu yao shi lun yu shengtang shufeng zhi pibian" 評書藥石論與盛唐書風之丕變, *Chinese Calligraphy Studies*, 1999 (2), 1-21.

ancient times.<sup>409</sup> The promotion of *bafen* script can be read as a part of Emperor Xuanzong's endeavour to resurrect the ethical and moral values of an idealised antiquity considered suitable to facilitate his own governance. In the preface to the *Annotations on the Classic of Filial Piety*, Emperor Xuanzong stated:

I hear that in antiquity the custom was plain and frugal. Though filial piety had been generated from people's hearts, the rituals demonstrating esteem were still simple...Alas! After the death of Confucius, the exquisite words became extinct. And the rise of heresies followed by the distortion of the truths...The longer the sage departed, the more remotely the doctrine was distanced from its origin.<sup>410</sup>

Associating virtue with antiquity and the age of the sage, Emperor Xuanzong lamented that as time went by the *Classic of Filial Piety* had gradually departed from its original meaning. This statement refers, on the surface, to a lapse in the essence of Confucius's words, but in a deeper sense reflects the emperor's anxiety about a decline in moral and cultural standards since an idealised period of distant antiquity. In the early years of Emperor Xuanzong's rule, not to mention the idealised antiquity that had drifted away long before, the ruling order of the Li imperial family had been upset by constant political coups over decades following Wu

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<sup>409</sup> The Tang dynasty calligraphic critic Zhang Huaiguan pointed out that: 'While the small seal script maintains half of the ancient pictograph, *bafen* script reduces half of that of the seal script, and clerical script further reduces half of that of the *bafen* script.' 小篆古形, 猶存其半. 八分已減小篆之半, 隸又減八分之半. Zhang Huaiguan, "Shu duan," 書斷 [Judgements on Calligraphy], 160.

<sup>410</sup> 朕聞上古, 其風樸略. 雖因心之孝已萌, 而資敬之禮猶簡...嗟乎! 夫子沒而微言絕, 異端起而大義乖...去聖逾遠, 源流益別. *Shisan jing zhu shu: xiaojing zhu shu* 十三經注疏: 孝經注疏 [Notes and Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics: Notes and Commentaries on the Classic of Filial Piety] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chu ban she, 1999), 11-15.

Zetian's rule, Empress Wei's intervention in Emperor Zhongzong's reign, and other upheavals. To restore unified and centralized rule, Emperor Xuanzong therefore resorted to a resurrection of the 'age of the sage' and the 'origin of the doctrine'. Confucius once said: 'I am not one who was born in the possession of knowledge; I am one who is fond of antiquity, and earnest in seeking it there.'<sup>411</sup> The antiquity or the notion of the past had been highly idealised and become a source from which the later rulers sought the tools with which they could claim legitimacy for their own governance.<sup>412</sup>

Although Emperor Xuanzong himself left no words explaining the relationship between the *bafen* script and his political ideals, through a close reading of the words written by the court calligraphic critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 we can catch a glimpse of the values that were attached to the *bafen* script and the inner correlation of this calligraphic script with the emperor's political policy. Zhang Huaiguan served as Academician in Attendance 翰林供奉 and Court Calligrapher in the 'Forbidden Inside' 侍書禁中 at Emperor Xuanzong's court. He submitted the famous work, *Ping shu yao shi lun* 評書藥石論 [*Commentary on Medicines to Calligraphy*] to the emperor. In this work, Zhang Huaiguan claimed:

Names have to be preserved, while virtues should be established. Nowadays, along with the wide circulation of the instructions of Your Majesty, the whole empire enjoys

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<sup>411</sup> Translated by James Legge, in *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2012), 201.

<sup>412</sup> Another typical example is seen in Pearce's examination of the architects of the Yuwen 宇文 regime, who were of nomadic Xianbei origin and reached into the ancient past to evoke the memory of the much revered Zhou dynasty. Scott Pearce, "Form and Matter: Archaizing Reform in Sixth-Century China," in *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200-600*, ed. Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 149-178.

peace and harmony. Although folk customs have been restored to their honest and good origins, calligraphy is still drifting away from its original simplicity. The calligraphy of this age has betrayed the canonical models of ancient times, sharing nothing in common with them. Viewing today through the lens of the past functions as a mirror that is visible to our eyes. Numerous things on the earth return to their roots, which is called reverting to one's original nature.<sup>413</sup>

Zhang Huaiguan saw a parallel between the ancient models of calligraphy and the honest and good origins of folk customs. The restoration of the origins of numerous things including calligraphy was acclaimed by Zhang as a tremendous achievement, being helpful to the peace and harmony of the empire. In addition, the canonical model of *bafen* script was the Han dynasty *Xiping Stone Classics* that were carved with the Confucian classics. The status of those Confucian texts in turn glorified the *bafen* script in which they were written. By the Tang period, after the *Xiping Stone Classics* had been copied and disseminated for hundreds of years, the *bafen* script had gradually come to gain meaning as a symbol of an idealised antiquity, an epitome of the highest political ideals of Confucianism. In this sense, Emperor Xuanzong's practice and patronage of the *bafen* script can be read as an expression of his desire to restore this idealised antiquity.

Returning to the motivation behind Emperor Xuanzong's transcription and exhibition of the *Scripture of Laozi*, beside the deliberate religious and calligraphic choices mentioned above,

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<sup>413</sup> 名固不可不存, 德固不可不立, 當今聖化洋溢, 四海晏然, 俗且還淳厚, 書未返樸. 今之書者, 背古名跡, 豈有同乎, 視昔觀今, 足為龜鏡, 可以目擊. 夫物芸芸, 各歸其根, 複本謂也. Zhang Huaiguan, "Ping shu yao shi lun" 評書藥石論, in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選, ed. Huang Jian 黃簡 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chu ban she, 1979), 231.



the third point to address is that praying for blessings for a deceased brother by transcribing scriptures in person was consistent with the emperor's self-presentation as a caring and loving sibling. In many cases, the emperor's behaviour seemed to echo the words: "Brothers are my hands and feet. If they were not in good condition, I would be disabled."<sup>414</sup> However, the reality might be that both the legitimation and the stability of Emperor Xuanzong's rule were constantly challenged by the very presence of those brothers. The strategy that Emperor Xuanzong employed in dealing with issues relating to his brothers on the one hand demonstrated his benevolence and lenience, and on the other strengthened the constraints imposed on the princes.

Since the epic Xuanwu Gate incident in which Emperor Taizong brutally killed and replaced the heir apparent, his older brother Li Jiancheng 李建成, fierce struggles over succession to the throne had become one of the central political issues affecting the unity and stability of the empire. The successful competitors for this prize, including Emperor Xuanzong, were not necessarily always the oldest son of the legal wife, who was considered to be the rightful successor according to the principle of primogeniture. In the historical record, Emperor Xuanzong's elder brother Li Chengqi 李成器 was depicted as a figure possessing the qualities of modesty and humility, and who refused to be appointed as the crown prince.<sup>415</sup>

Another plausible explanation could be that Li Chengqi was too scared of the military power

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<sup>414</sup> 兄弟, 吾之手足. 手足不理, 吾身廢矣. Wang Dang 王讜, *Tang yu lin jiaozheng* 唐語林校正 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1987), 3.

<sup>415</sup> *JTS*, 95.3009. At Xuanzong's court, the emperor's brothers held high ceremonial offices with no real power. Measures were taken to prevent the princes from attempting coups themselves and to keep them away from being manipulated by hostile factions to launch intrigues against the emperor. See Denis Twitchett, "Hsuan-tsung (reign 712-56)" in *The Cambridge History of China: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906*, Part I, volume 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 372-374.

wielded by Emperor Xuanzong to compete with the latter for the right of succession. In this sense, the eligibility of Emperor Xuanzong's succession was still questionable and vulnerable to suspicion in the minds of his contemporaries and later people. Even after he had ascended the throne, the relationship between Emperor Xuanzong and his brothers was still delicate, and they frequently clashed under the surface. To crack down on the possibility of factions gathering around the princes, Emperor Xuanzong maintained strict monitoring and tight control over his brothers, harshly forbidding any kind of association between princes and officials.<sup>416</sup> According to the records of *Old History of Tang*, the Prince of Qi, Li Fan, to whom the Daoist scripture transcribed by the hand of Emperor Xuanzong was dedicated, once travelled and banqueted with the Consort to the Imperial Princess 駙馬都尉 (*Fuma duwei*) Pei Xuji 裴虛己. After learning of this, the emperor forced Pei Xuji to divorce the princess and demoted him, but excused Li Fan.<sup>417</sup> Although according to official histories, almost all of the cases that involved Emperor Xuanzong's brothers ended with the emperor's extension of benevolent forgiveness to his brothers' faults, we can still detect traces revealing that the relationship between Emperor Xuanzong and his brothers was not always as benign and intimate as its public presentation would suggest. Within this context, transcribing scriptures to pray for blessings for his deceased brother and pursuing its presentation to a wide audience functioned as a statement describing the relationship between the emperor and his brother as harmonious and loving.

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<sup>416</sup> 上禁約諸王, 不使與群臣交結. *ZZTJ*, 212:6741.

<sup>417</sup> *ZZTJ*, 212:6741.

#### 4.2.2 Tang Palace Women's Scripture Transcriptions

'The Tang witnessed a spectrum of shrewd wives, cunning witches, spoiled princesses, versatile courtesans, and wayward Taoist priestesses.'<sup>418</sup> It is commonly perceived that in the Tang dynasty women led a life of greater freedom, less constrained by Confucianism and occupying a higher social position, than did their counterparts under subsequent dynasties.<sup>419</sup> However, as Suzanne Cahill suggests, when we take into consideration the many significant restrictions placed upon women by patriarchal law, customs and social ideals, it is not accurate to claim that the Tang dynasty was a golden age for the liberation of Chinese women.<sup>420</sup> The apparent reduction in control over women in the Tang era does not mean that women were encouraged to exert their talents and energies to seek influence outside their family or beyond the private sphere. Female virtues often adhered to women's performance in primarily family roles. The extant historical records do not provide many details about Tang palace women's daily practice in calligraphy, but a variety of sources and bits of information lead us to the genre of religious scripture transcription. Almost all of the known calligraphic works that were executed by Tang women have been recorded as, and are extant in the form of, religious scriptures. Here I argue that transcribing scripture was associated

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<sup>418</sup> Jowen R. Tung, *Fables for the Patriarchs: Gender Politics in Tang Discourse* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 10.

<sup>419</sup> Duan Tali 段塔麗, *Tangdai funü diwei yanjiu* 唐代婦女地位研究 [*The Study of Tang Women's Status*] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), 4. However, this judgement cannot be stated with absolute certainty. Some scholars have pointed to contradictions on women's status in subsequent dynasties. For example, Patricia Ebrey mentions that although the Song dynasty has long been regarded as a time when women's situations took a turn for the worse, Song women had particularly strong property rights, seen neither in earlier or later eras. See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>420</sup> Suzanne E. Cahill, *Divine Traces of the Daoist Sisterhood: Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City* (Magdalena, Three Pines Press, 2006), 9.

with Tang palace women's efforts to use writing in pursuit of influence within the imperial family and self-presentation as filial daughters and virtuous wives while observing those limitations, in terms of both channels and resources available, that were imposed upon them.

In legendary accounts from the era, female immortals are frequently portrayed as having taken writing, especially the copying of scripture, as a means through which to demonstrate their miraculous powers, a phenomenon which indicates the popularity of scripture transcription among female religious practitioners at the time. It is recorded that in the first year of the *Yongzhen* era (805) during the reign of Emperor Shunzong, a southerner, Lu Meiniang 盧眉娘, was presented to the court as a tribute. Meiniang was reportedly very beautiful and talented, and she was able to embroider seven volumes of the *Fahua Scripture* 法華經 on a small handkerchief. None of the characters were larger than half a grain of rice, and not one stroke was thicker than a hair. Her wisdom and technique drew admiration from Emperor Shunzong and Emperor Xianzong.<sup>421</sup> However, Lu Meiniang was never willing to stay in the palace and returned to the south with Xianzong's permission. Finally, it is said that she ascended to the Daoist heavens.<sup>422</sup>

Besides accumulating religious merit for oneself and demonstrating miraculous power, another motivation often cited by Tang palace women who engaged in copying scripture was to pray for blessings for other family members who might be their parents or husbands. In the first place, transcribing scriptures not only enabled a palace woman to socialise with and to win the favour of the recipients of that merit supposed to have been generated by the copying

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<sup>421</sup> Su E 蘇鶚, *Du yang zhibian* 杜陽雜編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 11.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*

practice. It also helped her to establish a reputation among contemporaries as a filial daughter or virtuous wife. This kind of deed was often recorded as evidence demonstrating virtue in epitaphs and official histories, evidence which was supposed to facilitate the construction of a positive historical image. The Song Dynasty scholar Zhao Jin 趙潛 reported that:

There was a small but exquisite collection in the Zhending Dali Temple. All of the scriptures of this collection were copied by Tang palace women. Their names were transcribed at the end of each scripture, and are quite legible... There was a box that was decorated with gold. A scroll of scripture was stored inside the box. The characters of the scripture were extremely graceful and exquisite. An inscription was transcribed at the end of the scripture: ‘The virtuous woman Ms Yang wrote (the scripture) for the Emperor of the Great Tang Li Sanlang.’<sup>423</sup>

In this paragraph, ‘Emperor of the Great Tang Li Sanlang’ refers to Xuanzong. The ‘virtuous woman Ms Yang’ would be Yang Guifei (719-756), also known as Imperial Consort Yang, who was Emperor Xuanzong’s beloved consort. Since Yang Guifei died before the emperor, this scripture was not dedicated to a deceased subject but intended to pray for blessings for the living. We can infer that Emperor Xuanzong was the potential audience of this scripture, to whom Yang Guifei expressed her love by transcribing scriptures. A carefully transcribed scripture would therefore have possessed a further meaning as a love token. Although it is hard to know how the emperor felt when he received

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<sup>423</sup> 真定大历寺有藏. 虽小精巧. 藏經皆唐宮人所書. 經尾題名氏. 極可觀...有塗金匣. 藏經一卷. 字體尤婉麗. 其後題曰: 善女人楊氏為大唐皇帝李三郎書. Zhao Jin 趙潛, *Yang ke man bi 養疴漫筆* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 4.

this gift, this scripture may partly explain how Yang Guifei retained Emperor Xuanzong's favour for so many years. A more extreme case of palace women's scripture transcription is seen in the *Old History of Tang*. In the second year of the *Shangyuan* era (761), Emperor Suzong (711-762) was seriously ill. To pray for the emperor's health, Empress Zhang cut her fingers and transcribed Buddhist scriptures with her own blood. In Buddhist practice, writing with blood was an extreme way of demonstrating devotion. Patricia Fister points out that the symbolic meaning of writing with blood is that a small portion of the body becomes one with the Buddha's words, expressing the transcriber's sincerity while, through its inherent link to sacrifice, also having a greater claim to efficacy.<sup>424</sup> Empress Zhang's deeds could be expected to have impressed Emperor Suzong and her contemporaries; their recording by the official diarist likewise suggests that they were thought to be worthy of preservation as exemplary behaviour.

Apart from expressing love and devotion to the emperors, demonstrating filial piety was also one of the goals that motivated women to transcribe scriptures. *Datang gu Linchuang jun zhang gongzhu muzhiming* 大唐故臨川郡長公主墓誌銘 [*Tomb Epitaph for the Grand Princess of Linchuan Commandery of the Great Tang*] reports that the death of Great Consort Wei, Princess Linchuan's mother, had left the princess in deep sorrow. To pray for her, the princess personally transcribed a volume of the *Baoen Scripture* 報恩經 and painted a figure of the Buddha. The epitaph claims that:

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<sup>424</sup> Patricia Fister, "The Making of Objects as Expressions of Religious Devotion and Practise," in *Zen and Material Culture*, ed. Pamela D. Winfield and Steven Heine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017),

The literary works that she composed, the scriptures that she transcribed, the figures of Buddha that she painted, etc., all of these were popular among the people of her time. She was the epitome of the womanly virtues of the nine kinship and was the female teacher (whose admonitions would work) for thousands of years.<sup>425</sup>

A similar case is seen in *The Xiguo zhanggongzhu shengdaobei* 鄔國長公主神道碑 [*Spirit Way Stele for Grand Princess Xiguo*]. The inscription on the stele narrates how Great Consort Cui, who was the mother of Princess Xiguo, died when the princess was only three years old. The precocious young princess was so sad that she refused to eat food for three days. Years later,

(Princess Xiguo) personally transcribed three volumes of Buddhist scriptures in golden characters and embroidered two figures of the Buddha with coloured silk thread. The Buddhist chants on palm-leaves reveal the image of the heart through silver hook strokes... (The princess) took filial piety as her code of conduct. Is morality still far away?<sup>426</sup>

‘Silver hook strokes’ here refer to a calligraphic term – ‘Iron wire and silver hook strokes’ 鐵線銀鉤 (*Tiexian yingou*), often used to praise brushstrokes that run smoothly and end

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<sup>425</sup> 所撰文筆及手寫諸經，又畫佛像等，並流行於代，可謂九族婦德，千載女師者乎。The Administration of Cultural Relics of Shaanxi Province and The Administration of Cultural Relics of Zhao Mausoleum 陝西省文管會及昭陵文館所，“Tang Linchuan gongzhu mu chutu de muzhi he zhaoshu” 唐臨川公主墓出土的墓誌和詔書 (The Tomb Epitaph and Imperial Edicts Excavated from the Tomb of Princess Linchuan), *Wenwu*, 1977(10), 50-59: 58.

<sup>426</sup> 手寫金字梵經三部，躬繡彩絲佛像兩鋪。貝叶真偈，現心相于銀鉤；蓮花妙容，呈意生於玉指。孝思唯則，道遠乎哉？*QTW*, 230:1029.

sharply. Here it is adopted as a figure of speech to celebrate the excellence of Princess Xiguo's calligraphy. In these epitaphs, the princesses' calligraphic talent was praised not as pure aesthetic achievement, but as a carrier of the virtue of filial piety, through its application to the transcription of scriptures for their deceased mothers.

Despite calligraphy being a medium for the expression of female talent in the Tang era and an integral component (according to the male imagination) of intellectually competent female composition, according to male accounts womanly virtues and family roles were the main ends which Tang women's talents were expected to serve. A majority of Tang women, including the palace women, were restrained within a framework set by men and extending from calligraphic styles to the subjects of their calligraphic works. This does not, however, mean that they did not have their own creativity and ambitions for calligraphic practice. Scripture copying is a potent angle through which we can observe how Tang palace women utilised their calligraphic talent to express themselves and to enhance their own influence in court society through the roles that religious scriptures played in mediating social relations.

### **4.3 Religious Scripture Transcriptions Commissioned by the Tang Courts**

In the last section, I discussed the phenomena of emperors and palace women transcribing scriptures in their own hand to pray for blessings on behalf of family members. This section is devoted to two other groups of scriptures, transcribed by renowned official-calligraphers and professional scribes respectively, under commission from the Tang rulers. In the following cases, some of the scriptures are similar to those mentioned in the last section, with prayers appended claiming that they were created to pray for blessings for imperial family members or for the people of the



state, while others contain no information regarding their dedication. The emphasis of this section shifts from an examination of social relations between the transcribers and the recipients of transferred merit, to focus on an analysis of how rulers' motivation for commissions determined the ways in which these scriptures were copied and influenced the social meanings of these works in the processes of reception and circulation.

This section has two main findings. First, focusing on the Daoist *Yinfu Jing* 陰符經 [*The Scripture of Hidden Contracts*], known to have been transcribed several times by high-ranking official-calligraphers commissioned by Tang emperors, I demonstrate that this kind of commissioning functioned more as a social activity through which ruler and minister interacted with the elegant cultural media of calligraphic creation than as a command requiring the official-calligraphers to transcribe scriptures as a labour task. Second, the discovery of a group of Buddhist and Daoist scriptures in Dunhuang, the colophons of which indicate that they were transcribed in the capital under imperial commission, leads us to the discussion of another kind of scripture transcription commission. I argue that these commissions not only enabled the Tang rulers to strengthen their control over religious institutions by distributing the imperial versions of religious canons to major temples across the empire, but also to facilitate the dispersion of the sovereigns' image as benevolent rulers within local societies. These two groups of religious scripture transcriptions together constitute a full picture of Tang imperial scripture copying commissions, revealing the adaptability of this genre of calligraphic creation to the various social and political needs of the Tang rulers.

## *The Scripture of Hidden Contracts*

### **- Religious Scriptures Transcribed by Official-Calligraphers**

As seen in Table 4.1 “Selected Religious Scriptures Transcribed by Eminent Tang Calligraphers”, many eminent Tang official-calligraphers transcribed religious scriptures. Some of these scriptures bear the words *Fengchi shu* 奉敕書 [Written on the Order of His Majesty], which indicates a commission from the emperor. In comparison to the large amount of scriptures that were brushed by professional scribes, the number executed by high-ranking officials who are supposed to have enjoyed close relations with the emperors is small. Taking the rarity of these works and the lofty identities of their transcribers into consideration, it is reasonable to speculate that these scripture transcriptions were not the sole products of religious practice, but would rather have played more complex roles at the Tang court. A case study on the imperial commissioning of transcriptions of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* affords a glimpse into the uses of those scriptures that were transcribed by official-calligraphers on imperial orders and the social meanings of this kind of calligraphic commission at the Tang court.

The *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* is one of the most important Daoist canons, containing information ranging from nourishing one’s body to managing state affairs.<sup>427</sup> The aim of this

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<sup>427</sup> For a full translation of the scripture, see Frederic Henry Balfour, *Taoist Texts: Ethical Political and Speculative*, (London: Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1884), 49-62.

scripture was summarized as being ‘to reconcile the decrees of Heaven with the current of mundane affairs.’<sup>428</sup> The scripture was believed to possess such magical power that:

When an emperor holds this scripture, he is able to manipulate the world; When a Daoist holds it, he is able to nourish his body; When a military strategist holds it, he is able to win; When a divine holds it, he is able to perform changes, manipulating gods and ghosts; When a political strategist holds it, he is capable of influencing people, adapting to changing circumstances.<sup>429</sup>

Its other title, *Huangdi Yinfu jing* 黃帝陰符經 [*The Yellow Emperor’s Scripture of Hidden Contracts*] indicates that authorship was traditionally ascribed to the mythical Emperor Huangdi of legendary antiquity. Since the Song Dynasty, scholars have put forward various theories about the creation date and authorship of the scripture.<sup>430</sup> Despite the various and conflicting theories, there is unanimous agreement that it was under the Tang dynasty that the scripture began to gain its popularity. Imperial patronage has been considered one of the

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<sup>428</sup> This sentence was originally quoted by Balfour from the words of Mr. Wylie. Frederic Henry Balfour, *Taoist Texts: Ethical Political and Speculative*, 49.

<sup>429</sup> 帝王得之以御世, 老氏得之以養身, 兵家得之以制勝, 術家得之以成變化而行鬼神, 縱橫家得之以股掌人群, 低昂時變。Lü Kun 呂坤, *Lü Kun Zhexue Xuanji* 呂坤哲學選集 [*Anthology of Lü Kun’s Philosophy*], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 35.

