

Article

Research on the Interdependence and Interaction between Sacred Space and Religious Personality—Centered on the Political and Religious Image of Wanhui 萬回 (632–712)

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Abstract: As a famous “miraculous monk” dating from the Tang Dynasty, Wanhui (632–712) was favored by four emperors, Gaozong (r. 649–683), Empress Wu (regency: 684–690; reign: 690–705), Zhongzong (r. 683–684, r. 705–710) and Ruizong (r. 684–690, r. 710–712). Relying on his special religious status as a Buddhist palace chaplain, he was alleged to have created religious momentum and to have advocated political opinions to maintain the “legitimacy” of the Li-Tang imperial family, but he was unflinchingly able to avoid political persecution. Although there have been some academic publications on Wanhui and the group of “miraculous monks” and “mad monks” in the Tang Dynasty, there are still ambiguities in the understanding of Wanhui’s political and religious image. This article firstly conducts textual research on the interdependence and interaction between the sacred space of the Tang Buddhist palace chapel on the one hand and religious personality as represented by Wanhui on the other. The former gave the latter a rich religious sacredness, mystical charm and strong political support; while the latter, in turn, strengthened the religious and political functions of the unique Buddhist institution in the service of imperial power, manifesting itself in the consolidation and elevation of the former. Secondly, by investigating the reasons for shaping the political and religious images of Wanhui in monastic biography and Buddhist hagiography, this article argues that this was a conscious arrangement due to the political purposes or religious intentions of the compilers. Finally, by exploring how Wanhui exerted various subtle political and religious impacts on the Tang emperors by virtue of his status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain—partly imparted by sacredness of the Buddhist palace chapel—this article attempts to shed new light on several key aspects of the complicated state–*samgha* relationship during this special period of the Tang Dynasty.

Keywords: Wanhui; miraculous monks; “mad” monks; Buddhist palace chaplain; political and religious image; sacred space; religious personality; state–*samgha* relationship; monastic biography; Buddhist hagiography



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1. Introduction

Wanhui 萬回 (632–712), who lived during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), is a typical representative of the category of miraculous monks within the history of Chinese Buddhism. Records of his various miracles have been kept in official histories, literary sketches, Dunhuang manuscripts and monastic biographies. Based on these texts, modern scholars regard Wanhui as a miraculous monk with vast and unpredictable powers. Additionally, because of his supernatural power (*shentong* 神通) in making a “10,000-mile round trip in a day” (*wanli er hui* 萬里而回), in the context of the wars and chaos of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), the image of Wanhui was transformed into the “*Hehe zhi shen*” 和合之神 (the god of reunion, harmony and good fortune), whose blessings can quickly reunite separated relatives. There have been several academic publications on Wanhui.¹ This one-sided image of “miraculous” Wanhui, which is almost non-human, gives people a highly unrealistic

impression that Wanhui was an eminent monk with supernatural powers and unhindered infinite Buddha-wisdom in his lifetime who could help people, whether at the palace or in the streets. He later evolved into a god who was efficacious enough to bless the common people. This understanding of Wanhui is obviously derived from the deliberately contrived influence of Buddhist hagiography, which sanctifies and mystifies the personalities of “sage monks” (*xianshengseng* 賢聖僧) in order to use them as a paradigm for a model of eminent monks. John Kieschnick sums up the purpose and manner of compiling the biographies of eminent monks: “The compilers of the Eminent Monks hoped that their works would serve as models for the monastic community, that they would be held up as ideals to which ordinary monks should aspire.” (Kieschnick 1997, p. 8) “The rich Buddhist lore that grew up around eminent holy men, whether imported from India or developed independently in China, was woven into the biographies, including accounts of miraculous births, interaction with deities, the power of Buddhist scripture, ascetic acts, and prophecy.” (Kieschnick 2022, p. 194) These overly laudatory writings deliberately elevate and perfect the vivid images of eminent monks in history, and cautiously discuss the emotions, psychologies and motivations of secular individuals in order to add more hagiographical elements to construct new images. Stuart H. Young points out that the obvious difference between hagiography and biography is not only that the latter is the source of the former’s written material, but also that the former has a special religious mission that the latter does not have: “Hagiographies of transcendentals and eminent Chinese monks, for example, were rooted in ancient Chinese biographical conventions; they followed fixed sets of structural characteristics, they were based upon common Chinese source materials, and they functioned as both models of and for traditional Chinese religious ideals.” (Young 2015, p. 247) Massimo A. Rondolino’s interpretation shows more clearly the distinctive features of hagiography as a special kind of text: “Similarly, hagiography, literally ‘the writing of the divine/holy,’ or ‘sacred writing,’ and its related terms are here employed as a metalinguistic category referring to sources that offer a codified rendering of the life, deeds, and teachings of saints, both as a testimony, which preserves their memory and their cult, and as a relationship with an incorruptible human being in the form of a written discourse.” (Rondolino 2017, p. 1) For a long time, Chinese compilers of hagiographies had been used to not only absorb seemingly reliable historical materials in biographies, but also preserve the words and deeds of eminent monks according to their own religious and political intentions and shape many perfect images to establish the models for ordinary monks and nuns. Therefore, we should carefully choose the appropriate approach to the study of hagiographies.

Based on a critique of the different approaches taken by traditional historians and modern scholars in the study of biography, which describes the life of an individual, and hagiography, which idealizes the life of a saint, Jinhua Chen believes that the three traditional approaches all have their own advantages and disadvantages. The first one is “the all-embracing approach, which is adopted by traditional historiographers and some modern sectarian scholars who have taken uncritically the existing traditional (mostly sectarian) accounts at face value and presented them as historical records.” The second approach dismisses “the accounts of miracles and marvels” and “uncover[s] kernels of historical fact from the shell of legendary accretions.” The third one “set[s] aside the historicity of the accounts and accepts them as representations of the image of the monk, of what monks were supposed to be.”² He proposes a more balanced approach in which “we should also be careful not to fall victim to the delusion that all these apparently biographical elements can be used for historical and biographical purposes and that those apparently hagiographical accounts are all about paradigms, neither reflecting historical reality nor containing any historically verifiable details” (Chen 2007, p. 339).

Therefore, we must maintain a high degree of vigilance so that our judgment cannot be easily swayed by texts that record Wanhui’s words and deeds, and we should not fall prey to intentional misleading by compilers of monastic biographies, Buddhist hagiographies and other materials. “We must see the eagerness with which our subjects interacted

with the secular world” (Chen 2007, p. 339). We should direct the academic research on Wanhui toward verifying historical authenticity and understanding the construction of religious personalities in biographical and hagiographical materials. In this process, it is necessary to have the courage to break down the barriers between the religious realm and the secular realm.

How, then, do the religious and the secular realms interconnect with and influence each other?

In order to show that the sacred can manifest itself and make humans aware of it, the religious scholar Mircea Eliade proposed two very important terms in religious studies: hierophany, “something sacred shows itself to us” (Eliade 1987, p. 11); and homo religious, “a potential religious complex of human beings or a personalistic existence with religious attributes.”³ Take Buddhism as an example: Buddhism’s sacred space⁴ often exists as various sacred sites associated with all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and deities. Many statues, murals, instruments and even natural phenomena that reveal mysterious and auspicious aspects are hierophanies and have special religious meanings. “When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world” (Eliade 1987, p. 21). At the same time, on the one hand, the Buddhist monks and nuns living within sacred space are naturally endowed with the religious sanctity and mystery unique to the sacred space; on the other hand, they also perform various daily Buddhist activities. These could include praying for increased blessings and the elimination of disasters (*qifu rangzai* 祈福禳災), conducting consecration (Skt. *abhiseka*; Ch. *guanding* 灌頂) or ordination (Skt. *śīla samād-hāma*; Ch. *shoujie* 授戒), or preaching Buddhist scriptures (*jiangjing shuofa* 講經說法). These activities add a stronger religious meaning to the sacred space and win the patronage and loyalty of Buddhist believers. Thus, we can see that Buddhist sacred space and the religious personality of monks and nuns are interdependent and interactional, and they jointly undertake the religious mission of propagating Buddhadharma and defending Buddhism (*hongfa hujiao* 弘法護教). The function of the former and the responsibility of the latter are intertwined and together constitute a crucial factor for Buddhism’s continued spread and survival in the complex and ever-changing cultural scene in East Asia. As Jinhua Chen points out, “Sacred space is an essential component of any religious tradition. It is especially significant for a trans-culture religion such as Buddhism, which originated in India and spread through the whole of East Asia via Central Asia” (Chen 2005, p. 353). It is because of the construction of the “sacred” that mundane places are transformed into sacred spaces to be reckoned with, secular people are transformed into religious and sacred personalities with divine power and the secular realm and the religious realm are able to blend together and influence each other.

The Buddhist palace chapel (*neidaochang* 內道場)⁵, as a special sacred space, is also a unique religious and political institution that highlights the relationship between the Buddhist community (*samgha*) and the imperial power of the state. In particular, it had an important historical position and special religious and political value in the Tang Dynasty. The monks and nuns living in the palace chapels could be endowed with the sacredness and mystery of religion—although they were ordinary monks and nuns (*fanfuseng* 凡夫僧), they seemed to have great supernatural powers; and because of their special religious words and deeds, the devout worship and the wholehearted belief of Buddhist believers intensified in sacred space. How to properly deal with the biographical and hagiographical factors in the various texts about Wanhui is a key issue for the author. Not all of the former can be used as historical evidence without a doubt, and the latter also contains some verifiable content to supplement the lack of the former, not just to establish a perfect religious model. In addition, the author intends to conduct a “comparative material research into the textual history of hagiographic literature,” because this method can “provide us with a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the production of any specific holy figure, as well as the evolving discourses of sanctity and holiness in general” (Zimbalist 2019, p. 1).

This refers to the “comparative hagiography” which is “a scientific study of phenomena, discourses and processes on, about, and for the production, distribution, and consumption of hagiography in global perspectives” (Rondolino 2020, p. 2). Hence, this article will discuss the political and religious image of the miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain Wanhui in the Tang Dynasty by adopting the hagiography study approach advocated by Professor Jinhua Chen and the method of comparative hagiography⁶ to study the interdependence and interaction between sacred space and religious personality. The main goal is to explore how Wanhui exerted various subtle political and religious impacts on Tang emperors by virtue of his status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain, partly imparted by the sacredness of the Buddhist palace chapel, in order to attempt to shed new light on several key aspects of the complicated state–*samgha* relationship during this special period of the Tang Dynasty.

2. Wanhui’s Political Image: The Guarantee of Sacred Space for Religious Personality

Shi Wanhui 釋萬回,⁷ whose secular family surname was Zhang 張, was a native of Wenxiang 閩鄉, Guozhou 虢州.⁸ He was born on May 29, 632 (Zhenguan 6.5.5), and died on January 20, 712 (Jingyun 2.12.8) at Liquan li 醴泉里, Chang’an.⁹ According to a record from Dunhuang manuscripts, “Wanhui’s father used to be the *Yuanmen biexiao* 轅門別校 (Commandant of the Gates of the Camp). His eldest brother joined the army outside the Great Wall at that time” (父乃轅門別校也。時兄從軍在塞外).¹⁰ Wanhui was deeply favored by emperors during the reigns of Gaozong (r. 649–683), Empress Wu (regency: 684–690; reign: 690–705), Zhongzong (r. 683–684, r. 705–710) and Ruizong (r. 684–690, r. 710–712). The imperial family, nobles and scholar–officials all profoundly believed in his abilities, and he enjoyed high prestige among the Buddhist communities at that time. Even after the Tang Dynasty, common people continued their unabated belief in Wanhui.

Wanhui’s miraculous deed of making a 10,000-mile round trip in a day made “everyone change their minds, and his fame was known to the court” (人皆改觀，聲聞朝廷).¹¹ Afterwards, he “shaved his hair, dressed in brown and became a monk” (剃髮著褐衣，為沙門).¹² Following his tonsure, “the emperor [Gaozong] invited Wanhui to receive offerings at a Buddhist palace chapel. Because of a message received in his dream, the emperor said, Wanhui was the incarnation of Avalokiteśvara. And two palace officials were ordered to serve Wanhui” (帝請於內道場供養。帝感夢，云是觀音化身，敕遣二宮官扶侍) (Hao and Zhao 2010, p. 374). “In the fourth year of [Xianheng], the emperor ordered Chan Master Wanhui to enter a Buddhist palace chapel to receive offerings.” ([咸亨] 四年，皇帝詔令萬回禪師入宮供養).¹³ From the above quotations, we see that during Xianheng 4 (January 24, 673–February 11, 674), Gaozong summoned Wanhui to receive offerings at a Buddhist palace chapel, and “rewarded him with exquisite and bright silk clothes and some palace servants served him” (賜錦繡衣裳，宮人供事).¹⁴ Following this, Wanhui developed close ties with the imperial family and scholar–officials in the Tang Dynasty by relying on his transcendental religious identity obtained from the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel, and exerted a subtle influence on the political situation at that time.