<sup>430</sup> The Song scholar Huang Tingjian suggested that the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* had been written by the Tang Dynasty Daoist scholar Li Quan 李筌. See Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅, *Shangu tiba* 山谷題跋, the version of Cong shu ji cheng chubian 叢書集成初編本, 4:41. The Modern scholar Liang Qichao claims that the scripture probably dates to the late Warring States Period (475-221 BCE). See Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Gushu zhenwei ji qi niandai* 古書真偽及其年代 [*The Authenticity of Ancient Books and Their Dates*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955), 156. Wang Ming suggests that the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* was composed by a hermit of the Northern Dynasties (386-581). Wang Ming 王明, *Daojia he Daojiao sixiang yanjiu* 道家和道教思想研究 [*Study on Daoism and Daoist Thought*] (Beijing: Zhongguo keshe chubanshe, 1984), 146.

primary reasons for this. The Yuan Dynasty scholar Yuan Jue 袁桷 claimed that: ‘the *Zhenguan* Emperor (Emperor Taizong) was the first (ruler) who had an intensive passion for the scripture.’<sup>431</sup>

The significance of the scripture to this research lies in the commissioning by Tang emperors, according to textual records and material evidence, of a number of the most revered and high-ranking Tang officials to transcribe it.<sup>432</sup> The Song Dynasty scholar Yu Wenbao 俞文豹 recorded:

Emperor Taizong ordered Zhangsun Wuji to write fifty volumes of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*. Again, Emperor Gaozong ordered (him) to transcribe twenty volumes of the scripture.<sup>433</sup>

Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌, who was Emperor Taizong’s brother-in-law and one of his most trusted advisors, made a tremendous contribution to Emperor Taizong’s success in pacifying the eastern plain and ascending the throne, and moreover played an instrumental role in settling the succession dispute in favour of his nephew Li Zhi 李治 (the future Emperor Gaozong). Serving as an influential and powerful imperial advisor during the reigns of

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<sup>431</sup> 貞觀皇帝始酷好之。Yuan Jue 袁桷, *Qingrong jushi ji* 清容居士集 [Collected Works of Qingrong Layman] *Si ku quan shu* 四庫全書本, 50:14.

<sup>432</sup> The Tang official-calligraphers who are known to have transcribed the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* include Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌, Chu Suiliang 褚遂良, Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, and Liu Gongquan 柳公權.

<sup>433</sup> 黃帝陰符經, 唐太宗令長孫無忌寫五十本。高宗又令寫本二十本。Yu Wenbao 俞文豹 (Around 1240), *Chuijianlu quanbian* 吹劍錄全編 [The Complete Compilation of Chuijian Lu] (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1958), 129.

Emperor Taizong and Emperor Gaozong, Zhangsun Wuji was primarily renowned for his military talent and political achievements, rather than his achievements in calligraphy. The biographies of Zhangsun Wuji in official histories do not mention a word about his calligraphic talent, but the Southern Song catalogue of stone inscriptions *Bao ke leibian* 寶刻類編 [*Classified Compilation of Treasured Inscriptions*] includes two of his calligraphic works.<sup>434</sup> For this reason, we may surmise that, although Zhangsun Wuji's calligraphic achievement was not famous enough to be incorporated into the history of calligraphy, like many other social elites he was a practitioner of calligraphy as well. Even so, as a respected minister, Zhangsun Wuji's identity seems too noble to be assigned as laborious a task as transcribing scriptures, one that a professional scribe without official rank was supposed to be competent enough to perform. We cannot help but suspect that either this was a fictional account or that the Tang emperors had other considerations beyond calligraphic skill in mind when they made the commissions.

From Yu Wenbao's brief account, it is hard to know whether the Song Dynasty scholar had personally seen those scriptures inscribed with Zhangsun Wuji's name, or he had perhaps transcribed this item from other resources. A similar account is seen in the postscript by another Song Dynasty scholar, Lou Yue 樓鑰, to one transcription of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* that was believed to have been transcribed by the early Tang official-calligrapher Chu Suiliang 褚遂良. In this postscript, Lou Yue remarked:

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<sup>434</sup> The two calligraphic works by “Zhangsui Wuji are Taizong deng Xiaoyaolou shi” 太宗登逍遙樓詩 [Poems on Emperor Taizong Ascent of the Xiaoyao Tower] and “Congxing Jiuchenggong timing” 從幸九成宮題名 [Inscriptions on Travel with the Emperor to the Jiucheng Palace]. *BKLB*, 698.

I have seen three copies (of the *Scripture of Hidden Contacts*) that were written by Henan (Chu Suiliang was conferred the title Duke of Henan). One of them is written in cursive script. In the sixth year of the *Zhenguan* era (632), (Chu Suiliang) transcribed fifty volumes under an imperial edict. Another is written in regular script of small characters. In the fifth year of the *Yonghui* era (655), he transcribed one hundred and twenty volumes under an imperial edict. Including this one, (Chu Suiliang) transcribed a total of one hundred and ninety volumes. Both of the two earlier copies are seen in the form of stone carving.<sup>435</sup>

Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 was one of Emperor Taziong's closest advisers and one of his most influential ministers. Before Emperor Taizong's death, both Zhangsun Wuji and Chu Suiliang were summoned to the emperor's bedside to receive his last will. In the early years of Emperor Gaozong's reign, Chu Suiliang was one of the most powerful ministers at the court, elevated in 654 as the first-rank Vice-President of the Right of the Department of Affairs of State 尚書右僕射. Chu Suiliang's calligraphic style is characterised as 'thin and strong'. He has been regarded as the most accomplished practitioner of Wang Xizhi's style and the one who blazed the trail for the maturity of regular script under the Tang Dynasty.<sup>436</sup> In comparison with the equivocation of Yu Wenbao's words, Lou Yue clearly pointed out that he had personally seen two copies

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<sup>435</sup> 凡見河南所書三本, 其一草書, 貞觀六年奉敕書五十卷. 其一亦小楷, 永徽五年奉旨寫一百廿卷. 及此蓋書百九十本矣. 二者皆見石刻. Lou Yue 樓鑰 (1137-1213), *Gong kui ji* 攻媿集 [*Collected Writings in the Gongkui Chamber*], Qing Wuyingdian Juzhenban Congshu 清武英殿聚珍版叢書, 72:624.

<sup>436</sup> Zhu Guantian. *Zhongguo shufa shi: Sui Tang Wudai Juan* 中国书法史: 隋唐五代卷 [*History of Chinese Calligraphy: Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties*] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 62-68.

of the *Scripture of Hidden Contacts*. These two copies were transcribed by Chu Suiliang, under commissions from Emperor Taizong and Emperor Gaozong, respectively. The copy of this scripture transcribed by Chu Suiliang is recorded in the catalogue of Pei Jingfu's 裴景福 (1854-1924) painting and calligraphy collection. At the end of this copy, it is claimed that this scripture was brushed by Chu Suiliang in the twenty-first year of the *Zhenguan* era (647) in the Cuihua Palace 翠華宮, which was Emperor Taizong's summer retreat.<sup>437</sup>

Today we can still see three versions of the *Scripture of Hidden Contacts* inscribed with Chu Suiliang's name. Two of them exist in the form of rubbings, included in the Ming Dynasty scholar-calligrapher Wen Zhengming's collection *Tingyunguan tie* 停雲觀貼 [*Rubbings of the Tingyun Pavilion*] (Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5). One is written in regular script, while the other is in cursive script. The third is a manuscript in regular script in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (Figure 4.6).<sup>438</sup> Unfortunately,

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<sup>437</sup> Pei Jingfu 裴景福 (1854-1924), *Zhuantai ge shuhua lu* 莊陶閣書畫錄 [*Catalogue of Calligraphy and Painting of Zhuangtao Pavilion*], in *Lidai shuhua lu xubian* 歷代書畫錄續編 [*The Sequel of Records on Painting and Calligraphy of Dynasties*], volume 6, ed. Wang Yanlai 王燕來 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2010), 93.

<sup>438</sup> However, in regard of the span of about a thousand years from the dates when the scriptures were supposed to be produced to now, there is much uncertainty on these scriptures and some scholars have called the authenticity of these works into question. For this reason, at this time I have no intention of defining whether these three scriptures were out of the hand of Chu Suiliang or whether they were the ones that the Song Dynasty scholar Lou Yue had ever seen personally but want to incorporate the records as evidence into the examination on the tradition of sutra copying. On the issues of authenticity of the three scriptures, see Yang Zhenfang 楊震方, *Beitie xulu* 碑帖敘錄 [*Narrative Records on Rubbings and Steles*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 207-208. And Li Yuzhou 李鬱周, "Dazi Yinfuling tiba yu shuti zhi yanjiu" 大字陰符經題跋與書體之研究 [*Study on the Postscripts, Inscriptions, and Calligraphic Styles of the Scripture of Hidden Contracts in Big Characters*], in *Zhongguo shufa quanji* 中國書法全集 [*The Full Collection of Chinese Calligraphy*], volume 22, ed. Liu Zhengcheng 劉正成 (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 1998), 19-28.

besides the full text of the scripture, the dates, the official titles held by Chu Suiliang when he *made* the transcriptions, and the words *Feng zhi* 奉旨 or *Feng chi* 奉敕 [‘On the order of His Majesty’], that indicate that these works were made under imperial commission, we still do not have enough information to give a proper answer to the questions raised by the case of Zhangsun Wuji. Although we cannot exclude the possibility that some of these transcriptions were forgeries, these works can, at least to some degree, prove that the appointment of high-ranking officials to transcribe scriptures was neither fictional nor an isolated case.<sup>439</sup> If, then, a humble professional scribe would be capable of performing the task of transcribing scriptures, what distinguished imperial commissions for scripture transcription assigned to revered official-calligraphers?

Although material relevant to the cases of Zhangsun Wuji and Chu Suiliang provides no answer to this question, a set of sixteen steles collected in the Xuzhou Museum (Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province) may offer a glimpse of the emperors’ roles as sponsors of these scriptures. The set of steles are engraved with the text of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* with calligraphy executed by the Tang calligrapher Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (Figure 4.7), a preface written by Emperor Taizong, and a postscript written by Emperor Xuanzong (Figure 4.8).<sup>440</sup> Originating from an established family of the

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<sup>439</sup> Yang Zhenfang 楊震方 has expressed his suspicion about the authenticity of Chu Suiliang’s transcription of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* bearing a signature dated to the sixth year of the *Zhenguan* period (632). According to Yang’s theory, because Chu Suiliang was introduced to Emperor Xuanzong in the twelfth year *Zhenguan* (638), it is unlikely that Chu had taken Emperor Taizong’s commission before meeting the ruler. See Yang Zhenfang 楊震方, *Beitie xu lu* 碑帖敘錄 [Narrative on Steles and Engraved Rubbings] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 207-208.

<sup>440</sup> According to Zhu Yueli’s research, the set of steles were made based on manuscripts that



south, Ouyang Xun was appointed Grand Secretary of the Department of the Imperial Chancellery 給事中 by Emperor Gaozu. By then his calligraphy had achieved canonical status and served as a norm for the stylistic development of subsequent Tang calligraphers. According to the stele inscriptions, in the fifth year of the *Zhenguan* Period (631), the seventy-four year old Commandant of the Heir Apparent's Guard Command and Concurrent Baron of Bohai 太子率更令兼渤海男 Ouyang Xun was commanded by Emperor Taizong to transcribe the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*. To emphasize the significance of this scripture, the Emperor Taizong personally wrote a preface appended to Ouyang's work to discuss the significance and essence of this scripture. Around a hundred years later, in the twenty-fourth year of the *Kaiyuan* Period (736), Emperor Xuanzong occasionally viewed the scripture transcribed by Ouyang and Emperor Taizong's preface and wrote a postscript to it:

The *Preface to the Scripture of Hidden Contracts* composed by Wen Emperor Taizong discerns meaning from sublime words and illuminates quintessence from obscurity, ascending to the domain of remote antiquity. Combining semi-cursive style and cursive style, his calligraphy looks like heavenly flowers fluttering down to the chambers of the Wei and Jing Dynasties. The regular script of Ouyang Xun is delicate and exquisite, that

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were originally collected at the court of the Song Emperor Gaozong (1107-1187). Zhu Yueli's paper is the only one undertaking in-depth research on this set of steles of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts* held at the Xuzhou Museum. The scarcity of research is probably due in large measure to the inaccessibility of these steles, rubbings of which have not yet been digitalized or published. See Zhu Yueli 朱越利, "Du xuzhou bowuguan cang yinfujing beike" 讀徐州博物館藏陰符經碑刻 (Study on the Steles of the Scripture of Hidden Contracts Held in the Xuzhou Museum), *Daojiao kaoxin ji* 道教考信集 [Collected Works On Daoist Textual Research] (Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 2014), 415-426.

is excellent enough to demonstrate to younger learners and to act as a standard for hundreds of generations. The brushwork of this scripture is vigorous and forceful, upright and firm, and can be claimed to be the best of Ouyang's calligraphic work. Indeed, amicable relations between emperor and minister are extremely precious. Browsing through this scripture at leisure refreshes both my mind and eyes. After unrolling and gazing this work many times, I took out a brush and inscribed a postscript.<sup>441</sup>

First, Emperor Xuanzong paid as much attention to the sacred religious meaning expressed by the texts as to the calligraphic achievements presented in either Emperor Xuanzong's preface or Ouyang Xun's transcription. This reaffirms that the value of these scriptures, transcribed in exquisite calligraphy by eminent figures, worked in two ways: first, the text was imbued with religious meaning; second, the calligraphy was acclaimed for its aesthetic merit. This kind of scripture was both a container for devout messages and an excellent calligraphic work. When a religious practitioner with noble social status wanted to distinguish himself from others, the calligraphy of the scriptures that they used for their daily practice was certainly among their key concerns. For instance, knowing that the chancellor Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 was a devoted

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<sup>441</sup> 太宗文皇帝御製陰符經序文，洞該微言，闡揚奧旨，實躋太古之域。書法行草相間，散落天花，直入魏晉之室。歐陽詢楷法精詳，足以範圍後學，標準百世。而此經用筆險勁，端整適利，尤為歐書之甲。君臣際美，洵至寶也。機暇流覽，爽我心目，展觀再四，援筆題後。The texts were transcribed by Zhu Yueli from the rubbings of the steles which are now stored in the Museum of Xuzhou. Zhu Yueli 朱越利, "Du xuzhou bowuguan cang yinfujing beike" 讀徐州博物館藏陰符經碑刻 [Study on the Steles of the Scripture of Hidden Contracts Collected in the Museum of Xuzhou], *Daojiao kaoxin ji* 道教考信集 [Collected Works On Daoist Textual Research] (Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 2014), 415-426: 416-417.

Buddhist, Emperor Taizong presented him with a volume of the *Sutra of Dabanruo* 大品般若經 that had been transcribed by Wang Bao 王褒 (511-575) and a cassock for his daily chanting.<sup>442</sup> Wang Bao was an accomplished calligrapher and writer. Initially, he served as Minister of Personnel 吏部尚書 in the Liang Dynasty (502-557) in the south. Later he was put in charge of the defences of the of Jiangling 江陵, but failed in this mission and, captured by the Western Wei (535-556) general Yu Jin 于謹, spent the rest of his life in the northern courts.<sup>443</sup> The advent of Wang Bao considerably changed the pervasive calligraphic styles of the north. A large number of sons of aristocratic families turned to admire and practice his styles.<sup>444</sup> Even Emperor Gaozu, the founder of the Tang dynasty, is said to have learned with Wang Bao.<sup>445</sup> In the early years of the Tang dynasty, a scripture by the renowned calligrapher Wang Bao was certainly an ideal gift for Xiao Yu as a Buddhist, a religious object functioning as a sign of prestige. Returning to the Tang rulers' acts of requesting esteemed official-calligraphers to transcribe religious scriptures, what they expected would have been unique pieces of art that fused sacred literature with the visual culture of calligraphy. These scriptures might be stored in the imperial collections as exemplary masterpieces for appreciation, used by Tang court members in daily religious practice or granted to certain subjects for devotional uses, like the *Sutra of Dabanruo* transcribed by Wang Bao.

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<sup>442</sup> 賜王褒所書《大品般若經》一部，並賜袈裟，以充講誦之服焉。 *JTS*, 63. 2402.

<sup>443</sup> *Zhou Shu* 周書 [*History of Zhou*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1971), 41.729; 47.847.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> As Zhang Yanyuan mentioned, for this reason, the emperor's calligraphy possessed the styles of the Liang Dynasty. *FSYL*, 170.

Second, after praising the calligraphic achievements of Emperor Taizong and Ouyang Xun, Emperor Xuanzong extended the connotation of this scripture to ‘the amicable relations between the emperor and the official.’ Appointing ministers to transcribe scripture for the emperor’s own use was adopted by Tang emperors as a way to deepen personal bonds between themselves and their ministers. When this scripture was copied, Ouyang Xun was seventy-four years old, respected not only as a great calligrapher but also as a senior official and a learned scholar. Indeed, in all of the three cases mentioned above, when the imperial commissions were made, Zhangsun Wuji, Chu Suiliang, and Ouyang Xun were respected and trusted by their contemporaries as ministers of high moral quality. Given the lofty status of these official-calligraphers, the commissions were less likely to be made in the form of commands, and should not be interpreted in the same way as the laborious sutra-copying tasks that were assigned to professional scribes or clerk calligraphers. Perhaps the philosopher Zengzi’s words can provide an appropriate angle from which to understand these commissions: ‘The superior man meets with his friends on grounds of culture, and by their friendship helps his virtue.’<sup>446</sup> In this regard, it is more proper to read the calligraphic commission as a form of social interaction between the emperors and their ministers, which was believed to be beneficial in deepening the bonds between them and nourishing their virtue.

### **Court Scriptures Distributed in Local Temples**

#### **- Religious Scriptures Transcribed by Professional Scribes**

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<sup>446</sup> 君子以文會友，以友輔仁。Adapted from the translation of James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean*, New York: ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2012, 262.

An abundance of resources discloses that the Tang government's endorsement of the compilation and transcription of Daoist and Buddhist canons, and distribution of the copies to major temples across the empire, was not an isolated occurrence. In comparison with the scripture copies that were made by noble official-calligraphers for imperial collection and devotional uses at court, the great majority of scriptures for distribution were transcribed under state administration by professional scribes or unranked clerical calligraphers who served in central government agencies. In the discussion of these sutra-copying projects, I have two points to address. First, the discursive effects of sutra copying did not only enable the Tang rulers to canonize and popularize the imperial versions of religious scripture, but also provided means for them to propagate their public image as benevolent rulers who supported Confucian family morality and cared about the welfare of the people. Second, due to the need for quantity in the copies and for accuracy in these canonical texts, for the Tang imperial patrons and the clerk calligraphers the most important aspects were not aesthetic achievement but the speed of writing and the legibility of the characters. This section demonstrates that to meet these potentially conflicting needs for speed and consistency, a highly standardised calligraphic style was deliberately adopted in the transcription of those scriptures made for distribution, which was executed and guaranteed by the bureaucratic production process. Since aesthetic judgement is a subjective topic, it is not the case that the aesthetic quality of the calligraphy adopted in scripture transcription projects resulted in discrimination against calligraphy executed by professional scribes. Rather, the 'mass production' property of these projects led to a high degree of calligraphic homogeneity, and this factor brought about a depreciation in the calligraphic value of this group of scripture transcriptions.

Because of the perishable quality of the paper on which religious scriptures were traditionally transcribed, the scriptures transcribed by the clerkly calligraphers of the Tang courts were lost for a long time except for mentions in textual records. They were not available until the discovery of the Cave Library in Dunhuang in the early twentieth century. Located in Gansu province, Dunhuang was one of the cosmopolitan cities on the Silk Road from the Han Dynasty to the Five Dynasties period. More than forty thousand secular and religious manuscripts, documents and paintings in languages including Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit, among others, were found in the Library Cave itself. Rong Xinjiang believes that the Library Cave was originally the library of the Sanjie Buddhist Monastery 三界寺.<sup>447</sup>

In the Dunhuang manuscripts, there is a group of Buddhist and Daoist scriptures bearing colophons indicating that they were made in the capitals under Tang court commission. Standard scriptures usually included a colophon providing information including the date of copying, the amount of paper used, the name of the copyist, the patron and the proof-reader. Based primarily on Ikeda On's ground-breaking work *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shu roku* 中國古代寫本識語集錄 [*Collected Colophons of Ancient Chinese Manuscripts*], in which a vast variety of colophons from Chinese manuscripts are collected, I have singled out from the Dunhuang manuscripts those scriptures executed by unranked clerkly calligraphers or scripture scribes under Tang court commission.<sup>448</sup> Table 4.2 lists the Daoist

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<sup>447</sup> Rong Xinjiang, translated by Imre Galambos, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 342.

<sup>448</sup> Ikeda On 池田温, "Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shu roku" 中國古代寫本識語集錄 [*Collected Colophons of Ancient Chinese Manuscripts*] (Tōkyō: Ōkura Shuppan, 1990).

scriptures that were commissioned by the Tang courts, while Table 4.3 lists the Buddhist texts.

The Daoist and Buddhist scriptures listed above can largely be categorized into two groups according to the dates and the motives declared by the Tang rulers for their commissioning. The first group is the scriptures that were executed on the order of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, dedicated to pray for blessings for imperial family members. This group includes two Daoist scriptures, P.3233 and P.2444, that date back to the first year of the *Lingde* Era (664), and all of the Buddhist scriptures listed in Table 4.3, that date from a period between the second year of the *Xianheng* era (671) and the second year of the *Yifeng* era (677). In the colophons to both P.3233 and P.2444, we read the same sentence:

‘On the twenty-first of July of the first year of the *Lingde* era, transcribed for the crown prince on the imperial order in the Daoist Abbey of Lingying.’<sup>449</sup>

According to the *Old History of Tang*, being physically weak, Crown Prince Li Hong had long suffered poor health before his death at the age of twenty-four.<sup>450</sup> From this, we can speculate that the two Daoist scriptures were transcribed under the imperial edict of Emperor Gaozong or even Empress Wu to pray for health for their sickly son. According to Zhao Heping’s research, it is highly possible that Empress Wu was also involved in the commission of the Daoist scriptures for her son, because she had played an initiating role in

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<sup>449</sup> 麟德元年七月廿一日, 奉敕為皇太子與靈應寫. Ikeda On 池田溫, *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shūroku* 中國古代寫本識語集錄 (*Collected Colophons of Ancient Chinese Manuscripts*), (Tōkyō: Ōkura Shuppan, 1990), 209.

<sup>450</sup> *JTS*, 86:2829.

the commission of a huge number of Buddhist scriptures for her parents.<sup>451</sup> Zhao has discovered that P.3788 and S.7236 are the prayers that were affixed to the *Diamond Sutra* and *Lotus Sutra* copies dedicated to Empress Wu's deceased parents. Composed in the name of Empress Wu, the prayers declare that for the sake of offering merit to her parents the empress commissioned three thousand copies of the *Lotus Sutra* and three thousand copies of the *Diamond Sutra*.<sup>452</sup> All of the Buddhist scriptures listed in Table 4.3 are copies of either the *Lotus Sutra* or *Diamond Sutra*, so are likely to number among the six thousand copies of the scriptures that were devoted to Empress Wu's parents. Zhao Heping claims that the commission of these scriptures was Empress Wu's rehearsal for using Buddhist scriptures as a means to legitimize her regime.<sup>453</sup> Ten years later, she widely promulgated the teaching of the *Great Cloud Sutra* 大雲經, a work that contains a prophecy foretelling the imminent reincarnation of Maitreya as a female deity, and as monarch over the whole world. We will not ever know whether Empress Wu had begun to plot her seizure of the throne so many years in advance, or whether she felt sincere worry about her sickly son and grieved for her deceased parents. From these scriptures we can indeed see the image of a loving mother and a filial daughter. Since the empress was supposed to provide a role model

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<sup>451</sup> Zhao Heping 趙和平, "Wu Zetian wei yishi fumu xiejing fayuanwen ji xiangguan Dunhuang xiejuan zongheyuanjiu" 武則天為已逝父母寫經發願文及相關敦煌寫卷綜合研究 [Comprehensive Research on the Prayers Composed by Wu Zetian for Deceased Parents and the Relevant Dunhuang Manuscripts], *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, 53 (March 2006): 1-22. 6.

<sup>452</sup> For the full text of the two prayers, see Zhao Heping 趙和平, "Wu Zetian wei yishi fumu xiejing fayuanwen ji xiangguan Dunhuang xiejuan zongheyuanjiu" 武則天為已逝父母寫經發願文及相關敦煌寫卷綜合研究 [Comprehensive Research on the Prayers Composed by Wu Zetian for Deceased Parents and the Relevant Dunhuang Manuscripts], 3-6.

<sup>453</sup> Zhao Heping 趙和平, "Wu Zetian wei yishi fumu xiejing fayuanwen ji xiangguan Dunhuang xiejuan zongheyuanjiu" 武則天為已逝父母寫經發願文及相關敦煌寫卷綜合研究 [Comprehensive Research on the Prayers Composed by Wu Zetian for Deceased Parents and the Relevant Dunhuang Manuscripts], 21.



for all women under heaven, Empress Wu certainly wanted to project an image that best matched her identity at that time.

The second group includes three Daoist scriptures – P.3725, P.2457, and P.2380 – that are listed in Table 4.2. All of these were transcribed during the *Kaiyuan* Era (713-741), one of the regnal eras of Emperor Xuanzong. The colophon of P.2457 claims that:

The Bureau of Merits and Virtues transcribe the Complete Daoist Scriptures on the order of the *Kaiyuan Shenwu* Emperor [Emperor Xuanzong], creating merit to secure the state and protect the people.<sup>454</sup>

The colophon of P.2380 says that:

Heavenly, for the ancestors, mundanely, for the common people, the *Kaiyuan Shenwu* Emperor [Emperor Xuanzong] took out seven thousand *guan* of cash from the inner storehouse, respectfully sponsoring the transcription of scriptures.<sup>455</sup>

The above colophons state that these scriptures were transcribed on behalf of Emperor Xuanzong with the intent to accrue merit for the purposes of securing the state, protecting

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<sup>454</sup> 功德院奉為開元神武皇帝寫一切經。用斯福力，保國寧民。Ikeda On 池田溫, *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shu rōku* 中國古代寫本識語集錄 [Collected Colophons of Ancient Chinese Manuscripts] (Tōkyō: Ōkura Shuppan, 1990), 295.

<sup>455</sup> 開元聖文神武皇帝上為宗廟下為蒼生內出錢七千貫敬寫。Ikeda On 池田溫, *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shu rōku* 中國古代寫本識語集錄 [Collected Colophons of Ancient Chinese Manuscripts], 297.

the people and even benefiting the ancestors. Hence, without personally lifting a brush, through sponsoring scripture copying the emperor was enabled to fulfil his moral responsibilities as a benevolent ruler in accord with the Confucian ideals and propagated this image along with the dissemination of these scriptures in local society.

Despite the various purposes claimed in the prayers appended to them, the scriptures above show patterns in the Tang courts' commission of scriptures executed by clerkly calligraphers or scribes. First, we must consider how these scriptures, transcribed in the Tang capitals, ended up in Dunhuang, a frontier garrison town that was thousands of miles away. One possible explanation is that these scriptures were part of the officially sanctioned canon, which underwent frequent distribution to provincial religious institutions all over the empire throughout the Tang period.<sup>456</sup> Although I have found no direct evidence for the nationwide distribution of the particular scriptures mentioned above, we do have some records of the Tang emperors ordering the distribution of scriptures copied at court to local society. One such edict was issued by Emperor Taizong and commanded that:

The corresponding bureau should appoint ten clerkly calligraphers to transcribe the scripture (佛遺教經 *Scripture of Foyijiao*) in as many copies as possible...Bestow on every official above rank five and every regional inspector of all prefectures one fascicle of the scripture. If the scriptures of monks and nuns are seen to be different to

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<sup>456</sup>Wang Yuanjun 王元軍, "Cong Dunhuang xiejing juanzi kan tangdai de xiejing shufa" 從敦煌寫經卷子看唐代的寫經書法 [Examination of Tang Dynasty Sutra Calligraphy through the Scriptures of Dunhuang], *Dunhuang Studies*, 1995(1), 308.

the text (of the officially sanctioned version), offices and individuals must persuade them to follow (the official version).<sup>457</sup>

From this paragraph, we can detect that in the process of distribution to local society what the Tang rulers cared most was the quantity of the copies (“as many as possible”) and the accuracy of the texts. Not only were the scriptures used by religious practitioners required to be in accord with officially sanctioned versions, the court also provided base texts for scriptures carved on stones to ensure the implementation of the imperial version and the uniformity of scriptures that were transmitted at the local level.

Secondly, by examining the Tang court scriptures that have survived in Dunhuang, we can discern that the Tang courts’ effort to ensure the accuracy of the texts can largely be seen from two aspects: the first being the bureaucratic process of production, and the second the standardisation of calligraphy applied in scripture copying. S.2573, a copy of the Buddhist *Lotus Sutra 2* dated to 673, and the P.2444, a copy of the Taoist *Dongyuanshenzhou Sutra 7* dated to 664, are good examples to demonstrate the points above. At the end of the scroll of S.2573 (Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11), a colophon of twelve columns is attached. The first column indicates that the scripture was transcribed by Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery 門下省群書手 Feng Anchang 封安昌 on the seventeenth day of the ninth month of the fourth year of the *Xianheng* era (673). The second column says that twenty pages of paper were used. The third tells us that Jie Ji (解集) mounted it. From the fourth column to the sixth column, we know that the first proof-reader was the monk Huaifu of the

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<sup>457</sup> 宜令所司. 差書手十人. 多寫經本...其官宦五品已上. 及諸州刺史. 各付一卷. 若見僧尼行業. 與經文不同. 宜公私勸勉. 必使遵行. *QTW*, 1:96.

Dazhuangyan Monastery (大莊嚴寺懷福); both the second and the third proof-reading was performed by the monk Xuanzhen of the Ximing Monastery (西明寺玄貞). The next four columns name three examiners who were high-ranking monks of the Taiyuan Monastery: the Great Virtue Shenfu (大德神符), the Great Virtue Jiashang 大德嘉尚, and the High Seat Daocheng 上座道成. The last columns list two government officials who participated in this scripture-copying project: the Administrative Assistant was Director of the Office of Imperial Parks under the Court for the National Granaries 司農寺上林署令 Li De 李德; the supervisor was the Superior Grand Master of the Palace 太中大夫 and the Dynasty-founding District Duke of Yongxing County 永興縣開國公 Yu Chang 虞昶. Similarly, by reading the colophon of P.2444 (Figure 4.12), we know that the three proof-readers of this scroll of Daoist scripture were the Daoist priests Li Lan 李覽, Fu Yan 輔儼, and Ma Quan 馬詮. The two government officials who took part in the project include the specially-appointed commissioner, who was the Right Guard Honouring of the Inner Apartments and Administrator of Military Section 專使右崇掖衛兵曹參軍事 Cai Chongjie 蔡崇節, and the supervisor, who was Grand Master of Bureau of Receptions 使司藩大夫 Li Wenjian 李文暕. The colophons of the other scriptures, both Buddhist and Daoist, that are listed in the two tables mentioned above, are generally the same as those for S.2573 and P.2444. These colophons are potent documents of the link between the scripture copying and state administration. After being transcribed by clerk-calligraphers in government service, to ensure the accuracy of the texts each scroll of the scriptures had to go through several inspections carried out by religious figures under the supervision or the administration of government officials.

In the production process of the court-commissioned scriptures, bureaucracy can be viewed as a guarantee of accuracy and quality, the standard script style linked with Tang scripture copying can be understood as both a method adopted by the Tang officials to ensure the uniformity of the scriptures and a by-product of the bureaucratized production process. For example, comparison between the calligraphy of S.2537 (673) and that of P.2444 (664) reveals that the Daoist scripture and the Buddhist scripture share some common stylistic features. The calligraphy introduces the squat proportions of archaic clerical script, while remaining a highly-defined standard script founded on the classical tradition of Wang Xizhi. The stressing of some elements in characters via heavy strokes, such as prominent rightward descending diagonals and horizontal strokes containing thin beginnings and thick endings, create a strong visual rhythm. The remarkable consistency and accuracy of this calligraphic style were deemed suitable for religious texts, and hence adopted by the Tang courts for their scripture transcription projects. The prerequisite for the wide application of this style in the court-commissioned scriptures was that most of the copyists were government-employed clerk-calligraphers serving in affiliated government agencies, whose calligraphic training and working were easily standardised and unified in line with the emperor's requirements.

In comparison to the commission of scriptures assigned to high-status official-calligraphers, in which the significance for the Tang rulers lay in the commissioning act itself as a social interaction through the medium of calligraphy and the aesthetic creation expected of the works, the commissions assigned to scribes emphasized accuracy in the texts and the quantity of the volumes produced. With regard to the latter, individual scribes' aesthetic self-expression was required to be minimized, giving way to the faithful replication of texts containing the Tang rulers' prayers and officially sanctioned religious canons. These

conscious intentions can be detected from the personnel arrangement, the bureaucratic process of production and the selection of calligraphic styles.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the dual attributes of Buddhist and Daoist scriptures as both religious objects and calligraphic works, following three different stages of the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* transcribed by Wang Xizhi from production to reception. It tackles the transformation undergone by the meaning of this scripture, initially a religious combination of Daoist canonical text and Daoist-calligrapher's calligraphic work, then a masterpiece catalogued and held in the Tang imperial calligraphic collections, becoming, at last, a synonym of the unique calligraphic style applied to its production. From this we can tell that the social meaning of religious scripture is neither static nor opaque, but rather emerges from the specific context in which it functioned and the relationship between it and people. In the cases of Tang court scriptures, the religious and aesthetic attributes of scriptures, for one thing, enhanced one another's charm; moreover, working together provided a variety of possible means by which the Tang court members could pursue their secular ambitions in social and political life.

In the investigation of the phenomenon of sutra transcription in the secular environment of the Tang courts, two issues permeate the concerns of this chapter. The first is the religious doctrine of the 'transfer of merit', which enabled court members, as either scribes or patrons of sutra-copying projects, to transfer the resultant merit to another person. Through this, the court members converted sutra copying into a means for expressing emotions and love to the merit recipients, as well as a technique for self-presentation. From this angle, we can see the

projection of images of Emperor Xuanzong as a loving brother through his personal transcription of the *Scripture of Laozi* and as a benevolent ruler who cared about the welfare of the people and the stability of the state through his commission of a group of Daoist scriptures, and Empress Zhang's presentation as a loyal wife who used her own blood to transcribe Buddhist scriptures for her husband, the Emperor Suzong.

The second aspect is how 'calligraphic aesthetic consciousness' performed and functioned in Tang court sutra transcriptions. From the cases studied in this chapter, we can tell that both the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic functioned in scripture transcription and criticism. To be specific, since the idea that calligraphy served as the external manifestation of the calligrapher's inner world was well-established, it is no wonder to see that contemporary Tang-era commentary on the scriptures transcribed by noble court members, such as those by Emperor Xuanzong and Princess Linchuan, demonstrated an inclination to highlight these figures' moral virtues by exaggeratedly praising their calligraphic achievement. In addition, sutra transcription did not always necessarily stimulate the pursuit of high calligraphic quality, but might even, in some occasions, impede calligraphers' artistic pursuits. To verify this point, no case speaks louder than those imperially-commissioned sutra transcription projects that were assigned to scribes. These professional calligraphers were expected to make replicas of religious texts faithfully and quickly, instead of indulging in artistic self-expression.

In the examination of the relationship between religion and state, scholars of Japanese studies tend to adopt the 'theatre-state' mode to explain early Japanese kingship.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Byan Daniel Lowe, "Rewriting Nara Buddhism: Sutra Transcription in Early Japan" (PhD

According to this kind of interpretation, Buddhist rituals were used as a stage from which the rulers could show their authority. Piggott claims that ‘Shomu Tenno - presenting himself contemporaneously as living god, sage ruler, heavenly heir, and Servant of the Buddha-engaged in all sorts of majestic performances.’<sup>459</sup> Returning to the relationship between Tang emperors and religious sutra transcription, we can also detect that sutra transcriptions likewise worked to produce a theatrical justification of political authority. Especially, the realisation of ‘mass-production’ of sutra copying was to a large degree guaranteed by a well-organised bureaucratic system, demonstrating the imperial power’s efficacy in controlling a large number of bureaucratic and social resources, and thereby the success of the emperor’s rule. Alongside the dissemination of scriptures, the Tang rulers’ glorious public image and the charisma of their supreme power could be extended from the capital to the frontier garrison town of Dunhuang. In addition to that, the artistic valuing of sutra transcriptions as a genre of calligraphic creation expanded the social meaning of those transcriptions. The interaction between Tang rulers and ministers in the forms of appreciating or commissioning calligraphic sutra-copying works brought cultural charisma to the rulers and the court society more broadly.

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diss., Princeton University, 2012), 283-284.

<sup>459</sup> Joan Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 1997), 278-288.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CALLIGRAPHY, GIFTS, AND PERFORMANCE

In the figuration of any court society, both the ruler and the ruled were bound to each other by a complex interdependence.<sup>460</sup> Trust and reciprocity were integral components of their interdependent relationships. There is an ‘unspoken contract’ between the ruler and the ruled.<sup>461</sup> Essentially, this contract could not be built or sustained by enforcement, but rather was reinforced by constant demonstration of continuing confidence on both sides of the relationship.<sup>462</sup> ‘Each gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged.’<sup>463</sup> For the Tang courts as for others, granting gifts was one of the most effective strategies that are adopted by the rulers to bind people around them, especially a gift that only the ruler could give, and only the recipient was worthy to receive; one of the most potent was a gift of imperial calligraphy.

To date, most scholarship has focused on the material aspects of imperial gifts, as well as the literary and musical components of imperial feasts. These studies have offered glimpses of the colourful court life, but a comprehensive examination on the roles that calligraphy played in the social activities of Tang courts is still lacking. This chapter first focuses on the

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<sup>460</sup> According to Elias’s theory, as a figuration formed by individual human beings, the court society was a network of interdependence. Norbert Elias, *O processo civilizador*, 249.

<sup>461</sup> Jeremy Paterson, “Friends in High Places: The Creation of the Court of the Roman Emperor,” in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. A. J. S. Spawforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 121-156, 139.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>463</sup> According to Marcel Mauss, in any given society, gifts are neither neutral nor voluntarily, but rather are actually meaningful and obligatory. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002), xi.

Tang emperors' practice of granting imperial calligraphy as gifts to subjects. It claims that in comparison with other forms of rewards, as an elegant token of imperial favour the emperors' calligraphy was deemed as more honourable in terms of both the personal participation of the emperors in making these gifts and often the tailor-made nature of the works' textual content. The two attributes distinguish the bestowal of imperial calligraphy from other forms of gifts as a better demonstration of the proximity between the emperors and their recipients. For Tang emperors, calligraphic gift-giving was a subtle instrument of power, distributing ideological propaganda and signifying imperial favour. For a subordinate, being bestowed with any form of imperial calligraphy was a mark of distinction and a visible indicator of imperial favours. The second section of this chapter reconstructs some social occasions, such as court gatherings and feasts, in which the emperors performed calligraphy in person or patronised calligraphers to write calligraphy in front of an audience. It notices the co-occurrence of calligraphic performance and gift-giving at Tang court gatherings or feasts, suggesting that calligraphic performance and gift-giving worked in conjunction to leave a deep impression on the audience, and thereby cultivating the emperors' public-image as civilised and benevolent rulers.

### **5.1 Bestowing Imperial Calligraphy as Tailor-made Gifts**

Emperor Taizong once said: 'The greatest of state affairs is reward and punishment alone. Bestow fair reward on the deserving, and those without merit will fall back naturally.'<sup>464</sup>

Over the past few decades, a considerable amount of literature has been published on Tang imperial gifts, covering topics ranging from various types of material gifts to the

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<sup>464</sup> 國家大事, 惟賞與罰. 賞當其勞, 無功者自退. Wu Jing, *Zhen guan zheng yao* 貞觀政要 [Political Program for the *Zhen Guan* Regnal Era] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chu ban she, 1978), 3.98.

appointment of officials and the bestowal of honourable titles, among other aspects.<sup>465</sup>

However, probably due to the scattering of materials and a lack of the records of relevant institutional regulation, far too little attention has been paid to the phenomenon of the bestowal of imperial calligraphy as gifts to ministers at the Tang courts. In my exploration on this topic, I find that granting imperial calligraphy to court members as gifts was not an institutionalised convention that ran throughout the whole dynasty but rather an occasional practice carried out repeatedly by a small number of specific Tang rulers.<sup>466</sup> The occurrence and frequency of imperial calligraphic bestowals were determined not only by a ruler's personal interest but also the overall political environment. The giving of calligraphy is a signifier of those reigns that are often characterised by cultural prosperity and political stability. The recipients of imperial calligraphy were diverse, ranging from high-ranking officials, through military generals, to imperial family members.

In the interpretation of these imperial calligraphic gifts, what matters is often not the emperors' calligraphy itself or reflections of the mood which the calligraphy was thought to

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<sup>465</sup> For example, Wang Yongxing 王永興 examined the phenomenon of conferring human beings (including slaves, servants, and prostitutes etc.) on the meritorious. Qi Dongfang 齊東方 studies the social functions of silver and golden wares as rewards in the Tang dynasty. Peng Bingjin examined the regulations on grants to officials in the Tang dynasty. See Wang Yongxing, *Suitang wudai jingji shiliao huibian* 隋唐五代經濟史料彙編校注 [*Annotations and Compilation of Historical Records on the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties Economy*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju 1986), 65-71. Qi Dongfang, *Tangdai jinyin qi yanjiu* 唐代金銀器研究 [*Study on the Silver and Golden Wares of the Tang Dynasty*] (Beijing: Shehui kexue chu ban she, 1999), 265-265. Peng Bingjin 彭炳金, "Tangdai ciguan zhidu shu lun" 唐代賜官制度述論 [*A Study on the Regulation of Grants Under the Tang*] *The Journal of Humanities*, 1999(1), 104-108.

<sup>466</sup> According to the materials I have surveyed, those Tang emperors known to have granted calligraphic works to subordinates include Emperor Taizong, Emperor Gaozong, Empress Wu (Wu Zetian), Emperor Xuanzong, Emperor Suzong, Emperor Dezong, and Emperor Wenzong.

embody. Few of these calligraphic works are extant at present, but by combining the textual content of these works and the circumstances in which they were produced. By combining the latter two sources of information, we can gain substantial knowledge of how the emperors utilised their calligraphic gifts to respond to specific issues and to achieve their personal goals. The Tang emperors usually composed the texts of the calligraphic gifts in person according to their expectation and knowledge of specific recipients' merits. In comparison with other forms of material rewards, imperial calligraphic gifts could more directly reflect the emperors' personal closeness to and recognition of individual recipients. Hence, I may call the imperial calligraphic transcriptions of encouraging words bestowed on subjects as 'tailor-made gifts' to distinguish them from other forms of rewards and to highlight their personal and customised properties. It is, however, worth noting that there is another group of imperial calligraphic gifts. Groups of ministers might all get calligraphic gifts with the same text, as we shall see in the case of Emperor Xuanzong's many times granting of his transcriptions of the *Xixue pian* 喜雪篇 [Adoring Snow]. Although the texts of these do not address a particular recipient, they are targeted at a specific group of readers or audience, most often the cultural elites, especially the scholar-officials. In this sense, giving imperial calligraphic transcriptions of these works as gifts to ministers can be interpreted as a subtle propaganda tool designed to meet the rulers' practical political needs in specific circumstances.

#### **a. Calligraphic Transcriptions of Phrases**

The second ruler of the Tang dynasty, Emperor Taizong, was most likely the one who set the precedent in the dynasty for this practice. Known for his own calligraphic achievement and

admiration for the art of the Jin dynasty calligrapher Wang Xizhi, on some occasions, Emperor Taizong creatively moved from bestowing regular material rewards to presenting personalised imperial calligraphic gifts to his ministers. Phrase was one of the preferred texts for imperial calligraphy conferred on meritorious ministers. They work like proverbs or sayings, frequently allude to well-known stories, and often carry a sense of offering or seeking good fortune. By examining these phrases, we can see that the themes and formats of them are more or less the same, expressing the rulers' desire for talent and praise for the virtuous.

Ma Zhou 馬周 was one of Emperor Taizong's closest confidants, acting as his advisor and companion. Emperor Taizong once wrote a sixteen-character work in the flying-white script and bestowed it on Ma Zhou. It reads: 'A phoenix needs the aid of wings to soar up into the sky; loyalty and capability are essential requirements for a right-hand man.'<sup>467</sup> The texts of this flying-white calligraphic work clearly express Emperor Taizong's desires for achievement and his recognition of the need for loyal and capable men to assist his great cause. Similarly, in the eighteenth year of the Zhenguan Period (644), the day before the Dragon Boat Festival (which traditionally occurs on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar), Emperor Taizong wrote four characters 鸞鳳螭龍 (*Luan feng li long*) translated as "Phoenix and Dragon" in flying-white script on fans and granted them to the Minister of Education 司徒 Zhangsun Wuji and Director of the Department of State Affairs 尚書 Yang Shidao 楊師道. The emperor said: 'Tomorrow will be the fifth day of this month; according to traditional custom, clothes and playthings will be exchanged to

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<sup>467</sup> 鸞鳳冲霄, 必假羽翼. 股肱之寄, 要在忠力. *JTS*, 74. 2619.

celebrate (the festival). Today, I granted each of you two fans that are inscribed with flying-white script. (I wish it enables you) to blow a cool breeze enhancing your virtue and righteousness.<sup>468</sup>

In the middle of the *Xianheng* Period (670-674), inspired by his father Emperor Taizong, Emperor Gaozong gifted each of his four close confidants with a flying-white script calligraphic work composed and written by himself. ‘Rowing in a huge river depends on paddles’ was given to the Director of the Ministry of Revenue 戶部尚書 Dai Zhide 戴至德.<sup>469</sup> ‘Flying to the highest heaven relies on wings’ was given to the Attendant Gentleman of the Palace Secretary 中書侍郎 Hao Chujun 郝處俊.<sup>470</sup> ‘Assisting the (ruler) with admonition; Sparing no effort in demonstrating a sincere heart’ for Attendant Gentleman of the Ministry of Personnel 戶部侍郎 Li Jingxuan 李敬玄.<sup>471</sup> ‘Devoting loyalty without reservation; Supporting the Majesty’s Grand Cause’ was given to the Attendant Gentleman of the Palace Secretary 中書侍郎 Cui Zhiti 崔知悌.<sup>472</sup> The four recipients of these calligraphic works – Dai, Hao, Li, and Cui – were among the chief assistants to Emperor Gaozong at that time, which is verified by the emperor’s personnel arrangement during his leave for the east capital Luoyang in the second year of the *Xianheng* Period (671), possibly the same year when the four ministers received the imperial calligraphy. The biography of Emperor Taizong in *Old History of Tang* made special mention Dai and Li being ordered to

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<sup>468</sup> 明旦五日, 舊俗必用衣服玩物相賀. 朕今各賀君飛白扇二枚, 庶動清風, 以增德義. *THY*, 35. 647.

<sup>469</sup> 泛洪源, 俟舟楫. *TPYL*, 591. 2663.

<sup>470</sup> 飛九霄, 假六翮. *TPYL*, 591.2663.

<sup>471</sup> 資啓沃, 罄丹誠. *TPYL*, 591.2663.