The *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [The Song Collection of Biographies of Eminent Monks] provides a record of a thrilling historical story:

Before this, during the reign of Empress Wu, cruel officials were appointed to fabricate facts about a crime and frame innocent people. [Before going to court], high-ranking officials said their goodbyes every day to their wives and children with the prospect of being imprisoned and unable to return home. Cui Xuanwei of Boling was a high-ranking official with a grand reputation, and his family may also have been in danger of being falsely accused. His mother, a very virtuous woman whose maiden name was Lu 廬, told him out of fear for their whole family: “You can invite Wanhui one day. This monk is like Baozhi 寶誌 (418–515).¹⁵ It is possible to know disaster and happiness by observing his behaviors.” So, Cui invited Wanhui to come to his house. His mother greeted Wanhui with tears, and gave him a charitable gift of a pair of golden *bizhu* 匕筋.¹⁶ Suddenly,

Wanhui descended the steps, threw the *bizhu* on the main house, and walked away. The whole family regarded it as unlucky. A few days later, when they climbed up to the main house to retrieve the *bizhu*, they found a book under the *bizhu*. After flipping through it, they found that it was a book of prophecy and quickly burned it. After a few days, some officials came to the house and searched for the book of prophecy, but found nothing. The accusation about their family was repealed. At that time, cruel officials often ordered thieves to bury the *gu* 蠱 (a poisonous insect), steal items, and falsify books of mystical prophecy to frame others. They also let false accusations be corroborated, so a great many officials and their families were killed, and their family assets were confiscated. If Wanhui hadn't thrown the *bizhu*, how could the Cui family have known that officials forged the book of prophecy? 先是天后朝任酷吏行羅織事, 官稍高隆者日別妻子. 博陵崔玄暉位望俱極, 其母廬氏賢而憂之曰: “汝可一日迎萬回, 此僧寶誌之流, 可以觀其舉止, 知其禍福也.” 乃召到家, 母垂泣作禮, 兼施中金匕筋一雙. 回忽下階擲其匕筋向堂屋上, 掉臂而去. 一家謂為不祥. 經數日, 令升屋取之, 匕筋下得書一卷, 觀之, 乃讖緯書也, 遽令焚之. 數日, 有司忽來其家, 大索圖讖, 不獲, 得雪. 時酷吏多令盜投蠱道 (盜) 物及偽造秘讖, 用以誣人, 還令誣告得實, 屠戮籍沒其家者多. 崔氏非聖人擲匕筋, 何由知其偽圖讖也.¹⁷

Cui Xuanwei 崔玄暉 (639–706) came from a distinguished family background, which was called the Cui family of Bolin 博陵. The time when “he had a very high position and a very grand reputation” probably referred to Chang'an 3 (January 22, 703–February 9, 704), when Cui “was appointed the *Luantai shilang* 鸞台侍郎 (the Second Executive Post of the Chancellery) and the *Tong feng'ge luantai pingzhangshi* 同鳳閣鸞台平章事 (the Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery), serving as the *Taizi zuoshuzi* 太子左庶子 (the Chief Official of the Secretariat of the Heir Apparent or the Crown Prince)” (拜鸞台侍郎、同鳳閣鸞台平章事, 兼太子左庶子).¹⁸ The “*Tong feng'ge luantai pingzhangshi*” was also the position of the Prime Minister, which was the highest rank among court officials. According to the records of the biography of Cui Xuanwei (Cui Xuanwei liezhuan 崔玄暉列傳) in the Old Book of Tang (*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書), “in Chang'an 1 (November 5, 701–February 1, 702), he was appointed the *Tianguan shilang* 天官侍郎 (the Attendant Gentleman of the Heavenly Official [the Second Executive Post of the Ministry of Personnel]). He was staunchly virtuous and always refused visits from other officials, which made him resented by those in power . . . Prior to this, Lai Junchen 來俊臣 (651–697), Zhou Xing 周興 (?–691) and others framed the innocent people for obtaining the ranks of nobility and its rewards, so the assets of hundreds of households had been confiscated. Xuanwei insisted on pleading by showing records of the false accusations. [Empress Wu] Zetian [武] 則天 was moved and realized her faults, so she pardoned all those who were falsely accused” (長安元年 [701年11月5日–702年2月1日], 超拜天官侍郎, 每介然自守, 都絕請謁, 頗為執政者所忌. . . . 先是, 來俊臣、周興等誣陷良善, 冀圖爵賞, 因緣籍沒者數百家. 玄暉固陳其枉狀, [武] 則天乃感悟, 咸從雪免).¹⁹ As the victim of a false accusation himself, Cui Xuanwei took the initiative to plead for those who were convicted after false accusations by officials, and to lead Empress Wu to pardon those falsely accused. Cui was wrongly accused of “ordering thieves to bury the *gu* and to hide the books of prophecy in others' houses at night, and searching for them one month later because of a whistleblower” (令盜夜埋蠱, 遺讖於人家, 經月, 告密籍之).²⁰ Furthermore, officials were able to frame court officials (even the high-level officials) on a large scale without the slightest hesitancy not only for their own goals of “obtaining the ranks of nobility and its rewards,” but more likely because the reigning Empress Wu, by reason of distrust of court officials and consolidation of power, intended to eliminate hostile political forces through actions of corrupt officials in order to maintain her legitimacy as ruler.

Wanhui, as recorded by Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001), helped the Cui family avoid the catastrophe from the false accusations with the intentional behavior of “throwing the *bizhu* on the main house.” Although the story was not recorded in other documents, it is highly credible. Cui's mother regarded Wanhui as a miraculous monk comparable to Baozhi. Under the increasingly severe political crisis of Empress Wu's reign, Cui's mother first thought of seeking Wanhui's help to save the lives of the whole family, so she persuaded her son to

invite Wanhui home, hoping to gain the wisdom to avoid disasters by observing Wanhui's behaviors. This actually shows that Wanhui was in a politically detached position, free from the political influence that endangered him by virtue of his special status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain. In addition, he had supernatural powers and merciful compassions, so was deeply trusted and relied on by bureaucrats.

We can also see that Wanhui was deeply trusted by Empress Wu from another incident that occurred during her reign.