<sup>472</sup> 竭忠節, 贊皇猷. *TPYL*, 591.2663.

assist the Crown Prince Li Hong, who was temporary regent, in overseeing the state in the capital Chang'an, while at the same time Hao accompanied the emperor on his journey to Luoyang.<sup>473</sup> The images of 'paddles' and 'wings' mentioned in these phrases were metaphors adopted to express the emperor's earnest appeal for competent men. 'Sincere heart' and 'loyalty' denote that the ruler expected his subjects to commit themselves to assist him in governing the empire. The four ministers' contemporaries commented that: 'Dai and Hao are known for their leniency, while Li and Cui have the reputation of being loyal and diligent. That is the reason why the emperor complimented them with these words.'<sup>474</sup>

Tang emperors' calligraphic gifts set a pattern which was followed by the rulers of later dynasties. Around four hundred years later, the Song Emperor Renzong (1010-1063) presented then Prime Minister Cai Xiang 蔡襄 with an imperial calligraphic transcription of a poem. In the imperial edict that the emperor sent to Cai, he recorded the inspiration for his calligraphic gift to Cai Xiang through reference to the Tang precedent. He wrote: 'Reading classics and history books in my spare time, as well as practising calligraphy, can help me attain mental tranquillity. (I) came across the writings that Tang Emperor Gaozong bestowed on the four ministers Dai, Hao, Li, and Cui. Their principal ideas are all about instruction and admonishment.'<sup>475</sup> Actually, as Song Emperor Huizong noticed, the key elements of these proverbs bestowed on the Tang ministers are more or less the same, expressing the rulers' urgent need for trustworthy people of talent and commendation of honourable

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<sup>473</sup> *JTS*, 5.95.

<sup>474</sup> 議者以戴, 郝寬厚, 而李, 崔忠勤, 故上以此言褒美之. *TPYL*, 591. 2663.

<sup>475</sup> 閒燕多以經史書藝時用頤神, 因見唐高宗賜戴, 郝, 李, 崔四臣之字, 旨義皆有誨諭. Cited after Shui Laiyou 水賚佑, "Cai Xiang xie ci yushu shi kao" 蔡襄謝賜御書詩考 [On Cai Xiang's Calligraphy Verse in Gratitude for a Gift of Imperial Calligraphy], *Shanghai wenbo luncong*, no.2 (2006): 51-53, 51.

ministers who had dedicated themselves to supporting the rulers' great cause. The following section approaches another genre of imperial transcription of literary compositions – poetry. When compared to these isolated short phrases, poems usually contain more characters, which allows them to express more complex ideas targeted to specific recipients. Hence, by studying these we can gain a closer understanding of the relationship between calligraphy and literature in the production and reception of imperial calligraphic gifts.

#### **b. Calligraphic Transcriptions of Literary Compositions Addressed to Specific Recipients**

As essential elements of Tang aristocratic cultural cultivation, calligraphy and literature, the arts of literacy, were often intertwined with one another. If a person excelled at calligraphy, at least they had to be literate and, at best, were expected to be skilled at literary composition. Harrist has observed that the 'rarity of autograph manuscripts of poetry from the pre-Tang era contrast starkly with the relative abundance of other texts that were preserved by early collectors and transmitted through copies or rubbings to later centuries.'<sup>476</sup> Since the Tang dynasty, a large number of calligraphic works were made taking poems as their texts.<sup>477</sup> These works were appreciated not only for their calligraphic achievement but also literary attainment, as the products of an intentional combination of visual beauty and exquisite literature. The examination of calligraphic catalogues composed after the Tang era reveals that literary composition, especially poetry, was among the most common subjects of the Tang emperors' calligraphic works. The titles of some such works

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<sup>476</sup> Robert Harrist, "The Two Perfections: Reading Poetry and Calligraphy," *The Embodied Image*, 281.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.



clearly show that both the texts and their calligraphy were dedicated to specific recipients. For instance, in *Bao ke lei bian* 寶刻類編 [*A Classified Compilation of Treasured Inscriptions*], under the entry for Emperor Xuanzong, we can see the “Ci Zhao Xuanfu shi” 賜趙仙甫詩 [Poem Bestowed on Zhao Xianfu], “Song Taishou Kangong shi” 送太守康公詩 [Poem Gifted to Grand Administrator Mr. Kang]. Similarly, in *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 [*The Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue*], we can see Emperor Xuanzong’s “Song Xuji fu Shuchuan shi” 送虛已赴蜀川詩 [Farewell Poem to Xuji leaving for Shuchuan]. Almost all of these poems, recorded as calligraphic works by Emperor Xuanzong, were also believed to have been composed by the emperor himself, given that he was both a productive poet and a distinguished calligrapher. Both the text and the calligraphy were carefully executed as gifts for specific readers and intended to be appreciated by the recipients.

It is noteworthy that this practice of bestowing calligraphic transcription of poems was not exclusive to interactions between male rulers and their ministers. The tomb epitaph for Princess Linchuan 臨川公主 (624-682) reveals how the princess and Wu Zetian maintained a seemingly good relationship through literary and calligraphic exchange. Most especially, there is a pentasyllabic regulated verse 五絕律詩 that was supposed to be the female emperor’s original composition, dedicated to Princess Linchuan and transcribed by Wu in person. Relating this work to the political circumstances in which it was produced and received, we can see the princess’s survival strategy through the years of chaos and Wu Zetian’s efforts to improve her relationship with the Li imperial family members.

According to the tomb epitaph, Princess Linchuan was the eleventh daughter of Emperor Taizong.<sup>478</sup> Renowned for her calligraphic and literary talents, the princess has been praised as ‘excelling at seal script calligraphy, and capable at literary composition.’<sup>479</sup> The princess’s literary and calligraphic talents can also be verified through a story that is told in the tomb epitaph. In the early years of the *Zhenguan* period (626-649), the princess travelled, following her father, Emperor Taizong, to the Ganquan Palace to avoid the summer heat. She wrote diaries in her own hand and brought them to her father. After examining these works, the emperor told his brother-in-law Zhangsun Wuji:

My daughter is remarkably young to practice and learn. It makes me really grateful to see the degree attained by her composition and writing. I heard that the courtesy name of Wang Xizhi’s daughter is Mengjiang. She was extremely good at calligraphy. Through admiration for (her), I name my daughter after (her). (The two of them) are almost as good as one another.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Due to the discrepancy between the records in *New History of Tang*, the tomb epitaph of Princess Linchuan, and the edict excavated from princess’s tomb, it is still unclear where Princess Linchuan was ranked by age among Emperor Taizong’s daughters. In these three resources, the princess was recorded respectively as the tenth, the eleventh, and the twelfth daughter. See *XTS*, 83. 3646; Shaanxi sheng wenguanhui and Zhaoling wenguansuo, “Tang Linchuan gongzhu mu chutu de muzhi he zhaoshu” 唐臨川公主墓出土的墓誌和詔書 [The Epitaph and Edict Unearthed from the Tomb of Tang Princess Linchuan], *Wenwu*, no.10 (1977): 50-59, 50. Presumably this was a question of whether the writer counted daughters who died in childhood.

<sup>479</sup> 工籀錄, 能屬文. *XTS*, 83.3646.

<sup>480</sup> 朕女年小, 未多習學, 詞跡如此, 足以慰人. 朕聞王羲之女, 字孟姜, 頗工書藝, 慕之為字, 庶可齊蹤. Shaanxi sheng wenguanhui and Zhaoling wenguansuo, “Tang Linchuan gongzhu mu chutu de muzhi he zhaoshu” 唐臨川公主墓出土的墓誌和詔書 [The Epitaph and Edict Unearthed from the Tomb of Tang Princess Linchuan] *Wenwu*, no.10 (1977): 50-59, 58.

The anecdote above is definitely one of the highlights of Princess Linchuan's childhood. The princess's literary and calligraphic practice lasted throughout her whole life and enabled her to maintain a relatively benign relationship with Wu Zetian, who has traditionally been believed to have engaged in a brutal persecution of many members of the imperial Li family. After the death of Wu Zetian's mother, Princess Linchuan personally took up her brush to compose the texts and execute the calligraphy of a memorial to praise the deeds and virtues of Wu's mother.<sup>481</sup> According to the tomb epitaph of Princess Linchuan, after reading this work Wu Zetian was deeply moved and granted handsome rewards to the princess. One of these rewards was a pentasyllabic regulated verse composed in person by Wu Zetian. The tomb epitaph records:

The Heavenly Empress especially descended her *Yin* benevolence that solemnly conveys divine kindness. Calligraphy was executed in eight scripts. The poem was performed in five-character lines. Decorated with beautiful embroidery, (this work) was bestowed on the princess. (It was created to) promote female virtues and to glorify the princess.<sup>482</sup>

To express her gratitude for Princess Linchuan's support, Wu Zetian combined the arts of calligraphy and poetry, personalising a calligraphic transcription of poetry as a gift for the princess. Although the text of this poem has unfortunately been lost, it is not hard to speculate that 'to glorify the princess' the content of the text should not be far from acclaiming Princess Linchuan's female virtues and noble deeds. The paragraph above also

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> 天后曲降陰慈, 載隆神澤. 翰垂八體, 詩備五言, 裝承錦鄣, 特賜公主. 闡揚嬪則, 盛述穠華. Ibid.

reveals that in the reception and appreciation of this imperial gift, the elements to which attention was paid include not only the format of the text but its calligraphic performance. The arts of literature and calligraphy have been closely intertwined with one another in the production and appreciation of this calligraphic gift.

### **c. Gifts of Calligraphic Transcriptions of Literary Compositions as Propaganda Instruments**

Besides these poems mentioned above, the titles and textual content of which explicitly reveal that each was personalised and prepared for one specific recipient, there is another group of Tang emperors' calligraphic transcriptions of literary compositions, the titles of which do not address one specific recipient. This group of works might have been transcribed by the emperors many times and bestowed on a broader range of subjects as gifts, reaching a wider readership than poems created for specific recipients. Although the emperors might not refer directly to themselves in these works, the text and calligraphy conferred on subjects, circulating among readers at and beyond the courts, provided a means for the emperors to cultivate a public image that was conducive to demonstrating their fitness to govern. The poems discussed here is *Xixue pian* 喜雪篇 [Adoring Snow], known to have been transcribed and conferred on several subjects by Emperor Xuanzong. From this case study, we can see how the emperor combined the gift-giving strategy and his calligraphic and literary talents to transmit propaganda messages.

In *Zhang Jiuling ji* 張九齡集 [*Collection of Zhang Jiuling's Works*], there are two memorials that were written by the Tang minister Zhang Jiuling as a response to Emperor

Xuanzong's creation and bestowal of the work "Adoring Snow". The first memorial is entitled "Guan yuzhi xixue pian chencheng zhuang" 觀御製喜雪篇陳誠狀 [*Sincere Description on Appreciating the Poem Adoring Snow Made by the Emperor*]. It was composed and submitted by Zhang Jiuling after he first saw this imperial poem, then newly bestowed on his colleague Chen Xilie 陳希烈. The Attendant Gentleman of the Ministry of Works 工部侍郎 and concurrent Academician Expositor-in-waiting 侍講學士 Chen Xilie had the duty of explaining classics to the emperor when the poem was composed. In Zhang Jiuling's memorial, besides a brief mention of the encounter with Chen Xilie that had allowed him to appreciate this imperial work, more words of this memorial are devoted to celebrating how wonderful the snow can manifest the emperor's benevolent government:

Food is the life of thousands of families. Snow is the essence of the five kinds of cereals. Auspicious omens respond to devout prayers for harvest years. A harmonious tune arises from an expression of aspiration. Favourable signifiers in the heavens correspond to the monarch's sincere heart.<sup>483</sup>

In the memorial, Jiuling flatteringly stated that the snow was an auspicious omen coming from heaven's acknowledgement of the emperor's devoted heart. Delighted by this memorial, Emperor Xuanzong personally brushed two copies of the poem and sent his most trusted eunuch Gao Lishi 高力士 on his behalf to confer them on Zhang Jiuling and the Prime Minister Li Linfu 李林甫. After receiving this imperial gift, Zhang Jiuling submitted

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<sup>483</sup> 食者萬姓之命，雪為五穀之精。兆且見於祈年，律既和於言志。聖心昭感，天瑞合符。Zhang Jiuling 張九齡, *Zhang Jiuling ji jiaozhu* 張九齡集校注 [*An Annotated Collection of Zhang Jiuling's Works*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2008) 15. 819-820.

the second memorial entitled “Xieci yushu xixue pian zhuang” 謝賜御書喜雪篇狀

[*Description of Gratitude for the Bestowal of Imperial Writing of the Poem Adoring Snow*].

It notes:

An article that glorifies heaven may expect to be widely read. Although the sacredness of the falling dew could be gained through special favour, what people do not know is that to attain profound achievement, one needs to employ all types of effort. Imperial calligraphy arrives; Phoenix descends; rain and snow carry harmony. What a great honour for stupid me to gain such a special gift. Thus, (I) know that the affiliation and affection between monarchs and courtiers are not all the same. My descendants will hand down the treasure from one generation to the next, without cease. (We) do not know what to do in this life to repay Your Majesty. We cannot appreciate (Your Majesty) more.<sup>484</sup>

‘Falling dew’ is a calligraphic technique that requires calligraphers to turn brushes back around at the end of writing a vertical stroke to create the visual effect of a drop of dew being poised to fall. In the paragraph above, it is used as a metaphor, referring to Emperor Xuanzong’s exquisite calligraphy. At the end of this paragraph, Zhang Jiuling made it clear that this calligraphic transcription of the emperor’s original literary composition was an elegant token of a deep personal rapport between the ruler and his ministers. He also

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<sup>484</sup> 麗天之文. 或冀傳誦. 垂露之聖. 雖有偏霑. 則不知玄造曲成. 宸豪俯逮. 鸞鳳斯降. 雪雨載均. 愚臣何幸. 叨此殊賜. 是知君臣之深. 義感不一. 子孫之後. 傳寶無窮. 而未知此生何以上答. 臣等不勝感戴. Zhang Jiuling 張九齡, *Zhang Jiuling ji jiaozhu* 張九齡集校注 (An Annotated Collection of Zhang Jiuling’s works), (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2008) 15. 822.

expressed his determination to serve the ruler with utter devotion to pay back the latter's recognition.

By piecing the scattered records together, we can see that the 'Adoring Snow' poem was personally transcribed by Emperor Xuanzong many times and granted as a gift to several officials, which constitute the initial circulation history of this poem. The Song dynasty calligraphic catalogue of imperial collections *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 [*The Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue*] includes a work entitled 'Adoring Snow' in the entry on Emperor Xuanzong. Unfortunately, this calligraphic work does not survive today. In addition, what makes the image of this work more obscure is that an examination of Emperor Xuanzong's literary creation reveals that throughout the emperor's whole life he composed at least two poems with the title of 'Adoring Snow'. They are "Dengfeng xixue" 登封喜雪 [*Ascending the Peak Adoring Snow*] and "Yeci xixue" 野次喜雪 [*Camping in the Wild Adoring Snow*]. Although it is hard to discern which of these was that transcribed and conferred on Zhang Jiuling by Emperor Xuanzong, it is still useful to make a brief examination of the textual content of these poems and the circumstances in which these poems were composed. From this examination, we can speculate as to the emperor's motives behind the intentional promotion of the poem 'Adoring Snow,' the initial circulation of which was largely stimulated due to imperial calligraphic gift-giving.

‘Ascending the Peak Adoring Snow’ was composed in the thirteenth year (725) of the *Kaiyuan* period, when Emperor Xuanzong was on his way to ascend the mountain Tai to perform the grand Feng and Shan sacrifices.<sup>485</sup> It reads:

I ascended the Riguan peak to divine the expedition ahead,  
Complying with the wishes of all creatures, (I come) to inspect the prefectures.  
Due to the rush of travel, I have not prepared for the gifts.  
As the clouds gather, snowflakes float in a sudden gale.  
Accumulating over the trees, they look like chilly flower blossoms.  
Swirling snowflakes come down to earth as light as cotton fibres.  
The Hall looks like jades gathered together.  
The snow-covered courtyard shines as bright as moonlight.  
Initially, I saw the snow that was four inches deep,  
Afterwards, I delightedly found that it had accumulated to more than a foot.  
What should I do to repay the honour of performing the ceremony?  
(The heavy snow) may confirm the accomplishment that I have attained.<sup>486</sup>

Feng and Shan sacrifices, regarded as a solemn gesture repaying Heaven and Earth for their kindness to the ruler and the empire, were believed in the Tang to be one of the highest rites that could be performed by an emperor. A receiver of the mandate of Heaven was not sufficiently qualified to perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices. Only when an emperor

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<sup>485</sup> *JTS*, 23:899.

<sup>486</sup> Li Longji (Emperor Xuanzong), “Xi xue” 喜雪 [Adoring Snow], in *Quan tang shi* 全唐詩 [Complete Tang Poems] (1705), ed. Peng Dengqiu et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1960), 3. 36. 日觀卜先徵, 時巡順物情。風行未備禮, 雲密遽飄囊。委樹寒花髮, 縈空落絮輕。朝如玉已會, 庭似月猶明。既睹膚先合, 還欣尺有盈。登封何以報, 因此謝功成。3. 36.



performed magnificent achievements and when his exceptional virtue and merit was confirmed by auspicious responses from the Heavens, could he rightfully perform the sacrifices to legitimize his authority.<sup>487</sup> Throughout history only seven emperors dared to perform this rite.<sup>488</sup> Emperor Xuanzong was one of them. He arose from the chaos that followed the ending of Empress Wu's reign and restored the empire to a new peak of power. Urged by the Prime Minister Zhang Yue 張說, Emperor Xuanzong decided to perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices that symbolised the success of imperial rule and the restoration of dynastic power. The early and middle parts of his reign seem to be a great era of internal stability and economic prosperity. However, as Skaff argues, when we take the foreign affairs of that time into consideration, Emperor Xuanzong was not in such an ideal position for conducting such a magnificent event or at least had a weaker claim than had his grandfather Emperor Gaozong to perform such rites.<sup>489</sup> Struggling in foreign affairs, to boost subjects' confidence and justify his qualification to perform the rites, Emperor Xuanzong was in need of an auspicious heavenly omen that was supposed to demonstrate heavenly approval. It was fortunate for him that, before the sacrifices were performed, a heavy snow fell on Mount Tai. There is a common belief that 'in the winter of a harvest year, heavy

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<sup>487</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk- Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, 170-172.

<sup>488</sup> According to Wechsler's research, the only emperors to have performed the Feng and Shan sacrifices include the First Emperor of Qin, the Han emperors Wu and Guangwu, and the Tang emperors Gaozong and Xuanzong. It is noteworthy, however, that Wu Zetian, the only female emperor, performed the sacrifices at Mount Song as ruler of her own Zhou dynasty.

<sup>489</sup> Jonathan Karam Skaff claims that external peace was deemed an important precondition for the implementation of the Feng and Shan rites. According to Skaff, prior to the performance of the Feng and Shan rites, Emperor Xuanzong was beset by a series of external troubles, such as the resistance of Bilgä Qaghan of the Second Türk Empire to the Tang investiture. See Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture Power and Connections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 144-148.

snow is certain to fall.’<sup>490</sup> Hence the snowfall was interpreted by the emperor as an auspicious omen from heaven that could serve to confirm his accomplishments.

As for the second poem, ‘Camping in the Wild Adoring Snow’, there is no reliable evidence to indicate when and where Emperor Xuanzong composed this work. Despite the obscurity of the circumstances surrounding its production, its gist is strikingly similar to that of the ‘Ascending the Peak Adoring Snow’, which can especially be verified from the poem’s last sentence. It reads: ‘Knowing that I work hard to sympathize with and comfort people, (the snow) arrives ahead to foretell a harvest year.’<sup>491</sup> In both of these two poems entitled ‘Adoring Snow’, Emperor Xuanzong interpreted the heavy snow as heaven’s response to and recognition of his merits as an outstanding ruler who cared about and served the people. Therefore, no matter which ‘Adoring Snow’ was the one that was awarded to Zhang Jiuling by Emperor Xuanzong, there should be no big difference in regard to the emperor’s motives behind this behaviour of calligraphic gift-giving. For Emperor Xuanzong, the significance of making calligraphic transcriptions of these poems and presenting them as gifts to ministers was not only about signifying imperial favour to the recipients but engaging in ideological propaganda that contributed to his public image as an excellent ruler whose achievement had been recognised by the heavens via the granting of auspicious omens.

## 5.2 Calligraphic Performance and Gifts at Court Gatherings and Feasts

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<sup>490</sup> 豐年之冬，必有積雪。Kong Yingda 孔穎達 et al. ed., *Mao shi zheng yi* 毛詩正義 (642) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chu ban she, 1999), 13:872.

<sup>491</sup> 為知勤恤意，先此示年豐。QTS, 3.31.

Feasting enjoyed a long history as one of the most important pastimes at the Tang courts and played significant roles in court members' social and political lives. The Tang emperors held banquets on a variety of ceremonial occasions to celebrate festivals, victories in war, official appointments and other notable events.<sup>492</sup> Like many other ancient court societies, the imperial banquet at the Tang courts was not merely about eating and drinking, but was instead a display of rulership and a socio-political arena in which the court members identified their positions in the hierarchy of court society and socialized with one another.<sup>493</sup> The treatise on rituals in the official dynastic history *Old History of Tang* declares that: 'Only after the rituals of banquets are established will the relationship between the emperor and the subjects be solid.'<sup>494</sup> In a banquet, a public shared meal, the consumption of drink and food was intertwined with art, discourse, and performance.<sup>495</sup> Every single component of banqueting (decoration, ritual, eating, and performing, etc.) works together to create a theatrical spectacle in which the banqueters were at the same time artists, spectators and participants.<sup>496</sup> The imperial banquets at the Tang courts were often accompanied by a

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<sup>492</sup> For more details about Tang banquets and food, see Huang Zhengjian 黃正建, *Tangdai yishizhuxing yanjiu* 唐代衣食住行研究 [*Study on the Tang Dynasty Clothing, Food, Shelter and Transportation*] (Beijing: Shoudu shifandaxue chubanshe, 1998), 28-36. Wang Saishi 王賽時, *Tangdai yinshi* 唐代飲食 [*Food of Tang Dynasty*] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2003), 224-260.

<sup>493</sup> For example, Maria Brosius examines the royal banquets in the courts of ancient Mesopotamia, claiming that royal banquets were an expression of kingship and an invitation to the royal banquet was an official declaration of royal favour and privilege. Maria Brosius, "New Out of Old? Court and Court Ceremonies in Achaemenid Persia," in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. A. J. S. Spawforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17-58: 41-42.

<sup>494</sup> 享宴之禮立, 則君臣篤. *JTS*, 21.825.

<sup>495</sup> Athena Stourna, "Banquet Performance Now and Then: Commensal Experiments and Eating as *Mise en Scene*," *Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, Vol.12, Spring 2018, 10-31:13.

<sup>496</sup> In Stourna's discussion on the topic of banquet performance, she incorporates Allan Kaprow's theory of 'lifelike art' that is dissociated from 'artlike art'. She summarizes lifelike art as art which 'embraces life, ceremony and ritual, and provides a communal experience

variety of artistic activities in which the banqueters participated as both performers and spectators. Most studies to date have focused on music, dance, and poetic composition performed at the court feasts. In contrast, calligraphic gift-giving and performance at feasts have seldom been mentioned in existing scholarship. In the Tang period, it was not rare to see the emperors demonstrating calligraphy in front of an audience and presenting imperial calligraphy as gifts to their subjects, as well as inviting subjects known for calligraphy to perform their calligraphy at court gatherings. These entertainment-like programs usually led the feasts towards an atmospheric climax, leaving a deep impression on the guests. This section attempts to reveal how the Tang emperors used calligraphy and court gatherings to publicly proclaim civilisation and harmony in their rule. From the perspective of the Tang emperors, both performing calligraphy in person and patronizing calligraphers to write calligraphic scrolls at court gatherings were conducive to the demonstration of their dedication to this form of art, witnessed by court members who were their most important audience, facilitating their self-presentation as men of letters and benevolent rulers interacting with their subjects through cultural activities.

#### **a. Tang Emperors' Calligraphic Performance and Gift-giving at Court Feasts**

At court feasts, sometimes with the aid of alcohol, the emperors might personally execute calligraphy in front of audiences that were mainly composed of their officials and might give imperial calligraphy as gifts to certain among those officials. These actions could enliven the banquet atmosphere and enable the Tang emperors to pose as enlightened rulers and even,

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where the boundaries between artists and visitors/spectators/participants are broken.’  
“Banquet Performance Now and Then: Commensal Experiments and Eating as *Mise en Scene*,” *Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, Vol.12, Spring 2018, 10-31:10.

perhaps, approachable friends. One of the most well-known cases of such behaviour is one that involved Emperor Taizong. He once held a feast at the Xuanwu Gate, attended by all of the officials graded above rank three. At the feast, the emperor publicly performed his most celebrated flying-white script in front of a large audience, a performance which aroused some drunken officers to grab the calligraphy from the emperor's hands. Among these, the boldest one was the Attendant-in-ordinary 常侍 Liu Ji 劉洎, who even climbed onto the throne and stretched out his hand for the emperor's calligraphy. This behaviour was viewed by his peers as a serious violation of law and rites. The other officers were all shocked and claimed that, according to law, Liu Ji should be sentenced to death. They even requested the emperor to execute Liu Ji immediately. The emperor responded with a laugh and said: 'In the past, Lady Ban refused to ride in the imperial palanquin. Today, an Attendant-in-ordinary climbed onto the emperor's bed'.<sup>497</sup> Emperor Taizong defused the awkward situation with this citation of the famous story of Lady Ban who was a role model for the admonition for women. It is said that she refused to share the palanquin with Han dynasty Emperor Cheng (51-7BC) and replied that 'I have noticed that in ancient paintings wise rulers are always represented with their ministers at their sides, in contrast, decadent emperors at the close of the Three Dynasties are accompanied by their beloved concubines'.<sup>498</sup> By citing the story of Lady Ban, Emperor Taizong excused Li Ji, who had seemingly forgotten the code of conduct. Further, he indicated that the incident was a sign that he was himself a wise ruler who kept the company of his ministers. In this event, calligraphy was not only played as a performance that added fun to the imperial gathering,

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<sup>497</sup> *JTS*, 170: 4432-4433.

<sup>498</sup> 觀古圖畫, 聖賢之君皆有名臣在側, 三代末主乃有嬖女. For the image depicting the story of Lady Ban on the Admonitions Scroll, see Sahane McCausland, *First Masterpiece of Chinese Painting: The Admonitions Scroll* (London: The British Museum, 2003), 55.

but also a medium that enabled the emperor to interact with his subjects outside of daily political affairs. Through the medium of calligraphy, this was a moment in which the boundaries between an emperor and his subjects were blurred, a blurring which might account for the emperor's success in gathering a group of remarkable ministers who served him sincerely.

The reign of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-758) was another heyday for the imperial patronage of calligraphy, like his predecessors, the emperor himself was a skilled calligrapher, incorporating calligraphy tactically into many aspects of his rule. Being well aware of the value of his calligraphy to his subordinates, he employed this calligraphic gift-giving strategy in more than one of the feasts held as a components of officials' appointment ceremonies. The primary goals of these feasts could be expected to be inspiring the newly-appointed officials to perform their duties properly and making them feel the imperial benevolence extended from the throne. To facilitate the fulfilment of these goals, the emperor not only executed calligraphy in person, but creatively designed the texts of these calligraphic gifts to echo the theme of these appointment ceremonies. In the sixteenth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (728), Emperor Xuanzong personally chose and appointed eleven officials as Prefectural Governors 刺史 (*Ci shi*). When the eleven newly-appointed officials were about to leave the capital for their official posts, Xuanzong summoned the prefectural governors, along with his Prime Ministers and princes, to enjoy a feast alongside the Luo River. A series of activities took place to enhance the celebratory atmosphere: the tables were placed with dishes of delicious food; court musicians played ceremonial music; emperor and officials boarded ships to play water games.<sup>499</sup> The climax of the feast occurred when

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<sup>499</sup> Ji Yougong, *Tangshi jishi jiao jian* 唐詩紀事校箋 [*Events Recorded in Tang Poems with*

Emperor Xuanzong sent his principal confidant, the eunuch Gao Lishi 高力士, to confer a poem on the eleven new appointed prefectural governors. This poem was composed and transcribed by the emperor himself.<sup>500</sup> The title of the poem, “Poem Awarded to Prefectural Governors to Inscribe to the Right of their Seats” 賜諸州刺史以題座右, suggests that the prefectural governors were supposed to place the poem to the right of their seats as mottos. The poem reads:

Concentrating on the grand mission of achieving unified governance throughout the state, I  
am eager for virtuous and talented men day and night.

What a marvellous selection it is!

Your remarkable reputation has spread throughout the courtiers.

The talents are recruited in order,

The civilians have a wealthy and happy life.

You should regard the people as your own children,

And treat them carefully as if they were wounded.

Reading and memorizing classics are tested at schools,

Farming and sericulture are encouraged in the fields.

Empty fame should not be pursued,

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*Annotations*], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 2007), 25.

<sup>500</sup> Poems written during the court banquets can usually act as annotations to reveal the themes of the banquets. In the Complete Tang Poems, we can see at least seven poems that were composed by Li Longji during his banquets with officials. Wu Qiuhui points out that the Banquet poems that were composed in Li Longji’s court show two noticeable features: The first one is that political significances are above festival meanings; the second one is the pervasive influence of Daoism. See Wu Qiuhui, *Tangdai yanyin shi yanjiu* 唐代宴飲詩研究 [*Study on Banquet Poems of the Tang Dynasty*], (Xinbei: Hua Mulan chu ban she, 2010). *QTS*, 3:26-42.

Incorruptible reputation should not be forgotten.  
It is easy to identify those who are (simply) pursuing reputation,  
Virtue speaks for itself when one sticks to moral integrity.  
Lawsuits should be judged in accordance with humanity,  
The value of education for people lies in ethics.  
Loneliness should be comforted, while the elderly should be sustained.  
The weak need support and the strong should be pacified.  
I hope that you will be self-motivated after being commanded by His Majesty.  
Bear in mind that I care about the people of the entire empire.<sup>501</sup>

Bestowed publicly at an imperial banquet for high-ranking figures, this work demonstrates the esteem that the emperor attributed to the well-being of the people and to the significance of the roles of prefectural governors for the stability of the empire.<sup>502</sup> Appreciated for both its calligraphy and literature, this informative poem presented in the emperor's calligraphy contributes to the emperor's image as not only a benevolent ruler but a man of letters.

It is worth noting that awarding imperial calligraphy to subjects at feasts was not an

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<sup>501</sup> 眷言思共理, 鑑夢想維良. 猗歟此推擇, 聲績著周行. 賢能既俟進, 黎獻實佇康. 視人當如子, 愛人亦如傷. 講學試誦論, 阡陌勸耕桑. 虛譽不可飾, 清知不可忘. 求名跡易見, 安貞德自彰. 訟獄必以情, 教民貴有常. 恤惻且存老, 撫弱復綏強. 勉哉各祇命, 知予眷萬方. Ji Yougong, *Tangshi jishi jiao jian* 唐詩紀事校箋 [*Events Recorded in Tang Poems with Annotations*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 25.

<sup>502</sup> Dai Ruihe suggests that the main responsibility of Tang dynasty prefectural supervisors was collecting tax. Their other duties, including performing rituals, undertaking large-scale building projects, and recruiting runaway households, should be regarded as their efforts to raise tax revenues. Dai Ruihe, "Tangdai cishi de shuiguan jue" 唐代刺史的稅官角色 [The Role of the Prefectural Governor as Tax Collectors in Tang Dynasty], *Collected Papers of History Studies*, (2015.9), 43-51.



accidental spur-of-the-moment action for the emperor. Another similar grant happened a year later in the seventeenth year of the *Kaiyuan* period (729) when Emperor Xuanzong appointed Song Jing 宋璟 as the Director of the Imperial Secretariat 尚書令, the Right Prime Minister 右丞相, Zhang Shuo 張說, as Left Prime Minister 左丞相, and Yuan Qianyao 源乾曜 as the Junior Mentor of the Heir Apparent 太子少傅. To celebrate these appointments, a banquet was held in the East Hall of the Imperial Secretariat. During the banquet, the emperor personally composed the “Poem of Three Heroes” 三傑詩 (*San jie shi*) and executed the calligraphy for it. After that, these works were presented as gifts to the three newly-appointed ministers.<sup>503</sup> For a scholar-official, a man of letters, it would be hard to expect anything more valuable than such a doubly precious object, a gift of both imperial calligraphy and poetic imagination with a tailor-made text.

#### **b. Calligraphers Called to Perform Calligraphy before the Throne**

In the Tang dynasty, it became common that at feasts or other forms of gatherings, the hosts themselves or invited guests demonstrated calligraphy before an audience. The most prominent artistic calligraphic pursuit that may help to illuminate the meaning of this practice is seen in the anecdotes of some wild cursive masters. For instance, Zhang Xu 張旭 was an eighth-century calligrapher, best known for his wild cursive script. It is said that most of his wild cursive script was created in a state of drunkenness and accompanied by exciting body-language. There is a poem entitled “Zeng Zhangxu” 贈張旭 (Honourable Bestowal upon To Zhang Xu), that was composed by Tang dynasty poet Li Qi 李頎. One sentence in

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<sup>503</sup> *XTS*, 124:4393. For the full text of this poem, see *QTS*, 3.38.

this poem reads: ‘All of the guests have just been seated.’<sup>504</sup> According to Huang Weizhong 黃緯中, this sentence indicates that Zhang Xu might have performed calligraphy before an audience. By the time of Zhang Xu, the public calligraphic demonstration had become a common practice, viewed as a performing art.<sup>505</sup>

As a matter of fact, Zhang Xu was only one of the many wild cursive script calligraphers of the Tang period. Beside Zhang Xu, several renowned wild cursive script calligraphers were Buddhist monks, such as Huaisu 懷素, Yaxi 亞栖, Bianguang 晷光, and Gaoxian 高閑. One of the main reasons why their names have been remembered is that some of them were summoned to perform calligraphy before the throne. Calligraphy as performance has been traditionally related to religious mental states, drunkenness and wild cursive script. The performance of a group of wild cursive script monk-calligraphers in front of the throne can be read as the afterglow of the Tang empire’s patronage of calligraphy, an illuminating footnote to the spiritual features of that era.

Although, in the late Tang period, due to the loss of its supreme political authority, the court was no longer the primary site at which patronage determined the mainstream development of calligraphy, as it had in the early Tang era, its patronage remained prominent, and the

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<sup>504</sup> 諸賓且方坐. Cited after Huang Weizhong 黃緯中, *Tangdai shufa shi yanjiuji* 唐代書法史研究集 [*Research on the History of Tang Dynasty Calligraphy*] (Taipei: Huifeng tang shushe, 1994), 52.

<sup>505</sup> Huang Weizhong notices that in comparison with *zhangcao* 章草 (ancient cursive script) that is an early form of cursive script based on clerical script and *jincao* 今草 (modern cursive script) that formed in the Jin dynasty, the wild cursive script is more unruly and even illegible. He hence claims that due to the loss of the utilitarian function of expressing the meaning of the text in wild cursive calligraphic works, these works fully achieved the status as pure ‘art’. Huang Weizhong 黃緯中, *Tangdai shufa shi yanjiuji* 唐代書法史研究集 [*Research on the History of Tang Dynasty Calligraphy*] (Taipei: Huifeng tang shushe, 1994), 40.

summons of a group of wild cursive script monk-calligraphers to perform cursive calligraphy before the throne exerted a significant influence on the history of calligraphy. After the monk Gaoxian was bestowed with the Purple Robe for performing cursive calligraphy before Emperor Xuanzong (810-859), the monks Yaxi and Bianguang were successively called by Emperor Zhaozong (867-904) to perform cursive calligraphy at the court.<sup>506</sup> In a case study on Bianguang, Wang Yuanjun 王元軍 suggests that the court provided a stage for the monk-calligraphers of the late Tang to show off their artistic achievements.<sup>507</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the office of Imperial Cursive Script Calligrapher in Attendance 御內草書供奉 offered to Bianguang was merely a temporary position that had no real political responsibility but rather served to increase the enjoyment of the emperors' cultural hobbies and activities.<sup>508</sup> In comparison the early and middle Tang periods when the most renowned calligraphers were often privileged ministers wielding real political influence and power, the identity and function of this group of monk-calligraphers are comparatively pure and simple. Their appearance at the Tang courts, without political participation, demonstrates on the one hand the development of the independence or professionalism of calligraphy as a form of art, but on the other hand might also reveal a loss of control among the late Tang rulers over political issues and personnel appointment.

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<sup>506</sup> The main primary source that records the life and works of these monk-calligraphers is the Song dynasty imperial calligraphy catalogue *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 [Calligraphy Catalogue of Xuanhe Era]. The biographies of these monk-calligraphers are seen in *XHSP*, 19. 342-347. See also Huang Weizhong, 黃緯中, “Zhongwantang de caoshu seng” 中晚唐的草書僧 [Monk-calligraphers of Cursive script in Middle and Late Tang], *Tangdai shufa shi yanjiuji* 唐代書法史研究集 [Research on the History of Tang Dynasty Calligraphy] (Taipei: Huifeng tang shushe, 1994), 40-55.

<sup>507</sup> Wang Yuanjun 王元軍, “Wan Tang yunri gongfeng caoshuseng Bianguang shiji tantao” 晚唐御內供奉草書僧晉光事蹟探討 [Study on the Cursive Script Calligrapher in Attendance Monk Bianguang of Late Tang], in *Chinese Calligraphy*, no. 2 (2005): 28-30.30.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

From the perspective of art history, some scholars have noted the relationship between wild cursive script calligraphers and the painters of the *yipin* 逸品 (the ‘Untrammelled category’), a label that was created by the ninth-century critic Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 for a particular painting style.<sup>509</sup> Schlombs claims that the similarities between early wild cursive calligraphers and the first painters of the untrammelled category include the fact that both indulged in drinking before work, both practiced their art in front of an audience, and in both cases it was the wild and dramatic spontaneity displayed in their performance that was cherished by their contemporaries as the ultimate display of unrestrained genius.<sup>510</sup> Lu Huiwen suggests that Daoist performances of magic and illusion might be a major source of inspiration for both wild cursive calligraphy and Untrammelled Category painting.<sup>511</sup> From the latter half of the ninth century, the Tang emperors had lost almost all control over their territory, being reduced to the status of pawns and puppets in wars prosecuted by local warlords. The dramatic calligraphic performance associated with mystical and spiritual powers might have freed the emperors from the bitterness of real life for a moment or endowed them with a hollow feeling of power in the bleak years of their helplessness.

While conceding the close relationship between calligraphy in performance and wild cursive script, I feel it is necessary to make it clear that this kind of relationship is not exclusive. In

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<sup>509</sup> See Adele Schlombs, *Huai-Su and the Beginnings of Wild Cursive Script in Chinese Calligraphy*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1998), 1; Lu Huiwen, “Wild Cursive Calligraphy, Poetry, and Chan Monks in the Tenth Century,” in *Tenth-century China and Beyond: Art and Visual Culture in a Multi-centered Age*, ed. Wu Hung (Chicago: The Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago Art Media Resources, 2012), 368.

<sup>510</sup> Schlombs, *Huai-Su and the Beginnings of Wild Cursive Script in Chinese Calligraphy*, 1.

<sup>511</sup> Lu Huiwen, “Wild Cursive Calligraphy, Poetry, and Chan Monks in the Tenth Century,” 368.

other words, a calligrapher may also perform calligraphy before an audience employing other scripts. The case of Liu Gongquan's calligraphic performance at the court of Emperor Xuanzong (810-859), recorded in detail, may improve our understanding of how the Tang rulers utilised calligraphy to socialise with their ministers and to pose as courteous sponsors of culture in accord with Confucian values.

In the history of calligraphy, Liu Gongquan 柳公權 (778-865) is thought of as the last great calligrapher of regular script in the Tang period. He served in the imperial court for over forty years, experiencing the reigns of seven emperors from Emperor Xianzong (r. 806-820) to Emperor Yizong (r. 860-874). According to the *Old History of Tang*, Liu initially began his calligraphic studies by imitating the style of Wang Xizhi. After examining the works of many calligraphers, he was able to develop his own distinctive calligraphic style that is characterized by “strength” 勁 and “seductive beauty” 媚.<sup>512</sup> When Emperor Muzong asked Liu how to write good calligraphy, instead of telling the emperor about brush techniques, he replied ‘when one's heart is upright, then one's brush will be righteous’.<sup>513</sup> Besides being a renowned calligrapher, Liu Gongquan also achieved a very successful official career, reaching the first-rank post of Grand Preceptor of the Heir Apparent 太子太師.

In the early years of the *Dazhong* period (847-860), after being promoted to this eminent position, he went to express his gratitude to Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 for this great favour. The emperor therefore called a court gathering and asked Liu to execute his calligraphy publicly on three pieces of paper before the throne. As Liu Gongquan performed his

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<sup>512</sup> *JTS*, 165.4311.

<sup>513</sup> 心正則筆正. *JTS*, 165.4310.

calligraphy, the Inspector of the Armies 軍容使 Ximen Jixuan 西門季玄 held his inkstone, and the Commissioner of Privy Affairs 樞密使 Cui Juyuan 崔巨源 dipped the brush for him. Liu first wrote ten characters in regular script on the first piece of paper. Those read: ‘Lady Wei imparted the principles of the brush to Wang Youjun.’<sup>514</sup> Then he wrote eleven characters in semi-cursive script on the second piece of paper. Those read: ‘Monk Yong’s *Thousand Character Essay* in regular and cursive script embodies the inheritance of the family.’<sup>515</sup> The last piece of paper was written with eight modal particles in cursive script. After that, Emperor Xuanzong presented coloured silk brocade, silver plates and bottles as gifts to the prominent official-calligrapher and ordered him to personally write out a memorial expressing his gratitude. The emperor was extremely surprised and admired Liu’s calligraphic achievement.<sup>516</sup>

In this case, there are two points worth noting. First, as a skilled calligrapher, Liu Gongquan demonstrated his mastery of multiple calligraphic scripts (regular script, semi-cursive script, and cursive script) by performing calligraphy in public at the court gathering. Without performing any of the dramatic or unusual actions often found among wild cursive script calligraphers and which were often described as crazy, the quality of Liu’s calligraphy was in itself enough to win the emperor’s admiration, showing that calligraphic performance is not exclusive to the execution of the wild cursive script style. Second, the people who were appointed to serve Liu Gongquan by preparing his inkstone and brushes were not regular humble servants, but rather eunuch officers with substantial power, namely the Inspector of

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<sup>514</sup> 衛夫人傳筆法於王右軍. *JTS*, 165.4312.

<sup>515</sup> 永禪師真草千字文得家法. *JTS*, 165.4312.

<sup>516</sup> 帝尤奇惜之. *JTS*, 165.4312.

the Armies and the Commissioner of Privy Affairs. Both the personnel arrangement and the generous material rewards given to Liu Gongquan after the performance show the respect that Emperor Xuanzong (810-859) paid to the senior official-calligrapher and to the art of calligraphy.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the Tang emperors' actions of bestowing 'imperial calligraphy' as gifts on ministers, as well as the social occasions of court feasts and gatherings that were accompanied by calligraphic production and imperial bestowals. To interpret the imperial calligraphic gifts that do not survive today, their textual contents are the starting point in exploring the social and political meaning of these works. Different from imperial edicts of which main function was to communicate and to issue imperial order, the texts of imperial calligraphic gifts were either tailor-made short phrases and poems, that expressed the rulers' appreciation and expectation to specific recipients, or literary compositions, that embodied the rulers' political aspirations and ideals. From these cases, we can see how the emperor combined the gift-giving strategy and his calligraphic and literary talents to socialize with their subjects and to transmit propaganda messages.

This chapter has also noticed the co-occurrences of calligraphic performances and court gatherings or feasts. No matter who brushed calligraphy, the emperors or the subjects, Tang court calligraphic performance was often accompanied by gifts from the emperors to their subjects. The emperors gave their calligraphy to subjects as gifts after live performance, or they bestowed material rewards, such as purple robes and precious objects, on those subjects who performed calligraphy at court gatherings. In either case, calligraphic performance and

gift-giving both served to facilitate the emperors' – the hosts' – endeavours to leave a deep impression on their guests, alongside functioning as subtle instruments to cultivate the emperors' public image as civilised and benevolent rulers, and lubricating the personal relationships between the emperors and their subjects.



## CONCLUSION

The Tang dynasty was a distinctive period in the development of calligraphy. During this period, through various creative innovations, the Tang imperial establishment cultivated calligraphy as a form of cultural capital, in the long-run rendering it a special feature of Chinese politics and culture. This thesis has addressed the previously under-researched issue of the social and political uses of calligraphy at the Tang courts through five groups of calligraphic objects. The significance of the approach this thesis takes to Tang court calligraphy is twofold. First, the discussion of Tang court calligraphy has broadened our knowledge of calligraphy and, more broadly, art theory. Second, the investigation of court calligraphy provides a better understanding of the particular historical configuration of Tang court society.

In the introduction to this thesis, I have expressed the inapplicability of modern western theories of ‘art’ when dealing with issues of ancient Chinese calligraphy and set up a goal to explore an indigenous explanation of the significance of calligraphy through the case of Tang court calligraphy. In *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, James Elkins made the resounding claim that it is impossible to shear off Western perspectives absolutely in art historical studies, because fundamentally ‘the project of writing art history is Western’.<sup>517</sup> He goes further, arguing that: ‘All art historical scholarship on Chinese painting involves parallels between Chinese and Western art, even when it seems it has

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<sup>517</sup> James Elkins, *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 57

expunged them.’<sup>518</sup> Given that this thesis is itself neither a theoretical work nor a comparative study, and that indeed I have drawn on some Western interpretive methods and conceptions in the process of its preparation, I have no problem accepting that Elkins’ argument has its theoretical basis. What I want to emphasize here is that the focus of some of my inquiries, as well as the notions of what constitutes art works and artists, as employed in this thesis, make a contribution to the diversity of art history, a field that has been established on, and historically reflecting, models and theories designed to explain western art.

To reveal the specificities of calligraphy within the scope of Tang court society and to contextualize the calligraphic works interrogated, this thesis, instead of focusing on the careers of ‘artists’ by situating calligraphic works in the lives of individual calligraphers, has rather contextualized calligraphic works through two layers of analysis. One is the macro-level examination of social processes, and the other the micro-level investigation of interpersonal relationships on which calligraphic objects functioned. First, each of the five chapters is anchored around a group of calligraphic objects. Each group of objects was connected with one particular political, cultural, ritual, or religious social process: masterpieces in imperial calligraphic collections; writings within government documents and involved in administrative information exchange relating to state affairs; writings in death rituals; scripture transcription in Buddhist and Daoist practices; calligraphy involved in court gift-giving and feasting customs.

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<sup>518</sup> James Elkins, *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History* 11.

In this thesis, I have adopted a broad concept of ‘calligraphic works’ that includes all types of objects that bear calligraphy. Emphasizing the functional uses of these calligraphic objects in corresponding social processes does not mean that I have taken a resolute attitude of ‘methodological philistinism’ by denying the existence of artistic consciousness in calligraphic creation and by devaluing the works as masterpieces of calligraphy. In many cases, we can see that the aesthetic value and utility of a calligraphic work did not impair the worth of one another, but rather could often work together to enhance the efficiency of the calligraphic object as both an art work and a practical implement, which can be potently proved by the series of rhetorical metaphors that Liu Yuxiu used to describe how glorious the emperor’s calligraphy applied on an imperial edict was. It might be hard to find a parallel or an applicable definition for such a broad scope of ‘art work’ within the western art history canon, but the breadth of this notion of ‘calligraphic works’ may itself reveal one of the main reasons for the significance of calligraphy to Chinese culture. That is, it is the pervasive and multiple uses of calligraphy and its close alignment to the broader political, cultural, and religious contexts that contributed to calligraphy’s high position within the Chinese cultural matrix.