Crown Prince Huizhuang was the second son of Ruizong. Heavenly Empress (Empress Wu) once held him in her arms and showed him to Wanhui, and Wanhui said: "This child is the reincarnation of a great tree spirit from the Western Regions, and raising him will be beneficial to his brothers." 惠莊太子, 乃睿宗第二子也, 天后曾抱示回, 曰: "此兒是西域大樹精, 養之宜兄弟也."²¹

Li Zong 李愔 (683–724), the second son of Ruizong, whose former name was Chengyi 成義, was posthumously conferred as Crown Prince Huizhuang after his death. His biological mother was "a servant from the palace residence of the concubines whose maiden name was Liu 柳" (柳氏, 掖庭宮人). When he was born, Empress Wu "intended to disown him as a prince because of his mother's lowly position" (以 [其] 母賤, 欲不齒).²² So, Empress Wu's act of showing Li Zong to Wanhui was probably meant as a request for Wanhui to read Li Zong's fortune from the details of his face and seek advice on whether to let the baby live. Wanhui cleverly succeeded in persuading Empress Wu to accept Li Zong and acknowledge his status as the second son of Ruizong (始令列於兄弟之次).²³ The subsequent facts were just as Wanhui predicted. Li Xian 李憲 (679–742), the lineal eldest son of Ruizong, steadfastly refused to become the crown prince after Ruizong's second accession to the throne, and elected Li Longji 李隆基 (Xuanzong, r. 712–756) to be the crown prince on the grounds that "when the country was stable, the lineal eldest son should be crown prince, and when the country was in danger, the prince with meritorious service should be crowned" (國家安則先嫡長, 國家危則先有功).²⁴ The reason why Ruizong became the emperor again was due to the "Tanglong Coup" jointly initiated by Li Longji and Princess Taiping (665–713) at the Shen hour 申時 (corresponding to the modern time of 15:00 to 17:00 p.m.) on Tanglong 1.6.20 [gengzi] (July 21, 710). As the second son of Ruizong, Li Zong also abdicated the throne of the crown prince, so Li Longji was able to avoid the tradition of "respect for seniority" in the imperial succession system of the Tang Dynasty, and was appointed the crown prince by Ruizong in the name of righteousness.

In gratitude for Li Zong's virtue in abdicating the throne of the crown prince, Li Longji posthumously honored Li Zong as Crown Prince Huizhuang on Kaiyuan 12.11.28 (18 December 724), and wrote an article named the *Ce Huizhuang Taizi wen* 冊惠莊太子文 (An Imperial Edict Conferring Li Zong as Crown Prince Huizhuang): "[Li Zong] was born with the nature of filial piety to his parents and friendship to his brothers, and his character was simple and gentle . . . The ancient emperors showed the kindness in caring for their relatives, and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 [the Spring and Autumn Annals] wrote about a higher level of righteousness. To confer him as Crown Prince Huizhuang as a posthumous honor" (體孝友以成性, 用淳和而合道. . . . 夫先王演親親之恩, 《春秋》著加等之義. 上嗣之位, 飾終在期).²⁵ In addition, Li Longji was grateful for Li Xian's virtue in abdicating the throne of the crown prince as the lineal eldest son of Ruizong, and posthumously honored Li Xian as Emperor Rang on Kaiyuan 29.11.25 (6 January 742) and wrote an article named the *Ce shi Rang Huangdi wen* 冊諡讓皇帝文 (An Imperial Edict that Enthroned and Gave Li Xian the Posthumous Title of Emperor Rang): "As the lineal eldest son of Ruizong, Li Xian deserved to be appointed the crown prince. In those days, I followed the teachings of my ancestors and put down the rebellions started by many villains. So, he kept the virtue of humility and sincerely abdicated the throne of the crown prince. His good deeds in life showed his deep benevolence and morality; and a grand ceremony should be held to show his exalted status and honorable fame after his death. Therefore, he was given the posthumous title of Emperor Rang" (惟王地居元子, 合膺主鬯. 昔朕上稟先訓, 克清群凶, 遂固守愔謙, 懇讓儲副. 然則深仁厚德, 茂行已表於生前; 寶位尊名, 盛禮甯忘於沒後. 是用諡王為讓皇帝).²⁶ It can be

seen that Li Longji and his brothers had a deep affection for each other and lived in harmony. The *Huizhuang Taizi ai cewen* 惠莊太子哀冊文 (An Imperial Edict Mourning and Conferring Li Zong as Crown Prince Huizhuang) written by the famous Tang Prime Minister Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (673–740) on Kaiyuan 12.12 [intercalary month] 27 (February 14, 725) told us: “Since childhood, they had a strong brotherly bond. Until the four princes had their own fiefdoms, the five brothers still remained one. They traveled together with a large number of horsemen and lived in the same mansion. They all enjoyed the love of their elders, offered sweet wine together to thank their teachers and learned the Confucian classics. As time went by, many very worrisome things would gradually appear. After the rebellions inside the palace were put down, Li Longji became the emperor. Although the emperor and his brothers were separated by the guards of the palace, they always acted in harmony with family protocol. Why did Crown Prince Huizhuang die? It was so sad that we shed tears for the past.” (昔在沖眇，具惟兄弟。四國並封，五王均體。游必連騎，居則同邸。各承愛於含飴，俱受經於置醴。既荏苒而雲邁，屬殷憂之將啟。實定禍於蕭牆，遂繼明於雲陛。雖隔深宮之衛，常洽家人之禮。曷殂謝以痛心，感平生而流涕。²⁷ The relationship between Xuanzong and his brothers remained friendly and harmonious throughout their lives. They loved and respected each other as good brothers should without any disagreements or disputes, which was a rare phenomenon among the imperial family of the Tang Dynasty, and really fulfilled Wanhui’s prediction that Li Zong, Crown Prince Huizhuang, would “be beneficial to his brothers.” Here, we can see that Empress Wu, who was a very devoutly Buddhist, trusted Wanhui so much that she sought his advice even on matters concerning the imperial family. It was Wanhui’s advice to Empress Wu that saved Li Zong’s life and later led to the closeness among all Ruizong’s sons. Wanhui also gained the trust of Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong in succession.

During the reign of Zhongzong, “in Jinglong (1 October 707–1 July 710), [Wanhui] entered and exited [the Buddhist palace chapel] from time to time. Many people competed to worship him regardless of whether they were scholar–officials, commoners, nobles, or lowly people. Wanhui was clad in a brocade robe, laughing and scolding, or beating a drum. Then, all his predictions came true” (景龍中，[萬回] 時時出入 [內道場]。士庶貴賤，競來禮拜。萬回披錦袍，或笑罵，或擊鼓。然後隨事為驗。²⁸ Although Wanhui was a Buddhist palace chaplain, he was not stationed in the Buddhist palace chapel all day and had the right to enter and exit the imperial palace freely. As a miraculous monk, the image of Wanhui was not only revered and trusted by the imperial family and the noblemen, but was also worshipped by the common people—even peddlers and menial servants. However, it was also because of the imperial family’s faith in the prophetic power of Wanhui that politics in the reign of Zhongzong were affected. The *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Broad records compiled in the Taiping (xingguo) era (976–983)] gives the following description:

[Wanhui] often told Wei Shuren 韋庶人 (a commoner whose surname is Wei, referring to Empress Wei, ?–710)²⁹ and Princess Anle: “*Sanlang* 三郎 (the third son) will chop off your heads.” Wei Shuren thought that Zhongzong was the third among his brothers and feared that he would have a change of heart, so she killed him with poisonous wine, but not realizing that she would be later executed by Xuanzong. [萬回] 常謂韋庶人及安樂公主曰：“三郎斫汝頭。” 韋庶人以中宗第三，恐帝生變，遂鳩之。不悟為玄宗所誅也。³⁰

The *Song gaoseng zhuan* gives the following description:

At the end of the reign of Zhongzong, [Wanhui] once called Empress Wei a rebellious person who would be beheaded. After a short time, Empress Wei was killed by Xuanzong ... Princess Anle, the youngest sister of Xuanzong, catered to Empress Wei and became so powerful that the people of the country were afraid of her. When Wanhui saw her carriage, he kept spitting toward it and saying: “Fishy! It stinks! Don’t go near it.” After a short time, she was killed in a palace coup. 中宗末，[萬回] 嘗罵韋后為反悖逆，斫爾頭去。尋而誅死……安樂公主，玄宗之季妹，附會韋后，熱可炙手，道路懼焉。回望車騎，連唾之曰：“腥！腥！不可近也。” 不旋踵而禍滅及之。³¹

The *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Book of Tang) states that on Jinglong 4.6.2 [*renwu*] (July 3, 710), Zhongzong was “poisoned and died in the Hall of Shenlong at the age of fifty-

five” (遇毒，崩於神龍殿，年五十五). Then, Empress Wei began her regency on *dinghai* (July 8, 710). Until the night of *gengzi* (21 July 710), Li Longji, King Linzi, united with his aunt, Princess Taiping, launched an army to kill the families of Wei and Wu and to execute Empress Wei and her daughter, Princess Anle (685–710). This was later known as the “Tanglong Coup.”³² Although there is no definite conclusion on whether Zhongzong was killed by Empress Wei and Princess Anle,³³ the narratives of the *Tanbin lu* 譚賓錄 [The Tang Collection of Stories about Official and Folk Characters] and the *Liangjing ji* 兩京記 [The Tang Local Chronicles on Chang’an, the Western Capital City, and Luoyang, the Eastern Capital City] quoted in the *Taiping guangji* attribute Zhongzong’s death to the prediction of “*Sanlang* chopping your heads” made by Wanhui in front of Empress Wei and Princess Anle, which led Empress Wei to kill her husband to save her own life. However, Empress Wei mistook the “*Sanlang*” who would kill her in Wanhui’s prediction as Zhongzong Li Xian 李顯, the third son of Empress Wu, but in fact Wanhui was referring to Li Longji, the third son of Ruizong. As a Buddhist historian, Zanning is much more cautious, mentioning only Wanhui’s rebuke of Empress Wei as “rebellious” and his direct prediction that Empress Wei and her daughter would soon be killed. If it was really Wanhui’s prediction and Empress Wei’s firm faith in his prediction that led to the death of Zhongzong and the subsequent outbreak of the “Tanglong Coup,” can we infer that the same trust in Wanhui’s prediction of Empress Wei’s fate led Li Longji and Princess Taiping to daringly launch a coup in a politically unfavorable situation when Empress Wei had already acted as regent and assumed power at the imperial court half a month earlier?

Wanhui also used his prophetic power to create religious momentum for the succession of Ruizong and Xuanzong:

When Xuanzong was in the period of *qianlong* 潛龍 (the dragon hiding in deep waters),³⁴ he paid a visit to Wanhui with Zhang Wei 張暉 and his other followers. When Wanhui met Xuanzong, he was very contemptuous. Holding a lacquered cane in his hand, Wanhui shouted loudly and drove them away. All the people who went with Xuanzong were driven out. Wanhui dragged Xuanzong into the room and closed the door and windows from inside, and then he returned to his normal state without any other abnormal words or actions. Wanhui stroked Xuanzong’s back again and said: “You will be the Son of Heaven for fifty years. I hope you will cherish yourself. I don’t know what happens after that.” Zhang Wei and others outside the door clearly heard Wanhui’s words, so they did their best to support and embrace Xuanzong. The event that happened fifty years later refers to the disaster of Lushan.³⁵ When Ruizong was living in the Prince Residence before his reign, he would sometimes wander among the crowds in the streets. Where crowds of people gathered, Wanhui would shout: “The Son of Heaven will come.” Or he would say: “The sage will be here.” For the next two or three days, Ruizong would pass by and walk back and forth in the places where Wanhui had been. 玄宗潛龍時，及門人張暉等同謁。回見帝甚至褻黷，將漆杖呼且逐之，同往者皆被驅出。曳帝入，反扃其戶，悉如常人，更無他，重撫背曰：“五十年天子自愛，已後即不知也。”張公等門外歷歷聞其言，故傾心翼戴焉。五十年後，蓋指祿山之禍也。睿宗在邸時，或遊行人間。回於聚落街衢中高聲曰：“天子來。”或曰：“聖人來。”其處信宿間，帝必經過徘徊也。³⁶

Xuanzong’s deliberate visit to Wanhui clearly implies political motives. Additionally, the “*qianlong*” mentioned in the text is a metaphor for the time before Xuanzong became an emperor. According to the “Zhang Wei *liezhuan*” 張暉列傳 [Biography of Zhang Wei] in the *Jiu Tang shu*, “when King Linzi (Xuanzong) was the *Biejia* 別駕 (the Administrative Aide to the Heads of Regions and the Commanderies in Tang and Song Prefectures) of Luzhou 潞州, Zhang Wei secretly recognized him as a magnificent man, so he followed him every day and did his best to serve him” (會臨淄王為潞州別駕，暉潛識英姿，傾身事之，日奉遊處).³⁷ Xuanzong served concurrently as the *Biejia* of Luzhou in Jinglong 2.4 (April 25–May 23, 708),³⁸ and Zhang Wei, who served as the county magistrate (*xianling* 縣令) of Tongdi 銅鞮 (the ancient name of Qin County, located in the northern part of present-day Changzhi City) became a follower of Xuanzong. Ruizong issued an imperial decree to confer Xuanzong as Crown Prince on Tanglong 1.6.26 [bingwu] (27 July 710), shortly after the

“Tanglong Coup.”³⁹ Therefore, we can deduce that the time of Xuanzong’s visit to Wanhui should be between Jinglong 2.4 (25 April–23 May 708) and Tanglong 1.6.26 [*bingwu*] (27 July 710), and the place where they met could not have been the imperial palace, but in the private house given to Wanhui by Princess Taiping, which was more secluded.⁴⁰ Wanhui expelled Zhang Wei and his other followers from the house, but dragged Xuanzong inside, closed the door and windows very carefully, and gently stroked his back again while predicting that he would become the Emperor of Tang who would rule for fifty years, but deliberately concealed from Xuanzong the An-Shi Rebellion that would break out fifty years later. Although Wanhui’s action appeared to be cautious, Zhang Wei and other followers were able to hear Wanhui’s prophecy of Xuanzong clearly outside the door, and since then, they “supported and embraced Xuanzong wholeheartedly” (傾心翼戴). The “Zhang Wei liezhuan” in the *Jiu Tang shu* evaluates Zhang Wei as “finishing what he started” (善保終始).⁴¹ In combination with Zanning’s narratives, we may consider that Wanhui’s prophecy influenced Zhang Wei’s lifelong loyalty to Xuanzong.