Although this thesis has tried to include the most common types of calligraphic works that were created and functioned at the Tang courts, it is worth noting that the five groups of objects and the social processes that have been examined here cannot comprise a complete picture of all social and political uses of calligraphy. Further types of calligraphic objects, such as calligraphic screens created for decoration and the commemorative steles 紀功碑 that were commissioned by the Tang rulers and located across the state, have not been examined due to time and space constraints, are worthy of further interrogation.

Secondly, with regard to the interpretation of specific calligraphic works, in addition to the meaning embodied in the functions ascribed to these calligraphic objects in corresponding social processes, at the micro-level the interpersonal relationships behind the works' production and reception and the identities of their calligraphers are key points of focus. In the cases of religious scriptures transcribed by Tang palace women to pray for blessings for their relatives, I have revealed the inclination of Tang contemporary commentaries to comment on calligraphic performance by relating it to the feminine qualities of the calligrapher and the morality that was embodied in the deed of devoting writing to family members. Those figures that have been examined in this thesis as 'calligraphers' or 'artists' have shown a rich diversity, ranging from emperors to professional scribes, from scholar-officials to palace ladies. Calligraphy as an instrument of social interaction was well-suited to the various strategies adopted by members of the court according to key elements of their identities. The interpersonal relationships and interactions between these figures through the medium of calligraphy have largely remained beyond the scope of the normative themes in Western art history, such as patronage, consumption, the market, and commissioning etc, but here lead us to observe and understand the configuration of Tang court society.

Martin Powers suggests that, as one of the oldest and most persistent defensive ploys, 'oriental despotism' survives 'even up to the present in a preference for the descriptive terms that cast China's cultural tradition and social practice as normatively dogmatic, inflexible, or servile.'<sup>519</sup> Although this thesis was not initially intended as a corrective to this view, the

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<sup>519</sup> Martin Powers, "Introduction," in *A Companion to Chinese Art*, ed. Martin Powers and Katherine Tsiang (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 5.

conclusion achieved here might be helpful to a degree in countering this stereotype. Framing calligraphy as an instrument in the interaction among the Tang court members first highlights the rarely-mentioned affectionate and loving facets of the interpersonal relationships within the Tang court. Second, it demonstrates that the Tang emperors' authority over the subordinates was neither limitless nor self-evident. Even the mightiest among these monarchs worked hard on improving their relations with subordinates and on building their public image.

Calligraphic interaction provides a lens zooming in on the relationship between Tang emperors and other court members. Regardless of the various meanings that were embodied in the functions of these calligraphic works, such as tomb steles created to memorize the dead and Buddhist scriptures that were transcribed to gain religious merits, it seems that there was a common basis to the values behind the making of these calligraphic works, and that this was Confucian ideology. The values of Confucianism were not necessary to be the true drive of court members' calligraphic interactions, but for certain they contained the virtues that the court calligraphic practitioners desired to relate themselves with and present themselves as through calligraphy.

The core ideas of Confucianism are about human relationships. Confucianism deems family to be the origin of the values that can make government benevolent. In Confucianism, 'loving one's family members' is a natural step for a person's development of the moral qualities required to conduct benevolent rule, a transferable character to that of 'loving the people'.<sup>520</sup> In terms of familial relationships, the public image that the Tang rulers'

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<sup>520</sup> Guo Xuezhong, *The Ideal Chinese Political Leader: A Historical and Cultural Perspective*

attempted to relate themselves with through their calligraphic practice was in accordance with the ‘Wuchang’ 五常 [Five Rules] defined in the Confucian classic *Shangshu* 尚書 [*Book of Documents*]. ‘The father is benevolent, the mother is kind, the elder brother cares for his younger brother, the younger brother respects his elder brother, children have filial piety toward their parents.’<sup>521</sup> These principles can be seen in many cases that have been examined in this thesis but are scattered across different chapters. For example, after the death of the Prince of Qi, Emperor Xuanzong personally transcribed *The Scripture of Laozi* in exquisite *bafen* script to pray for the salvation of his younger brother, and after which this Daoist scripture was exhibited in the Academy of Scholarly Worthies. I have revealed that, by utilising the dual attributes of sutra transcription as both a religious object and a calligraphic work, Emperor Xuanzong at once cultivated a public image as a loving brother with close bonds to his siblings and an accomplished calligrapher. Wu Zetian, regarded as a rule breaker responsible for establishing steles in the mausoleums of Emperors and Empresses, has been related to four tomb steles dedicated to her parents, husband, and son, all of whom bore the titles ‘Emperor’ or ‘Empress’. Although the interpretation of these steles has focused on relating them to the corresponding historical context and social relations, they can all be boiled down to the politically astute Wu Zetian’s self-presentation as a filial daughter, a kind mother, a devoted wife and a devotee of Confucian family values.

Beside the relations among members of the imperial household, the emperor-minister relationship was another core issue examined in this thesis. According to *The Analects*, Duke

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(London: Preager, 2001), 11.

<sup>521</sup> 父義, 母慈, 兄友, 弟恭, 子孝. This translation is originally cited by Guo Xuezhi. For more discussion on the familial relationships defined in Confucianism, see Guo Xuezhi, *The Ideal Chinese Political Leader: A Historical and Cultural Perspective*, 12.

Ting asked Confucius about the relationship between a prince and a minister. Confucius replied, saying: ‘A Prince should employ his ministers with courtesy. A minister should serve his Prince with loyalty.’<sup>522</sup> Even though the ruler-minister relationship was dynamic and underwent constant changes, some of the characteristics of this pair of relationship that emerged during the Tang dynasty were in line with and even more advanced than the ideals of Confucius. Hu Baohua argues that changes in vocabulary relates to and symbolises a change of ideas. The shift from the “The Righteousness of Monarch-Officials” 君臣之義 that was widely used in the pre-Qin period to ‘The Monarch-Officials United in the Way’ 君臣道合 that emerged in the Sui and Tang dynasties signifies the advent of a new Monarch-official relationship.<sup>523</sup> This new relationship is characterised by the relatively equal or even friend-like relations between the rulers and their high ministers.<sup>524</sup> Since the Song dynasty (960-1279), the authority of emperor increasingly overrode the bureaucracy.<sup>525</sup> And in some extreme periods, such as the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), few officials dared to challenge the emperors’ decisions.<sup>526</sup> However, the early Tang was a different period, characterised by ‘an impressive degree of official participation in decision making and official freedom to

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<sup>522</sup> 君使臣以禮，臣事君以忠。 Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. William Edward Soothill (Yokohama: F.H. Revell, 1910), 207.

<sup>523</sup> Hu Baohua 胡寶華, “Cong Junchenzhiyi dao Junchengdaohe ” 從“君臣之義”到“君臣道合”: 論唐宋時期君臣觀念的發展 [On the Change of the Monarch-Officials’ Ideas during Tang-Song Period], *Nankai Journal (Philosophy, Literature and Social Science Edition)*, 2008(03): 26-34.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid

<sup>525</sup> Haward J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of Tang Taizong*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 3.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

criticize the throne.<sup>527</sup> Rober M. Somers also observes that Tang Emperor Taizong's high ministers were more like his colleagues than his servants.<sup>528</sup>

Throughout the thesis, I have examined many cases in which the Tang rulers used calligraphy to express their favour for and support to ministers in a variety of ways. These provided evidence supporting and complementing the judgements on ruler-minister relationships under the Tang that have been made by scholars from other perspectives. Refined calligraphy was both one of the criteria for the evaluation of one's self-cultivation and a vital factor that influenced other members' evaluation of individuals. In the Tang dynasty, competence in this field had become a necessity to establishing and maintaining one's social status and esteem. Even the Tang emperors' calligraphy could not escape other court members' 'gaze' and, therefore, judgement. In many cases, it is not surprise to see that the Tang emperors' calligraphic displays were often received complimentary responses from their subjects' compliments. This kind of interaction can be interpreted as a manifestation of the interdependent and reciprocal relationship between the ruler and the subject.

In addition to this, various social uses of calligraphy provided ways to create proximity between the emperors and their subjects. Through these activities, the relationships between court members, especially those pivotal ones between the emperors and ministers, were continually being renegotiated and augmented. Grants to ministers of access to the imperial calligraphic collections was adopted by Tang rulers as gestures of imperial favour,

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<sup>527</sup> Haward J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of Tang Taizong*, 4.

<sup>528</sup> Rober M. Somers, "The Sui Legacy," in Arthur F. Wright, *The Sui Dynasty* (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 1978), 203-204.



strengthening the bonds between the rulers and ministers as members of the same community of interests. Brushing imperial edicts in person and emphasizing their own calligraphic contribution to these official documents were also effective measures for the rulers to colour their relations with the ministers. Demonstrating calligraphy in front of an audience at the court feasts and bestowing these works on ministers were not only showcases of the rulers' calligraphic achievement and therefore useful in increasing their cultural cachet, but also eye-catching tactics through which messages of kindness and goodwill could be sent in a dramatic way.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig 2.1 “Ci Shazhou cishi Neng Changren lunshi chishu” 賜沙州刺史能昌仁論事敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs to the Regional Inspector of Sha Province Neng Changren], the character *chi* ‘敕’ was supposed to be written by Emperor Ruizong, 711, British Library, London.

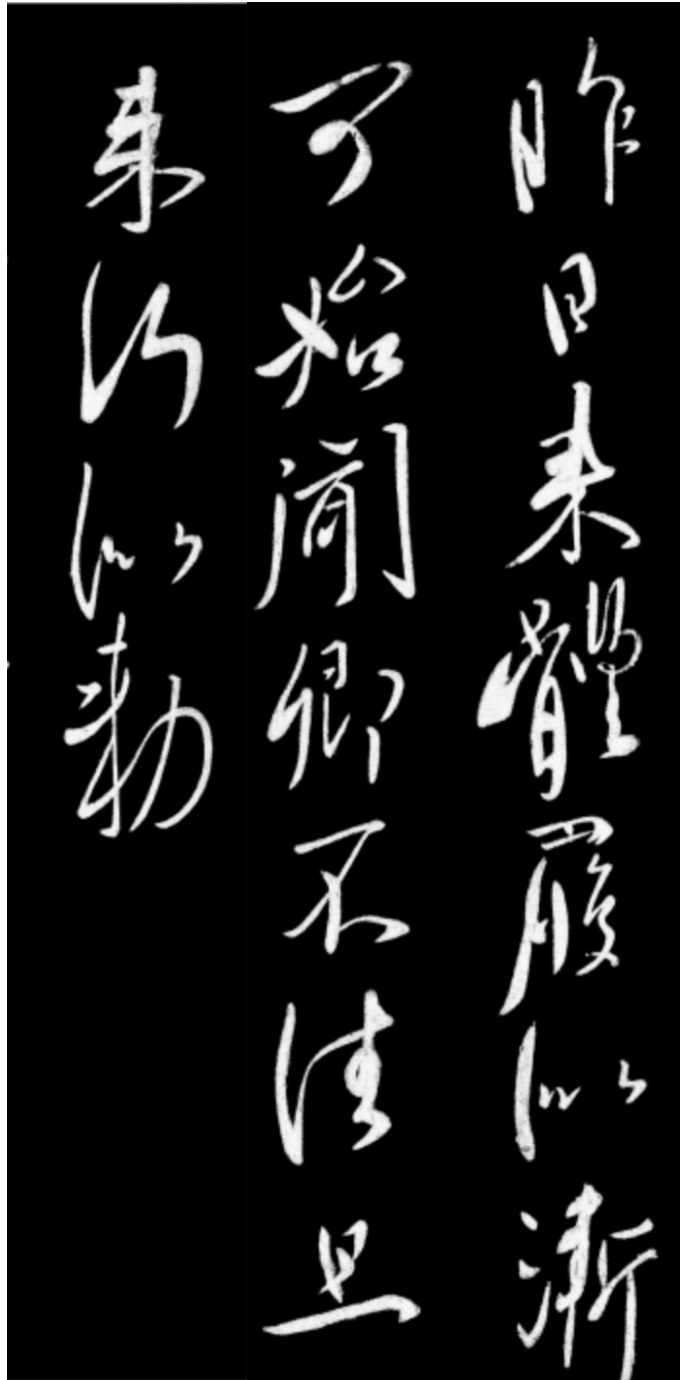


Fig 2.2 Rubbing of “Zuori tie” 昨日貼 [Letter of Yesterday], Emperor Taizong, in *Chunhua getie* 淳化閣帖 [*Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*].

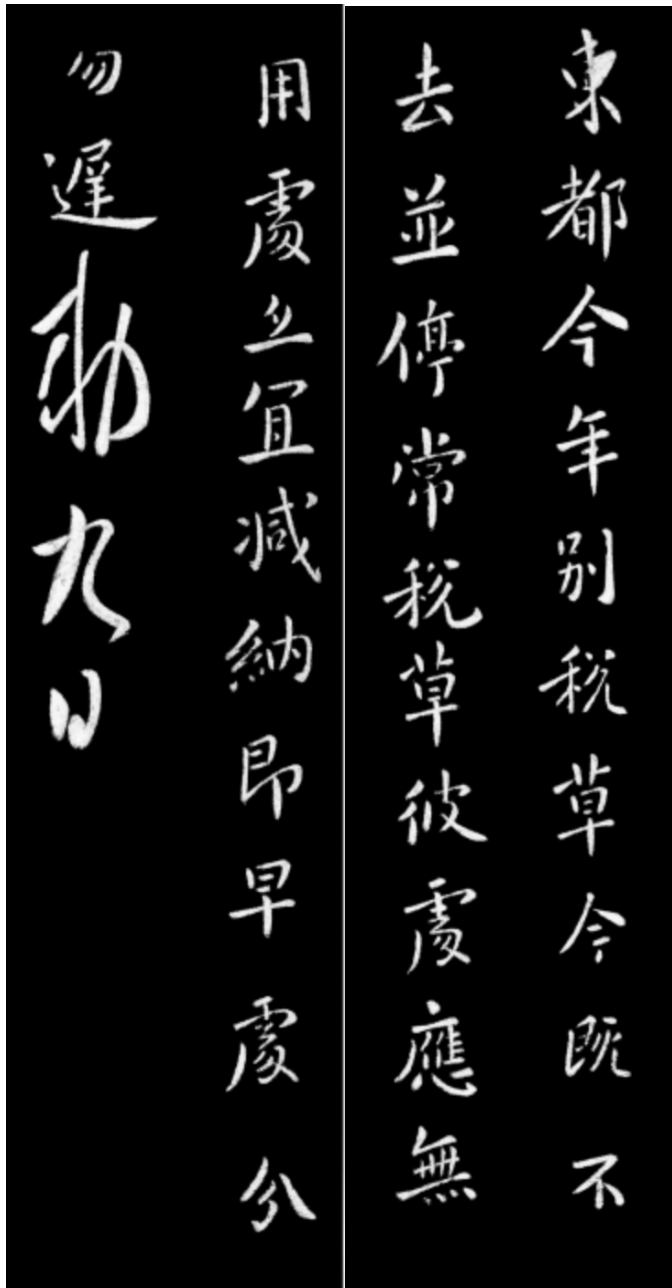


Fig 2.3 Rubbing of “Dongdu tie” 東都貼 [Letter of East Capital], Emperor Gaozong, in *Chunhua getie* 淳化閣帖 [*Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*].



Fig 2.4 “Wenguan tie” 文瓘貼 [Letter of Wenguan], Emperor Gaozong, in *Chunhua getie* 淳化閣帖 [*Model Letters from the Imperial Repository Issued in the Chunhua Period*].

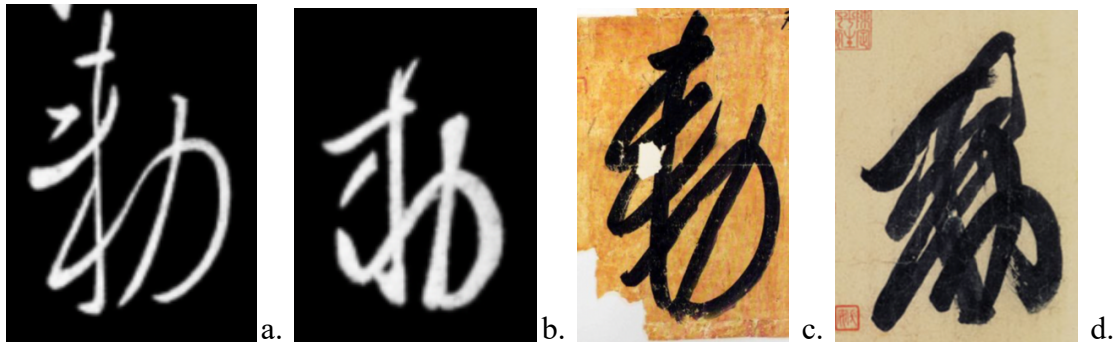


Fig 2.5 A comparison of the character for “decreed,” 敕 (*chi*) in the rubbing of Emperor Taizong’s “Zuori tie” 昨日貼 [Letter of Yesterday] (a.) with the rubbing of Emperor Gaozong’s “Dongdu tie” 東都貼 [Letter of East Capital] (b.), and Emperor Ruizong’s “Imperial Rescript to Neng Changren” (c.), and Emperor Xuanzong’s “Jiling song” 鷓鴣頌 [Eulogy of Wagtail] (d) reveals how distinct the same character *chi* could be executed by different emperors.

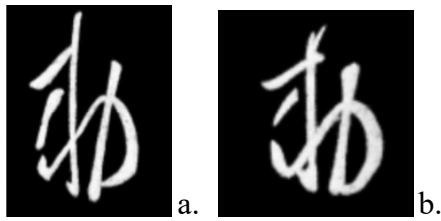


Fig 2.6 *chi* in the rubbing of Emperor Gaozong’s “Letter of East Capital” (a); *chi* in the rubbing of Emperor Gaozong’s “Letter of Wang Guan” (b).

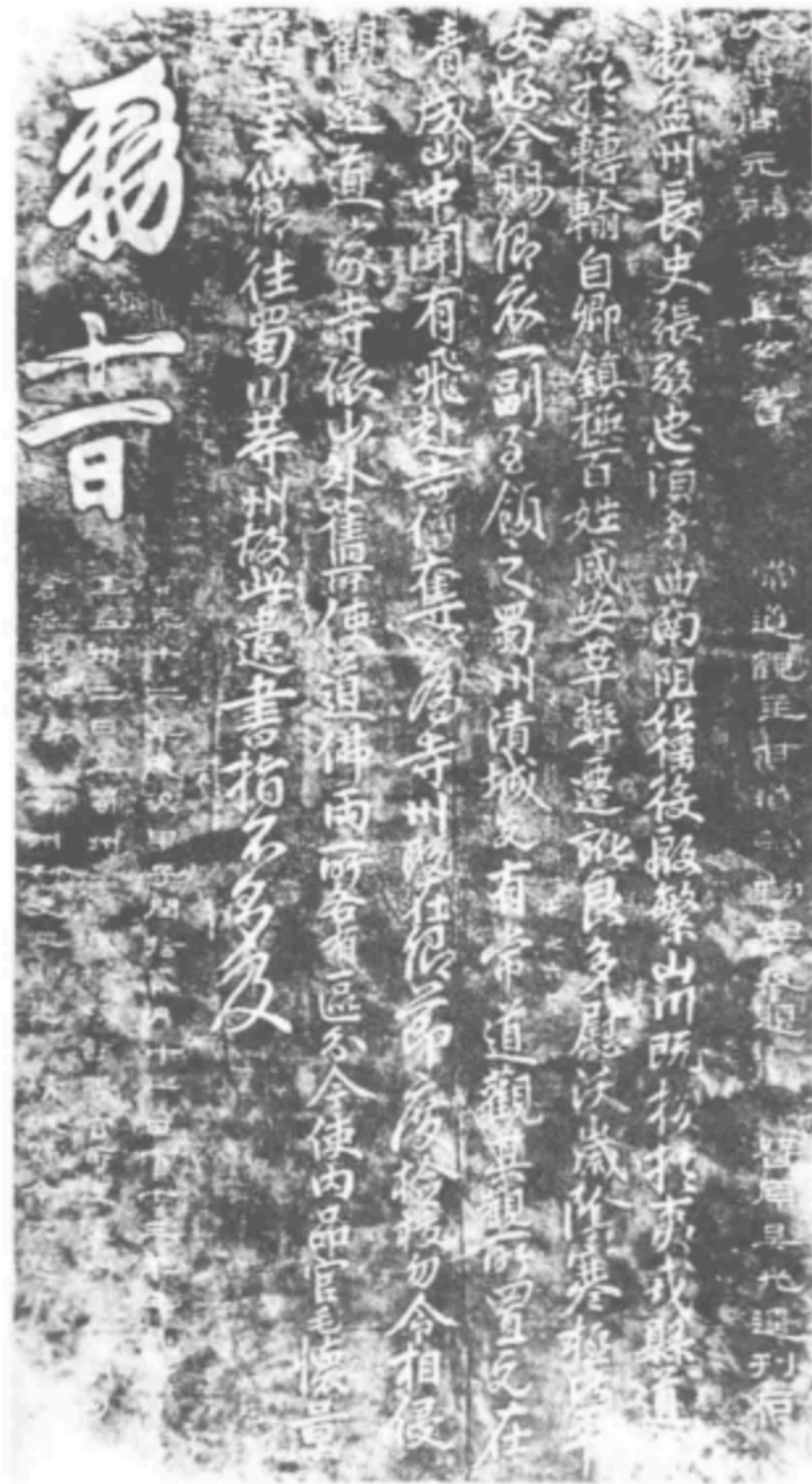


Fig 2.7 Rubbing of the stone carved with “Ci Yizhou zhangshi Zhang Jingzhong chi shu” 賜益州長史張敬忠敕書 [Imperial Rescript for Commenting on Affairs to the Administrator of Yi Province Zhang Jingzhong].



Fig 2.8 Attributed to Emperor Xuanzong, “Jiling song” 鵲鵲頌 [Eulogy of Wagtail], National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig 2.9 The left one is the character “dao” 道 in “Eulogy of Wagtail”; the right is the same character in *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong*.



Fig 2.10 The left one is the character “cheng” 成 in “Eulogy of Wagtail”; the right is the same character in *Imperial Rescript to Zhang Jingzhong*.