From Wanhui’s political prophecy, Xuanzong gained confidence that his succession would be possible and that the loyalty of the political team that served him would be strengthened. At the same time, Wanhui’s prophecy that Ruizong and Xuanzong would successively succeed to the throne as emperors of the Tang Dynasty seems to be some sort of political strategy—reminding Xuanzong to firstly support his father to regain the throne and then consider his own interests, which led to the subsequent “Tanglong Coup (21 July 710)” and “Xiantian Coup (27 July–25 August 713)” that Xuanzong staged to seize imperial power. Wanhui’s prophecy, which nearly publicly told everyone that Ruizong and Xuanzong would be the emperors of the Tang Dynasty, seemed to be a personal statement of Wanhui. However, combined with his unique status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain, closely related to the imperial family with the ability to make efficacious predictions who also had the unquestionable faith of the nobles, scholar–officials and common people, his predictions were naturally regarded as powerful religious legitimation of the political destiny of Ruizong and his son Xuanzong. Zanning’s ingenious writing leaves enough room for our imagination, but it is also logical. Wanhui purposely waited at the road that Ruizong had to pass after leaving his Prince Residence, and loudly referred to him as “the Son of Heaven” or “the Saint”; Xuanzong brought his followers to pay a special visit to Wanhui, who promoted the prestige of Xuanzong. Wanhui insisted on the political position of safeguarding the “rightful”⁴² status of the Li-Tang imperial family. Therefore, he was happy to make full use of his status and reputation as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain to build up religious momentum and advocate the public’s belief to support Ruizong and Xuanzong’s legitimacy in seizing imperial power and succeeding to the throne.

To sum up, the reason why Wanhui was able to use his identity as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain to gain the deep faith and devotional worship of the Tang emperors, nobles and scholar–officials, and to skillfully exert a variety of subtle influences on the politics of the Tang Dynasty according to his will, was that the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel guaranteed and even strengthened the charisma⁴³ of his religious personality. Confucianism displays “its religious character primarily through the performance of ritual sacrifices and veneration” (Huang 2020, p. 213). However, Chinese Buddhism can not only demonstrate religious influence through “the believers’ interaction with sacred space” (Huang 2020, p. 212) of Buddhist temples, but monks and nuns can also make believers worship them more devoutly and believe in Buddhism more wholeheartedly because of the influence of the sacred space they live in. The Buddhist palace chapel as a special sacred space is not just a unique religious and political institution inside the palace, it is also a holy place that symbolizes the supreme imperial power and great religious sanctity as well as “a means of direct access to the center,” “in which Buddhist monks” can “cooperate with the highest secular authority” (Chen 2004, p. 102). Wanhui, as a monk with a transcendent status in the Buddhist palace chapel, was often regarded by the imperial family, nobles, scholar–officials and even ordinary people as a miraculous monk with

mysterious and unpredictable supernatural powers, as well as a Buddhist palace chaplain who always maintained close relations with the Tang imperial family and had extraordinary religious and political influence. Therefore, no matter what seemingly mad words or deeds he showed, everyone would regard them as accurate predictions or well-intentioned reminders. This just proves that the far-reaching influence of the Buddhist palace chapel was reflected in Wanhui's religious personality. When Wanhui was outside the Buddhist palace chapel, he often needed to evoke people's awe of the sacred space through some mad words and deeds, so that people could trust his predictions and act according to his will. "Although replicating a sacred space tied to a specific locale is difficult, recreating the sacred space ritualistically in miniature can be successful in evoking its sacrality" (Lin 2014, p. 178). This shows that the sacredness of sacred space is not necessarily fixed in a specific place, but can also be expressed anytime and anywhere through special words and deeds similar to the miniature rituals in different ways by religious people with great charismatic personalities.

3. The Religious Image of Wanhui: The Reinforcement of the Religious Personality on the Sacred Space

According to relevant records, the Buddhist monk with whom Wanhui first came into contact might have been the famous Tripitaka Master (Skt. *tripitakācārya*; Ch. *sanzang fashi* 三藏法師)⁴⁴ Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). The latter was not only the founder of the Consciousness-only (Skt. *vijñapti-mātratā*; Ch. *weishi* 唯識) sect and one of the greatest translators of Chinese Buddhism, but also a monk who was truly favored by Taizong (r. 598–649) and Gaozong, as well as by Empress Wu.⁴⁵ The *Song gaoseng zhuan* provides a historical material about Xuanzang's visit to Wanhui after completing his pilgrimage from India and returning to China:

During the period of Zhenguan, after returning to China from the West, Tripitaka Master Xuanzang said: "There was a Shizang Temple in Tianzhu 天竺 (an old name for India in the Eastern Asia). When I entered the temple, I saw an empty room with only the *huchuang* 胡床 (a type of portable folding chair) and the *xizhang* 錫杖 (Buddhist monk's staff). So, I asked about [the whereabouts of] the *bhadanta* [who lived in this room before], and everyone else said: 'This monk was punished to reincarnate in Wenxiang which was in an oriental country called Zhendan 震旦 (Skt. *cina-sthāna*; a name for China in ancient Indian records and some Chinese Buddhist texts) because he was absent from Dharma events. He is named Wanhui in this life.'" After Xuanzang returned to China, he sought to visit Wanhui, and paid homage [to Wanhui]. [Xuanzang] asked [Wanhui] about the situation in the Western Regions, [Wanhui replied] as if he was watching [everything with his own eyes]. When Xuanzang was about to visit Wanhui's home, Wanhui told his mother: "A guest is coming, please prepare vegetarian dishes." Presently Xuanzang arrived. 貞觀中, 三藏法師西歸雲: "天竺有石藏寺, 奘入時見一空房, 有胡床錫杖而已。因問此房大德, 咸曰: '此僧緣闕法事, 罰在東方, 國名震旦, 地號閩鄉, 于茲萬回矣。'" 奘歸, 求見回, 便設禮。問西域, 宛如目矚。奘將訪其家, 回謂母曰: "有客至, 請備蔬食。" 俄而奘至。⁴⁶

The *Taiping guangji* also records a similar historical material:

Prior to this, Master Xuanzang went to the Buddhist country to obtain Buddhist scriptures. He saw a couplet on a Buddhist shrine that read: "The Bodhisattva Wanhui was relegated to Wenxiang to teach [all living beings]." After returning to China, Xuanzang drove to Wenxiang County on a post horse and asked others: "Is Master Wanhui here?" The others asked him to shout, then Wan Hui came to him. Master Xuanzang paid homage to Wanhui, gave him the *kasaya* (Skt. *trīṇī cīvarāṇī*; Ch. *sanyi* 三衣) and an alms bowl (Skt. *pātra*; Ch. *boyu* 鉢盂), and then left. 先是玄奘法師向佛國取經。見佛龕題柱曰: "菩薩萬回, 謫向閩鄉地教化。" 奘師馳驛至閩鄉縣, 問: "此有萬回師無?" 令呼之, 萬回至。奘師禮之, 施三衣瓶鉢而去。⁴⁷

The previous material tells us that when Xuanzang was at the Shizang Temple in Tianzhu, he learned from other monks that an eminent monk who lived here before had been reincarnated in Wenxiang, China, and his name in this life was Wanhui. After Xu-

anzang returned to China, he actually found Wanhui in Wenxiang, and confirmed that Wanhui was the reincarnated monk mentioned by the monks of Shizang Temple and had the supernatural power to predict the future. The latter material is relatively brief, mainly indicating that Xuanzang learned about Wanhui's identity as a Bodhisattva in the past and the information about his reincarnation in this life from a couplet on a Buddhist shrine in India.

Combining these two pieces of material, we can infer three conclusions:

First, Xuanzang arrived in Chang'an in Zhenguan 19.1 (2 February–2 March 645),⁴⁸ and only after that he had time to go to Wenxiang to visit Wanhui. The second material mentions that Xuanzang had the right to use the official post horse, which also shows that Xuanzang received great favor from Taizong after returning to China. Since Wanhui's birth year is 632, we can deduce that Wanhui was a child who had reached the age of thirteen and lived at home at this time.

Second, Xuanzang learned that "Wanhui" was the Dharma name of the monk Wanhui himself in India rather than in China. This is a third explanation for the origin of Wanhui's name.⁴⁹

Third, Xuanzang firmly believed that Wanhui was the reincarnation of a *bhadanta* or a Bodhisattva, and worshiped him devoutly. Considering the fact that Xuanzang was deeply favored and trusted by Taizong, Gaozong and Empress Wu, the reason why Wanhui was invited by Gaozong to enter a Buddhist palace chapel during Xianheng 4 was not only due to his miracle of making a "10,000-mile round trip in a day," but it is also very likely that Xuanzang strongly recommended Wanhui in front of Gaozong.

The above conclusions have actually explained the reason why Wanhui was born with a variety of Buddhist supernatural powers, and had the ability to perform many miracles freely, because his previous life was a respected *bhadanta* or Bodhisattva in Buddhism, who had reached the level of being able to use supernatural powers wisely and freely to teach and save sentient beings through the Buddhist practice of continuous reincarnation. The emperors of the Tang Dynasty also needed such miraculous monks to meet their political and religious needs, which also explains why Wanhui had the opportunity to become a Buddhist palace chaplain from a miraculous monk.

In fact, before Wanhui entered the Buddhist palace chapel, there was a prophecy that revealed the particularity of Wanhui's identity.

"At that time, a Fufeng monk named Menghong had a lot of miraculous events. At first, at the Buddhist palace chapel, he always said: 'Come back! Come back!' After Wanhui came into the Buddhist palace chapel, he said: 'My replacement has arrived! It's time for me to leave!' After ten days or so, he passed away" (時有扶風僧蒙鴻者, 甚多靈跡。先在內每曰: "[萬] 回來, [萬] 回來。"⁵⁰ 及公至又曰: "替到, 當去。" 迨旬日而瀕卒。⁵¹ Menghong (?–673 or 674), who was from Fufeng 扶風 (present-day Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province), was a Buddhist palace chaplain until Wanhui arrived. His prophecies gave Wanhui a religious mystique and a special status in the Buddhist palace chapel.

The "Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu" 唐玉泉寺大通禪師碑銘並序 [The inscription and preface about Chan Master Datong of Yuquan Temple in the Tang Dynasty], written by Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731), a three-time prime minister and a master of literature of his generation, shows us Wanhui's important influence in the imperial court and his esteemed status in the Buddhist community. Chan Master Datong, who was Yuquan Shenxiu 玉泉神秀 (605–706), the patriarch of Northern Chan, passed away at Tiangong Temple in Luoyang on the night of Shenlong 2.2.28 (15 April 706).⁵² The inscription written by Zhang Yue describes Zhongzong as so saddened that he gave Chan Master Shenxiu the posthumous title of "Datong" on Shenlong 2.3.2 (18 April 706). On the day of *Jiwang* 既望 of the month of *Zhongqiu* 仲秋 (27 September 706),⁵³ he issued an imperial edict to hold a funeral ceremony for Chan Master Shenxiu. "The *Taichang qing* 太常卿 (Chief Minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices) guided and led the funeral procession, and the *Cheng-men lang* 城門郎 (Gentleman of the Capital Gates in charge of the Entry to the Imperial Residence) guarded and monitored it. On this day, the emperor (Zhongzong)