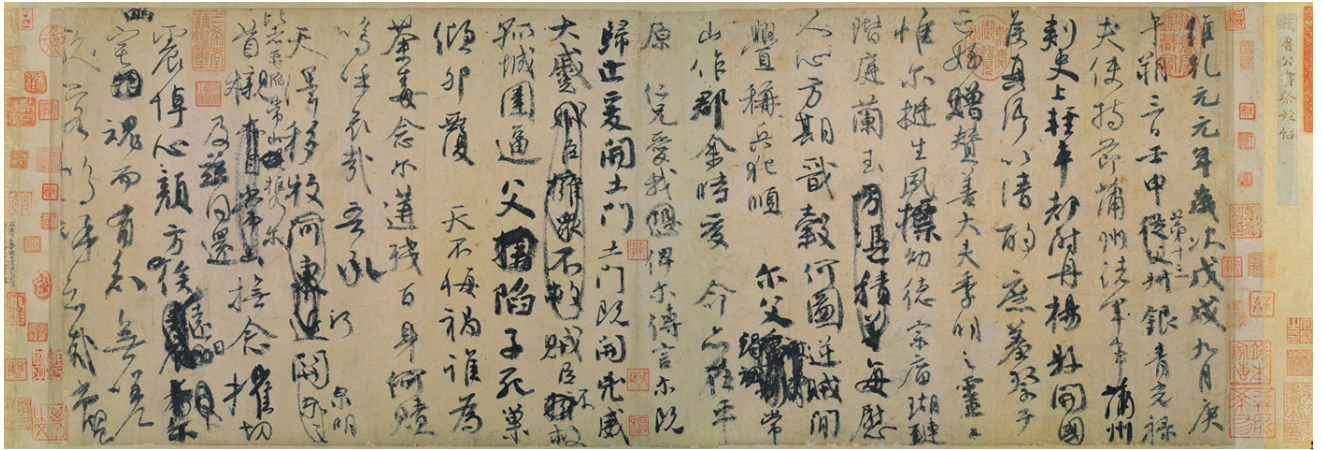
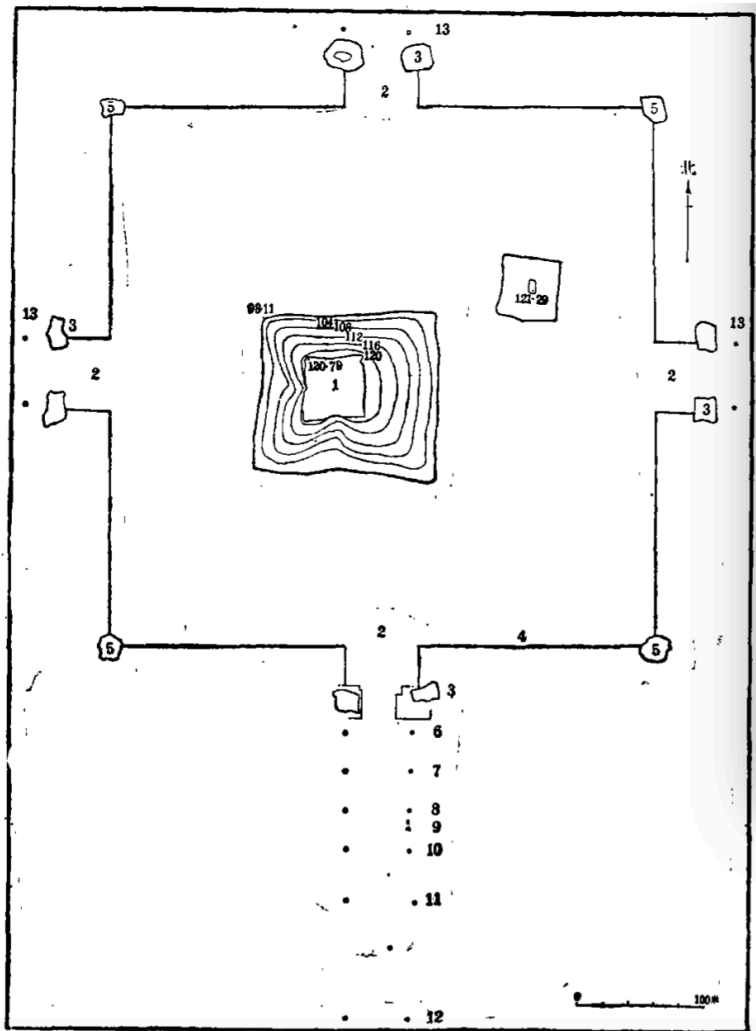


Fig 3.1 Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, "Jizhi wengao" 祭姪文稿 [Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming], ink on paper, National Palace Museum, Taiwan



- 1 Altar
- 2 Gate
- 3 Gate Tower
- 4 Wall
- 5 Corner Tower

- 6 Stone Lions
- 7 Stone Officials
- 8 Stone Officials
- 9 Tomb Stele
- 10 Stone Officials
- 11 Stone Horses
- 12 Octagonal Pillar

Fig 3.2 Diagrammatic layout of Gong Mausoleum. For the original image, see Xu Diankui 徐殿魁, “Tang Gongling shice jiyao” 唐恭陵實測紀要 [The Summary of the Measurements of the Gong Mausoleum], *Archaeology*, 1986(05), 458-462: 458.



Fig 3.3 The Gong Mausoleum and the *Stele of Wisdom and Virtue of Emperor Xiaojing*

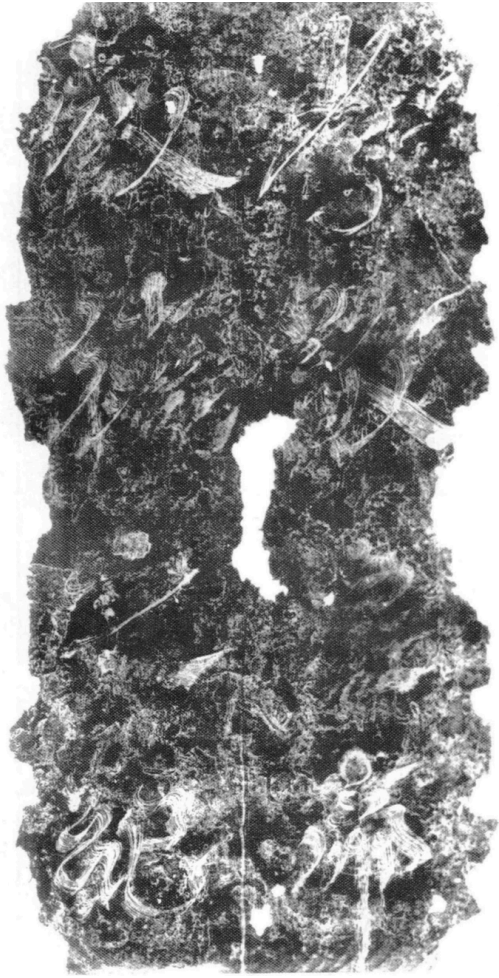


Fig 3.4 The Rubbing of head of the *Stele of Wisdom and Virtue of Emperor Xiaojing*.



Fig 3.5 Part of the Rubbing of the *Stele of Narrating the Wise Deeds (of Emperor Gaozong)*

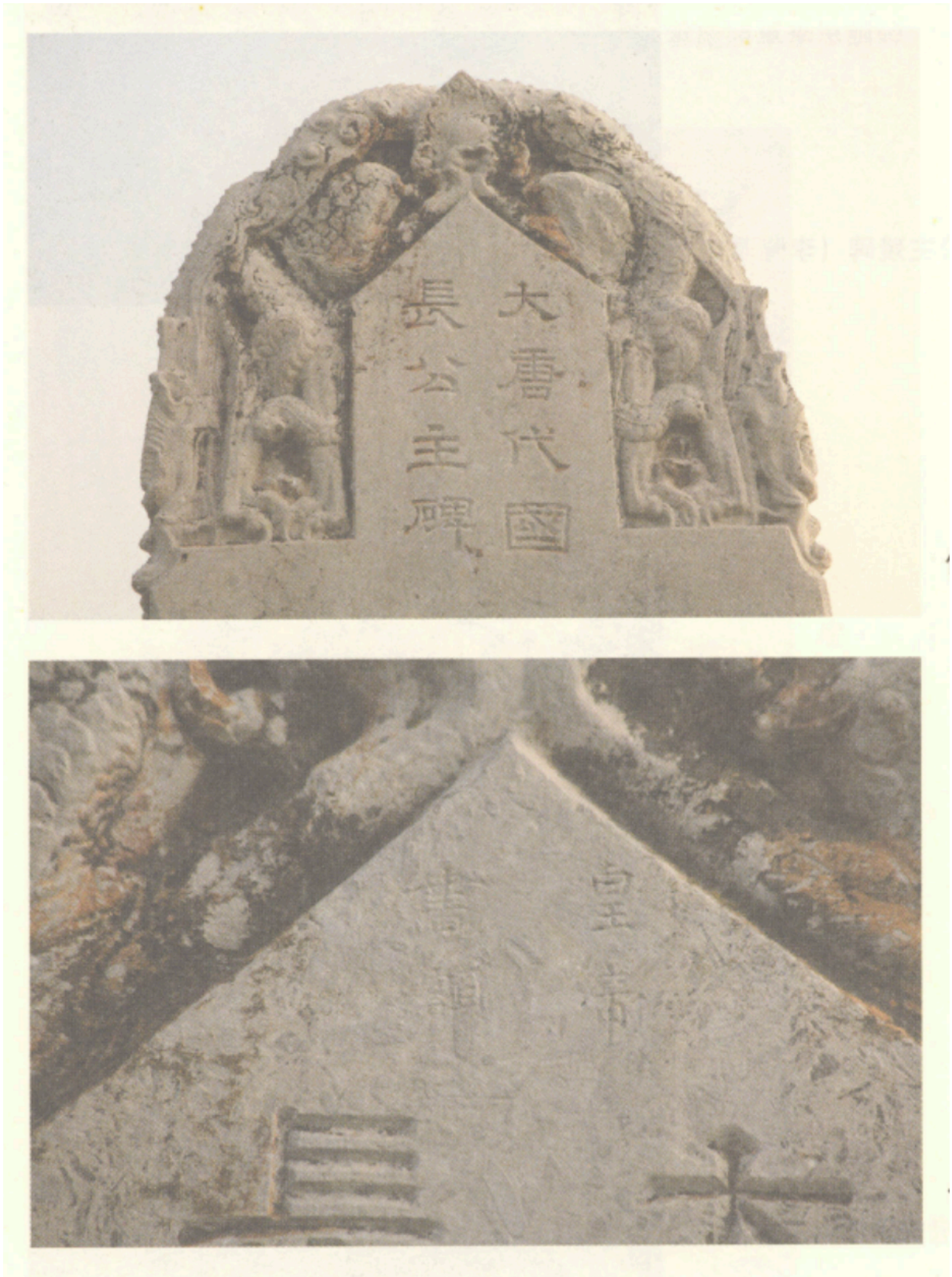


Fig 3.6 The Head of the Tomb Stele of the Grand Princess Daiguo. On the top of the head, there are four characters '皇帝書額' indicating that the calligraphy of the head of the stele was out of the hand of the emperor.

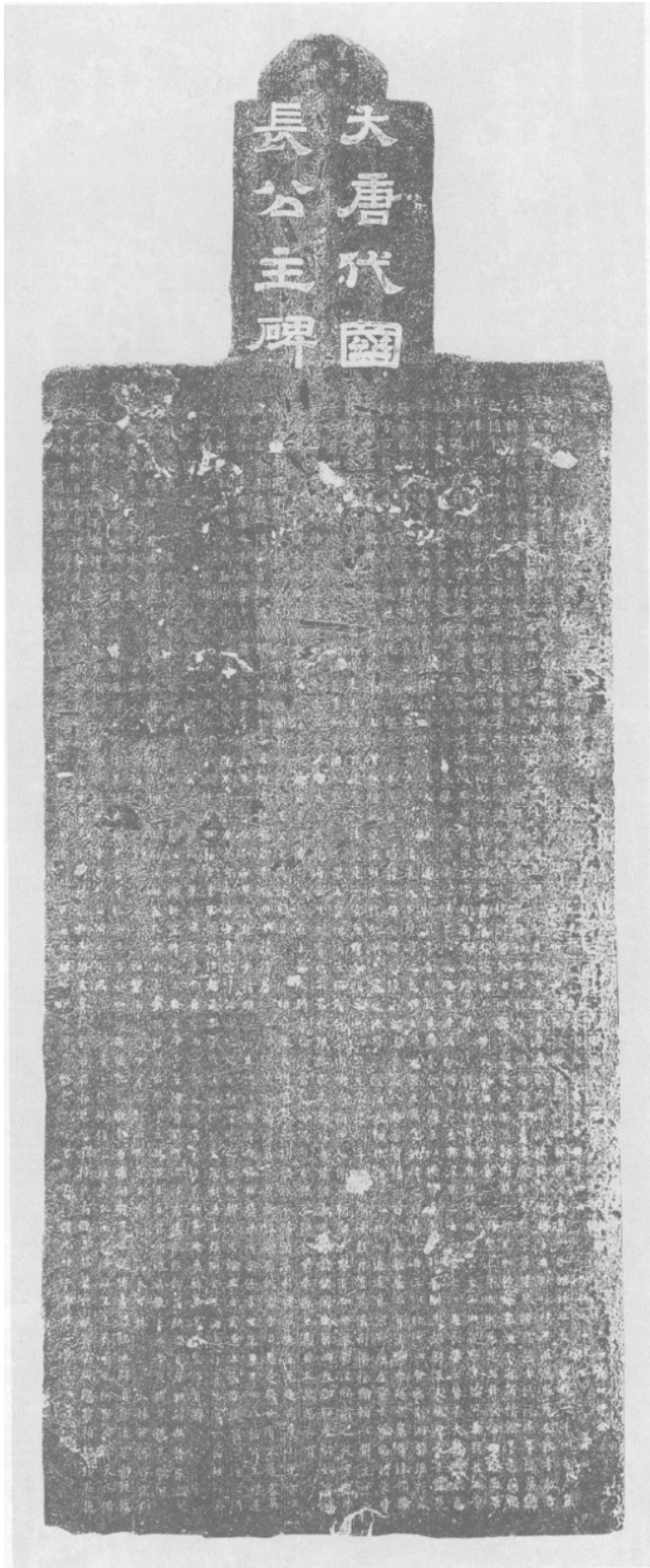


Fig 3.7 Rubbing of the *Tomb Stele of Grand Princess Daiguo*



Fig 3.8 Part of the Rubbing of the *Tomb Stele of Grand Princess Daiguo*

太宗文武聖皇帝之曾孫  
 高宗天皇大帝之孫  
 睿宗大聖皇帝之女  
 今上之八孫也粵若  
 公至紙頁氣於滿水稟胎執大如其仙姿也明月吐於錦雲其淵問也忠風拂於瓊  
 三受法若夫全印紫綬縣主之榮也綬帶青圭公主之貴也固將脫落容脫微微章  
 薄蓋非而不顧想琪林之可惜皆公主之志也焉也先帝亦許之成之於  
 是曳月懷震虹珠誦金闕玉京師大宋位上清為環玖刻金名伯九仙而高視齊十  
 聖而忘情不亦休矣登主上朝昇大寶仁先文愛進封長公主  
 加實賦一千四百戶仍於京都雙建道館館臺北開接筆執於洛濱珠閣西臨聆蕭  
 曲於野野龍光若及而冲用瑞然以書於舉控披雲於碧落詞西明  
 之河錄五鳳之牙金華王妃風遊煙會然則長生之藥析王母而未遊掩心之鏡訪春  
 宮而莫相遺三元之算不嘗四劫之瓜魯館長虛平原徒在姑山衣塵遊海莫退以  
 壬申之年建午之月十日辛巳薨於洛陽之開元元春秋廿有四日以葬於壬申年七月  
 已卯朔四日壬午葬善塋而自洛即陪墓于橋陵禮也宋正假節廟臺護  
 駕象物空陳天倪永謝十絕霞微五軒雲奔鴻鸞洛浦視舞吳軒指指橋於西鎮陪畢  
 陌於北原皇女曼芳壽陵固松齊日暮芳何言其銘曰  
 士師典刑政理以子柱史作史隨後垂嗣克誕天孫九懷仙心白雲禁休應希微星披  
 參於月殿妖暉壽駐品容道高泉受歎繼仙籍價先  
 帝妹襲破約繪指其緞帶首冠寬晉鳴山珮寶步臨宮風迎芝蓋以今視古秀出千  
 載火災易滅臺萬多傾悟益為誠怡然解形神辭洛清看去秦京文圓陪葬法倡揚情  
 情傷涕泗芳徒涉沔  
 芳將奈何  
 開元廿四年大歲景子七月己卯朔四日壬午  
 洛陽都督府戶曹參軍直隸襄陽府襄陽縣人

Fig 3.9 Part of the Rubbing of the Entombed Epitaph of Princess Jinxian





Fig 4.1 Part of the stele of *Xiping Stone Classics*, attributed to Cai Yong, 175 CE, Luoyang museum.



Fig 4.2 *Classic of Filial Piety on Stone Terrace*, the head-title was written by Li Heng (later Emperor Suzong) and the main content was written by Li Longji (later Emperor Xuanzong), 745 AD, Xi'an Beilin Museum.

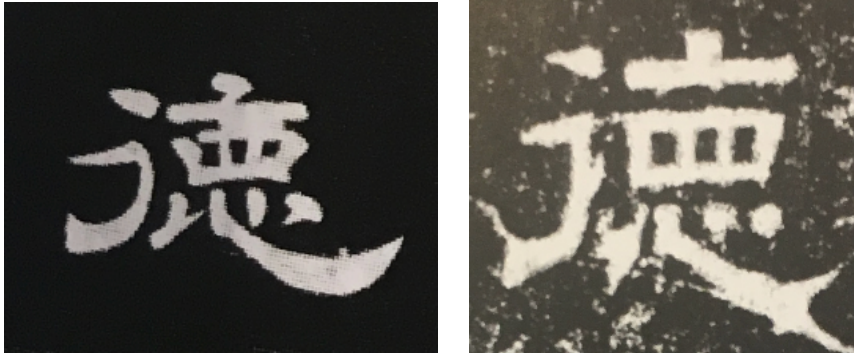


Fig 4.3 The left one is the character “de” 德 in Emperor Xuanzong’s *Classic of Filial Piety on Stone Platform*; the right one is the character “de” 德 in Cai Yong’s *Xiping Stone classics*.

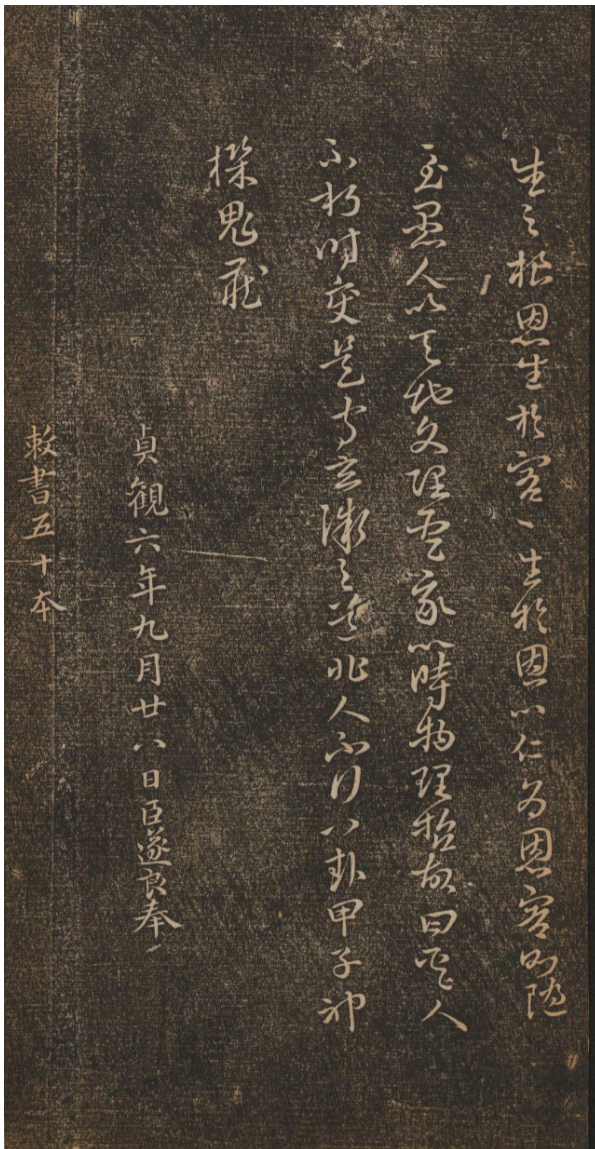


Fig 4.4, Chu Suiliang, part of the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*, semi-cursive script, rubbing, *Tingyunguan tie* 停雲觀貼 [Rubblings of Tingyun Pavilion]

陰符經  
 觀天之道，執天之行，盡矣。故天有五賊，見之者昌；五賊在心，施  
 行於天，宇宙在乎手，萬化生乎身。天性人也，人心機也。立天  
 道以觀人，也。天發殺機，日月星辰，地發殺機，龍蛇起陸，人發殺  
 機，天地反覆。天人合發，萬靈受命。性有巧拙，可以伏藏。九竅  
 耶在乎三，要可以動靜。火生於木，禍發必烈。奸生於國，時動必  
 潰。知之修練，謂之聖人。天地萬物之，萬物入之，人萬物之  
 盜三盜既宜，三才既安。故曰：食其時，百穀入之，動其機，萬化安  
 神。明出焉，其盜機也。天下莫不神，日月有數，大小有定。聖功生  
 得之輕，命替者善聽。崩者善視，絕利一源，用師十倍。三及晝夜  
 用師，萬倍。心生於物，死於物，機在目。天之無恩，而大恩生。迅雷  
 烈風，莫不祭然。至樂性餘，至靜則廉。天之至私，用之至公。禽之  
 制在氣，生者死之根，死者生之根。恩生于害，害生于恩。愚人以  
 天地文理聖，我以時物文理哲。自然之道，靜故天地萬物生。天  
 地之道，浸故陰陽。陰陽相推，而變化順矣。至靜之道，律呂所  
 不能契。爰有奇器，是生萬象。八卦甲子，神機鬼藏。陰陽相勝之  
 術，昭乎進乎象矣。

陰符經  
 大唐永徽五年歲次甲寅正月初五日奉  
 旨造  
 尚書右僕射監修國史上柱國河南郡臣褚遂良表  
 百寫一百廿卷

Fig 4.5, Chu Suiliang, the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*, regular script, rubbing, *Tingyunguan tie* 停雲觀貼 [Rubblings of Tingyun Pavilion]

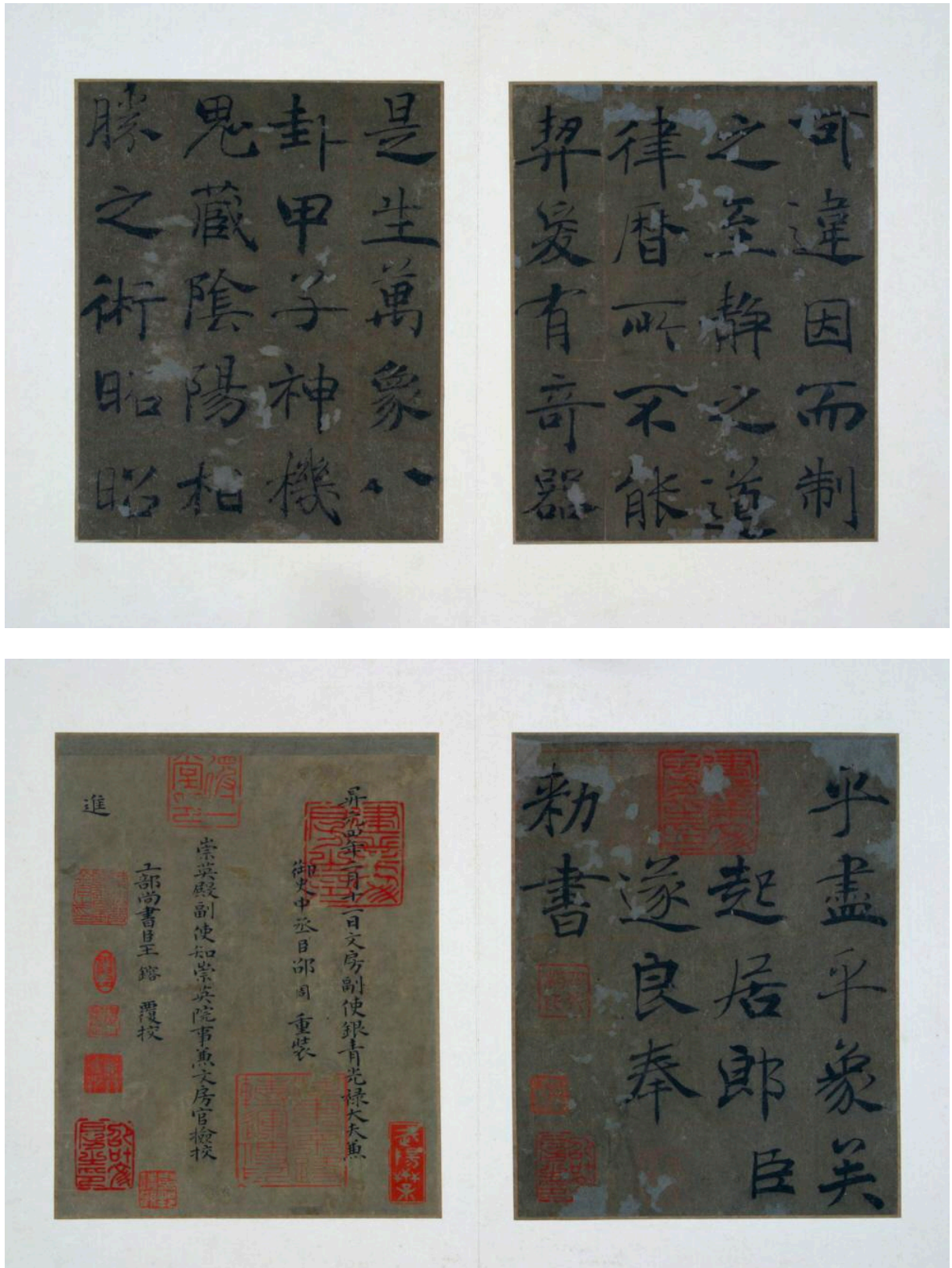


Fig 4.6 Chu Suiliang (596-658), Ink on paper, *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*, regular script, Asian Art Museum (San Francisco)

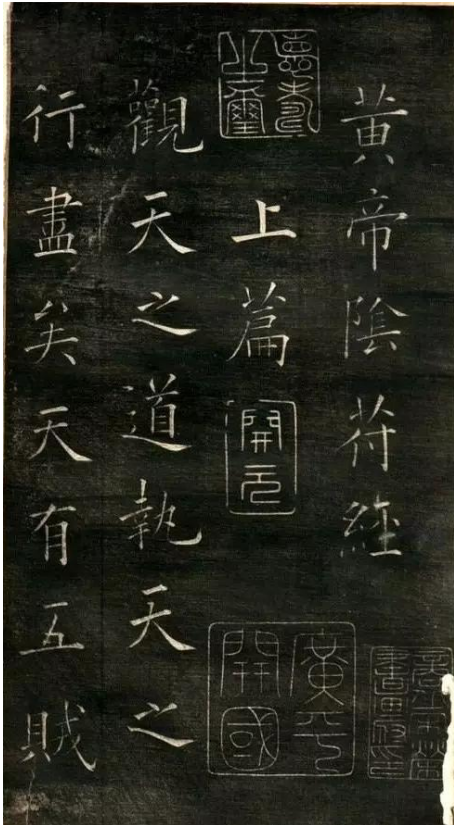


Fig 4.7, Ouyang Xun (557-641), Detail from the *Scripture of Hidden Contract*, rubbing, the original steles collected in Xuzhou Museum

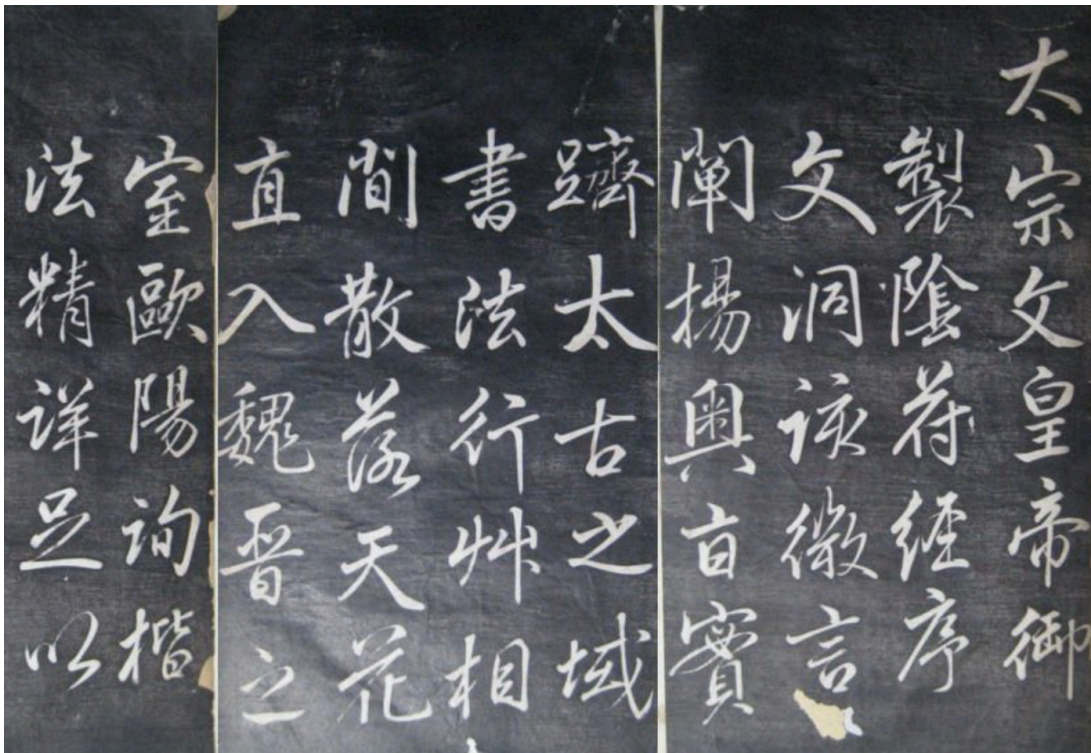


Fig 4.8, Emperor Xuanzong (685-762), Detail from Emperor Xuanzong's postscript to the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*, rubbing, the original steles collected in Xuzhou Museum

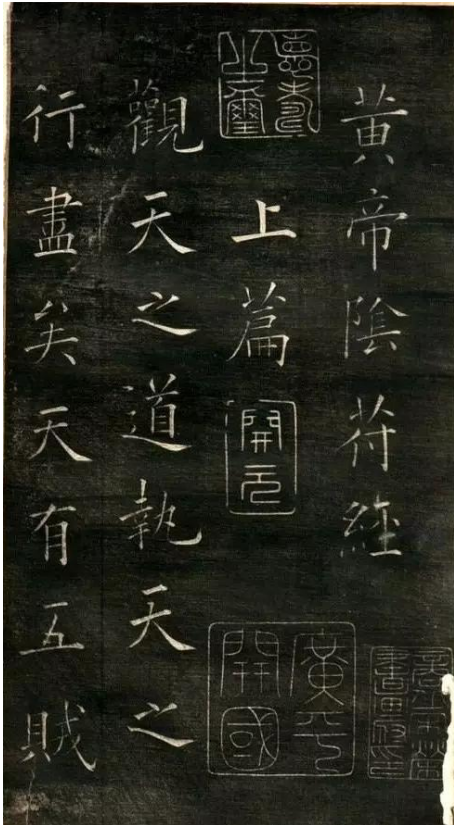


Fig 4.9, Ouyang Xun (557-641), Detail from the *Scripture of Hidden Contracts*, rubbing, the original steles in Xuzhou Museum



Fig 4.10, S.2573, Feng Anchang, *Lotus Sutra*, chapter two, dated 673, handscroll, ink on paper

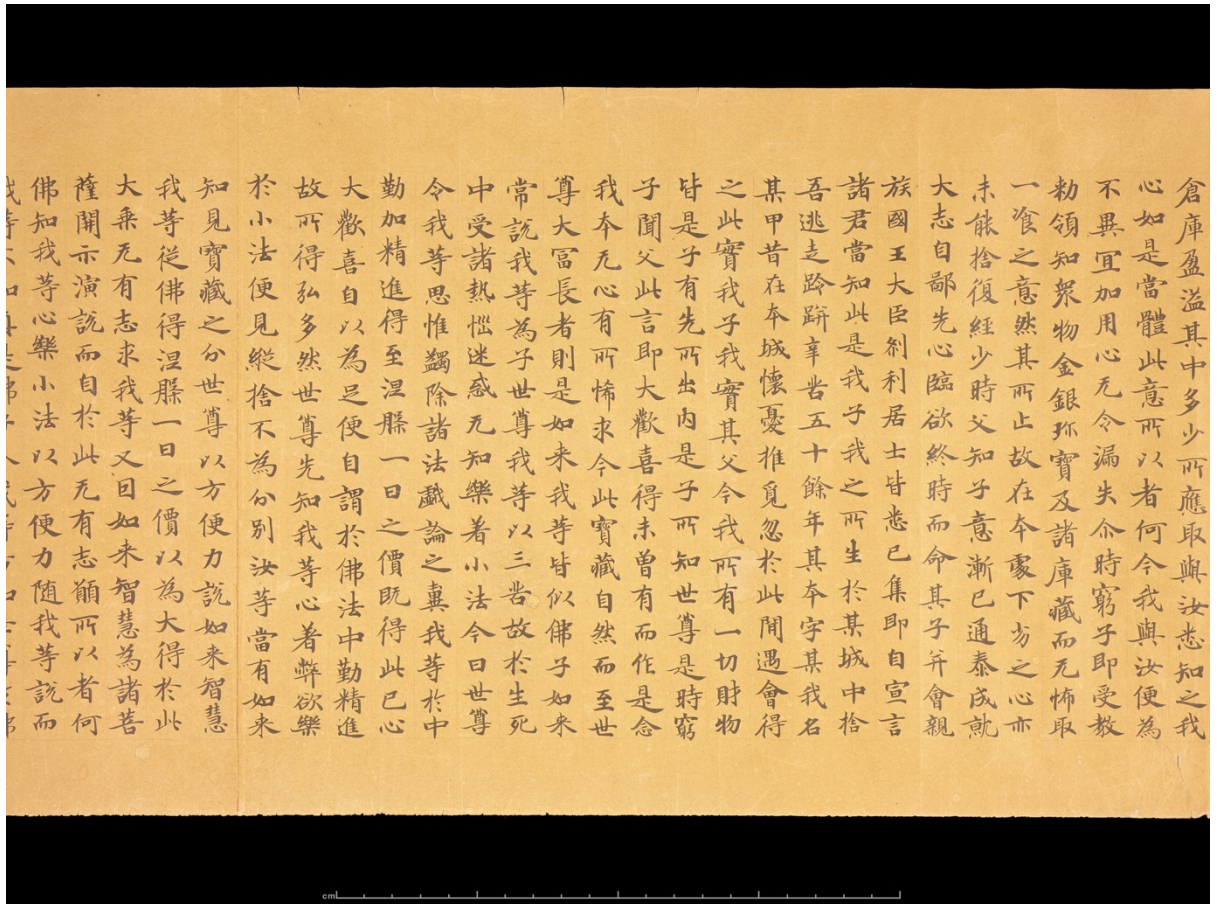


Fig 4.11, S.2573, Feng Anchang, *Lotus Sutra*, chapter two, dated 673, handscroll, ink on paper.

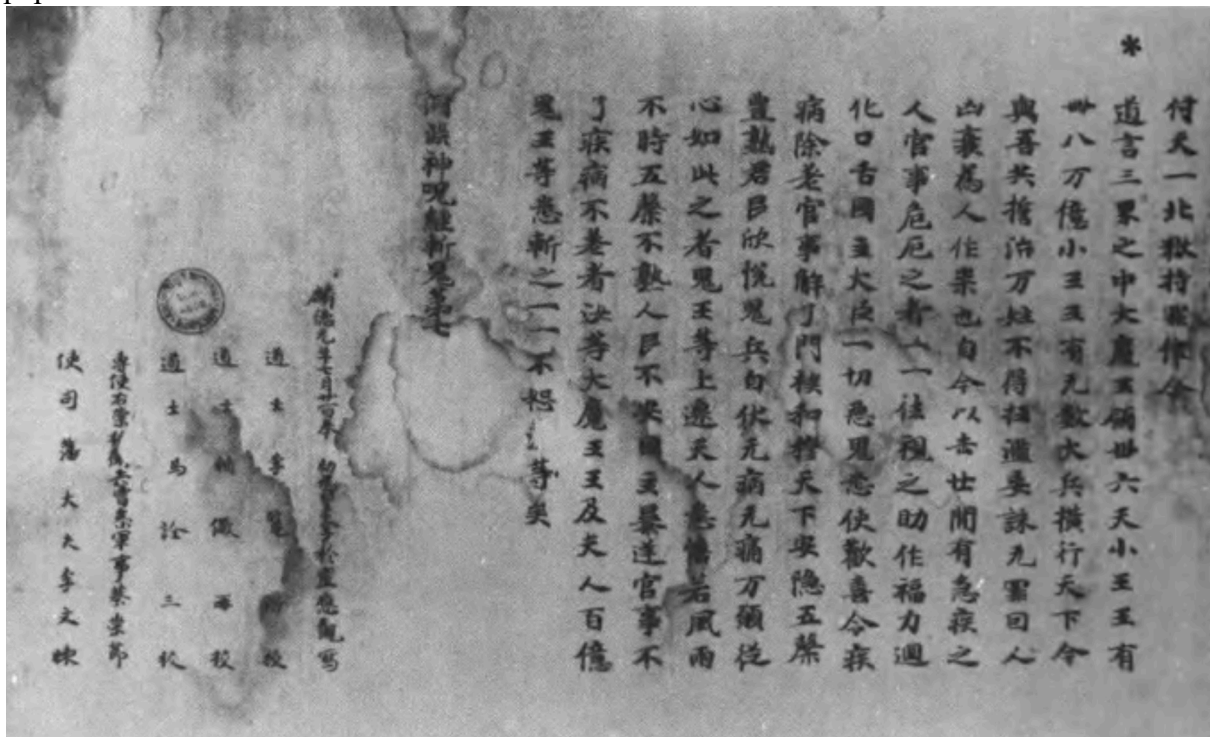


Fig 4.12, P.2444, *Dongyuan shenzhou Scripture*, Chapter Seven, dated 664, handscroll, ink on paper.



## APPENDICES

Table 2.1 List of the Imperial Edicts Attributed to Tang Emperors

Title of the Imperial Edict	Tang Emperor to Whom the imperial edict was attributed	Calligraphic Script	Source
道德敕	Emperor Taizong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
魏仲思改名敕	Emperor Taizong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
九仙門敕	Emperor Taizong	Cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
晚來敕	Emperor Taizong	Cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
手敕	Emperor Taizong	Cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
無為敕	Emperor Taizong	Cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李順卿賀狀	Emperor Taizong		<i>BKLB</i>
万年宮銘并碑陰敕	Emperor Gaozong		<i>BKLB</i>
賜盧正道敕	Emperor Zhongzong	Standard script	<i>Henan beizhi xulu</i> 河南碑志敘錄 (Collection of Steles and Inscriptions of Henan Province)
賜張敬忠手詔	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>BKLB</i>
敕冀州刺史源復詔	Emperor Xuanzong		<i>BKLB</i>
賜趙宣王等敕	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
訪道敕	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
嘉賓敕	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
賜李含光敕二	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表謝賜	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表投壁	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表修齋二	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表起居	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表香信	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>

批答李含光表謝修功德	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答張九齡謝知製誥表	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答楊勵俗等表	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答裴耀卿等雪篇表	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答裴耀卿等賀雨表	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答裴耀卿等奏謝宣示聖旨	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
常道觀敕	Emperor Xuanzong		<i>Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian</i> 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本彙編 (Ancient Stone Inscription Rubbings Held by Beijing Library)
賜李含光敕二	Emperor Suzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答郭子儀表	Emperor Suzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李季卿表	Emperor Suzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表修齋	Emperor Suzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
批答李含光表修功德	Emperor Suzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
刑政箴並批答	Emperor Dezong		<i>BKLB</i>
批答趙惠伯表	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
賜李叢敕	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
賜李叢手敕	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>
賜李叢手詔	Emperor Xuanzong	Semi-cursive script	<i>XHSP</i>

Table 3.1 List of Inscription Authors on the on the Four Princesses' Tomb Steles

Title of the Stele	Calligrapher of the Head of the Stele	Calligrapher of the Stele Inscription	Author of the Inscription Text	Source
Stele for Princess Jinxian	Wei Linghe 衛靈鶴 wrote in seal script	Emperor Xuanzong wrote in semi-cursive script	Xu Qiaozhi 徐嶠之	<i>JSCB</i> , 84:1485
Stele for Princess Xiguo		Emperor Xuanzong wrote in clerical script	Zhang Yue 張說	<i>JSCB</i> , 35:1332
Stele for Princess Liangguo		Emperor Xuanzong wrote in clerical script	Su Ting 蘇頲	<i>JSCB</i> , 75:1325
Stele for Princess Daiguo	Emperor Xuanzong wrote in clerical script	Zheng Cong 鄭聰 wrote in regular script	Zheng Wangjun 鄭萬鈞	<i>JSCB</i> , 78:1373

Table 4.1 Selected Religious Scriptures Transcribed by Eminent Tang Calligraphers

Title of the Scripture	Religion	Calligrapher	Calligraphic Script	Source
Tiantong Sutra 天童經	Daoism	Xu Qiaozhi 徐嶠之	Cursive Script	<i>XHSP</i>
Amituo Sutra 阿彌陀經	Buddhism	Chang Zheng 暢整	Standard Script	<i>BKLB</i>
Heart Sutra 心經	Buddhism	Han Zemu 韓擇木	<i>Bafen</i> Script	<i>XHSP</i>
Yinfu Sutra 陰符經	Daoism	Chu Suiliang 褚遂良	Cursive Script	<i>BKLB</i>
Duren Sutra 度人經	Daoism	Liu Gongquan 柳公權	Standard Script	<i>XHSP</i>
Qingjing Sutra 清淨經	Daoism	Liu Gongquan 柳公權	Standard Script	<i>XHSP</i>
Yinfu Sutra 陰符經	Daoism	Liu Gongquan 柳公權	Standard Script	<i>XHSP</i>
Heart Sutra 心經	Buddhism	Liu Gongquan 柳公權	Standard Script	<i>XHSP</i>
Qingzai Sutra 清災經	Daoism	Liu Gongquan 柳公權		<i>BKLB</i>
Qingjing Sutra 清淨經	Daoism	Liu Gongquan 柳公權		<i>BKLB</i>
Heart Sutra 心經	Buddhism	Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢		<i>BKLB</i>

Atuoni Sutra 陀羅尼經	Buddhism	Xue Ji 薛稷		<i>BKLB</i>
Duren Sutra 度人經	Daoism	Wu Tongxuan 吳通玄	Semi-cursive Script	<i>XHSP</i>

Table 4.2 Selected Examples of Daoist Scriptures Commissioned by the Tang Courts

Number	Name	Date	Scribe
P.3233	Dongyuanshenzhou Scripture 洞淵神咒經 1	664	Written Under Imperial Edict
P.2444	Dongyuanshenzhou Scripture 洞淵神咒經 7	664	Written Under Imperial Edict
P.3725	Dao Scripture of Laozi with the annotation of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗御注老子道經	735	
P.2457	Yueziluyisannianyishuo 閱紫錄儀三年一說	735	Scripture scribe Xu Ziyong 經生許子顥
P.2380	Tongxuanzhen Scripture 通玄真經	739	

Table 4.3 Selected Examples of Buddhist Scriptures Commissioned by the Tang Courts

Number	Name	Date	Scribe
S.5319	Lotus Sutra 3	671	Clerkly Calligrapher Cheng Jundu 書手程君度
S.84	Lotus Sutra 5	671	Sutra Scribe Guo De 經生郭德
S.3079	Lotus Sutra 4	671	Sutra Scribe Guo De 經生郭德
Museum of Dunhuang 55	Lotus Sutra 6	672	Sutra Scribe Wang Siqian 經生王思謙
P.4556	Lotus Sutra 2	672	Sutra Scribe Wang Siqian 經生王思謙

P.2644	Lotus Sutra 3	672	Sutra Scribe Wang Siqian 經生王思謙
S.4209	Lotus Sutra 3	672	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Zhao Wenshen 門下省群書手 趙文審
S.36	Diamond Sutra	672	Calligrapher of Regular Script of Secretariat of the Heir Apparent Wu Yuanli 左春坊楷書吳元 禮
S.4551	Lotus Sutra 4	672	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Liu Taici 門下省群書手劉大慈
Library of Otani University (Japan)	Diamond Sutra	673	Clerkly Calligrapher Cai Yizhe 群書手蔡義愨
In a private collection	Diamond Sutra	673	Calligrapher of Regular Script of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature Ling shirendao 弘文館楷書令史仁道
S.2573	Lotus Sutra 2	673	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Feng Anchang 門下省群書手 封安昌
S.312	Lotus Sutra 4	673	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Feng Anchang 門下省群書手 封安昌
Bei. 0622	Diamond Sutra	673	Clerkly Calligrapher You wujuyan 書手由吾具言
Bei. 0653	Diamond Sutra	674	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Shen Daizheng 門下省群書手 申待徵
S.456	Lotus Sutra 3	674	Calligrapher of Regular Script of Secretariat of the Heir Apparent Xiao Jing 左春坊楷書蕭敬
S.3348	Lotus Sutra 6	674	Calligrapher of Regular Script of Secretariat of the Heir Apparent Xiao Jing 左春坊楷書蕭敬

Library of Shanghai 32	Lotus Sutra 6	674	Calligrapher of Regular Script of Secretariat of the Heir Apparent Liu Xuanhei 左春坊楷書劉玄徽
書博	Diamond Sutra	675	Calligrapher of Regular Script of the Palace Library Jia Jingben 秘書省楷書賈敬本
P. 2195	Lotus Sutra 6	675	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Yuan Yuanzhe 門下省群書手袁元愨
Museum of Shanghai	Lotus Sutra 3	675	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Gongsun Renyue 門下省群書手公孫仁約
In the old collection of Li Shengduo 李盛鐸舊藏	Lotus Sutra 4	675	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Gongsun Renyue 門下省群書手公孫仁約
Misuro Goro 三井八郎右衛門	Lotus Sutra 2	675	Clerkly Calligrapher Chenggongjingbao 群書手成公敬賓
Kyoto Museum	Lotus Sutra 3	675	Clerkly Calligrapher Zhao Xuanxiang 書手趙玄詳
S.513	Diamond Sutra	676	Calligrapher of Regular Script of Secretariat of the Heir Apparent Ouyang Xuanzhe 左春坊楷書歐陽玄愨
S.2181	Lotus Sutra 2	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Yang Wentai 群書手楊文泰
S.1456	Lotus Sutra 5	676	Clerkly Calligrapher of Regular Script of the Palace Library Sun Xuanshuang 秘書省楷書手孫玄爽
S.3361	Lotus Sutra 1	676	Clerkly Calligrapher of the Chancellery Yuan

			Yuanzhe 門下省群書手 袁元愬
S. 2637	Lotus Sutra 3	676	Calligrapher of Regular Script of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature Ren Dao 弘文 館楷書任道
P.3278	Diamond Sutra	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Cheng Jundu 書手程君 度
Misuro Goro 三 井八郎右 衛門	Lotus Sutra 7	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Ma Yuanli 群書手馬元禮
In the old collection of Li Shengduo 李盛鐸舊 藏	Lotus Sutra 3	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Wang Zhangju 群書手王 章舉
In the old collection of Li Shengduo 李盛鐸舊 藏	Lotus Sutra 4	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Ma Yuanli 群書手馬元禮
Bei.637	Lotus Sutra 5	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Wang Ju 群書手王舉
S.1048	Lotus Sutra 5	676	Calligrapher of Regular Script of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature Cheng Gongdao 弘文館楷書成 公道
Bei.690	Diamond Sutra	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Liu Honggui 書手劉弘珪
S.4353	Lotus Sutra 1	676	Calligrapher of Regular Script of the Institute for the Advancement of Literature Wang Zhiyuan 弘文館楷書王智苑
In the old collection of Li Shengduo	Lotus Sutra 6	676	Clerkly Calligrapher Zhao Ruzhang 群書手趙 如璋

李盛鐸舊藏			
S.3094	Lotus Sutra 2	677	Clerkly Calligrapher Liu Yishi 書手劉意師

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