came to the Dragon Gate (Longmen 龍門), wetting the golden lining of his clothing with tears, and climbed to a high place and stopped to look at the funeral procession until he could no longer see it, then returned to his imperial chariot. From the Yi River to the Yellow River, the faithful greeted the funeral procession along the road with sorrow. Countless hanging banners and colored flowers adorned the hundreds of chariots, and auspicious clouds stretched for thousands of miles in the air” (太常卿鼓吹導引, 城門郎護監喪葬. 是日, 天子出龍門泫金襴, 登高停蹕, 目盡回輿. 自伊及江, 扶道哀候. 幡花百輦, 香雲千里). “In October (November 10–December 9, 706), near the time when the moon was full, a pagoda was built on the hill behind the former residence of Chan Master Shenxiu. The imperial court gave millions of coins to decorate the pagoda in a solemn manner. The huge bell was cast by order of the previous emperor, and many Buddhist scriptures were given by the current emperor. The golden plaque was inscribed by the emperor himself, and the magnificent hanging banners were made by the imperial court. The pagoda and the Buddhist temple were respected by everyone. Chan Master Shenxiu’s fame had spread far and wide and he was admired by all” (維十月哉生魄明, 即舊居後岡安神起塔. 國錢嚴飾, 賜逾百萬. 巨鐘是先帝所鑄, 群經是後皇所錫. 金榜禦題, 華幡內造, 塔寺尊重, 遠稱標絕). Such a description shows the posthumous glory of Chan Master Shenxiu, who was held in high esteem by the imperial family. “The Bodhisattva [Wanhui] begged imperial wives and concubines for alms, and he received a chest full of precious clothes of great value. He was favored by the emperor and was elected to lead a Dharma assembly with offerings, parades and incense burning” (萬回菩薩乞施後宮. 寶衣盈箱, 珍價敵國, 親舉寵費, 侑供巡香). This Dharma assembly was held in recognition of the great religious appeal and charisma of Chan Master Shenxiu, who “possessed profound blessings and many karmas both during his life and after his death, and whose glory and decline passed each other with the passage of time” (廣福博因, 存沒如此, 日月逾邁, 榮落相推).⁵⁴ Zhongzong gave Chan Master Shenxiu a posthumous title and led civil and military officials and believers to hold a funeral ceremony and erect a pagoda for him. Following this, Wanhui made offerings and paraded with burning incense for the Dharma assembly of Chan Master Shenxiu with the belongings collected from imperial wives and concubines. Zhang Yue calling Wanhui a “Bodhisattva” in the inscription singled out Wanhui as the representative of the Buddhist community and placed him after the procession of Zhongzong and officials to commemorate Chan Master Shenxiu. This reveals to us that Wanhui was actually the leader of the Buddhist community at that time, and only he was qualified and prestigious enough to represent the Buddhist community to honor and provide for Shenxiu, who was revered as “the leader of the Buddhist community of two capitals, Chang’an and Luoyang, and the national teacher of three emperors” (兩京法主、三帝國師). In addition, Wanhui’s special religious status as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain and his close relationship with the imperial family were two important conditions that other monks in the Buddhist community did not possess at that time. Therefore, Wanhui was also elected by Zhongzong to lead the monks to participate in the funeral ceremony and memorial service of Chan Master Shenxiu. In conclusion, Wanhui was highly favored by the emperor and revered by the Buddhist community, and had considerable religious influence in the imperial court and an important religious position in the Buddhist community.

Chan Master Hui’an 慧安 (582–709), whose secular family surname was Wei 衛, was a monk at Shaolin Temple in Songshan. He was also one of the ten disciples of Hongren 弘忍 (602–675), the Fifth Patriarch of the Chan sect. In Shenlong 2.9 (12 October–9 November 706), Hui’an was given a purple robe by Zhongzong, and then entered the Buddhist palace chapel with Chan Master Jing 靜 (active in the seventh century AD) to receive offerings. The following year, he returned to Shaolin Temple. On Jinglong 3.3.3 (17 April 709), after Hui’an had instructed his disciples about his funeral arrangements, Wanhui came to see him. “Hui’an took Wanhui’s hand as if he had lost his mind and talked for a while, but the attendant monk next to them could not understand the meaning of their conversation even though he tried to listen” (安倡狂執手, 言論移刻, 旁侍傾耳都不體會).⁵⁵ The phrase “移刻 (*yike*)” refers to a short period of time. Wanhui came to visit Hui’an in person before

Hui'an was about to die, which shows that they had a close personal relationship. Hui'an had been living in Zhongzong's Buddhist palace chapel for nearly a year, so perhaps the two had formed a friendship during that time. Although Hui'an and Wanhui only talked for a moment, the attendant was unable to understand them, so it is clear that they had profound knowledge of Buddhadharma and knew each other well, and were therefore not able to be understood by outsiders.

The two religions, Buddhism and Taoism, continued to maintain a competitive and/or mutually influential interactive relationship in the Tang Dynasty. Even the relationship between monks and Taoists was often characterized by various situations of either close admiration or struggle and dislike. Ming Chongyan 明崇儼 (646–679), the *Zhengjian dafu* 正諫大夫 (Grand Master of Remonstrance), who was a Taoist, was willing to call Wanhui a “miraculous monk” because of an incident he had personally experienced, leading him to discard the views of religious sects.⁵⁶

Since he was young, [Wanhui] had been close to the Sramana Daming 大明 (active in the seventh century AD) of Longxing Temple. He came to the Monk Dorm of Daming [as a guest]. When Ming Chongyan, the *Zhengjian dafu*, came to the temple at night, he was frightened to see that Wanhui was guarded by divine soldiers. In the morning, he told Daming what he had seen the night before, gave him valuable golds and silks, bowed to him, and then left. 有龍興寺沙門大明少而相狎，公來往明師之室。屬有正諫大夫明崇儼夜過寺，見公左右神兵侍衛，崇儼駭之。詰旦言與明師，複厚施金繒，作禮而去。⁵⁷

Here, the personal experience of Ming Chongyan, who was both a court official and a Taoist, proves that Wanhui was indeed an unusual “miraculous monk,” highlighting the fact that Wanhui's high reputation not only reached the Tang imperial court, the Buddhist community and his believers, but also attracted the admiration of Taoists as non-Buddhists.

In conclusion, we can conceive that Wanhui, as a charismatic type of Buddhist leader with a high degree of Buddhist attractiveness (or rather, supernatural powers), had a charismatic religious personality, which naturally strengthened the influence of the sacred space in his Buddhist palace chapel. The more inconceivable the miracles he performed were and the more accurate his prophecies were revealed to be, the more obvious the political influence and religious sanctity demonstrated by his religious personality were. This was very beneficial to the Buddhist palace chapel, especially for setting up to meet the various religious and political needs of the emperors of the Tang Dynasty, so that the imperial power could take advantage of the authority of eminent monks and the sanctity of Buddhism to consolidate its own rule. Whenever there were sudden natural or man-made disasters within the state, one of the ways that the extremely worried emperors could think of to tide over the difficulties was usually to use religion. The reason the emperors of the Tang dynasty were willing to establish the Buddhist palace chapels and make offerings to eminent monks was not only to satisfy their own religious needs, but also to use the religious prestige of the Buddhist palace chaplains and the sanctity of Buddhism they represented to create religious momentum for the legitimacy of their power and to ease the discontent of nobles, ministers and ordinary people with the emperor's rule in times of crisis. As Tambiah particularly emphasizes, when the country was in times of war, famine, epidemic, flood, drought, etc., the forest monks must play the role of recharging and fortifying “monarchical legitimacy and creative powers by tapping the purity and charisma of the untarnished forest ascetics” (Tambiah 1984, p. 77). The more religiously influential and capable the eminent monks summoned by the Tang emperors were, the more powerful the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapels would be—especially when the emperor's difficulties seemed to be solved many times by various incredible Buddhist rituals performed by the Buddhist palace chaplains. The emperors' purposes of inviting the eminent monks into the Buddhist palace chapels to receive offerings can be broadly summarized into three aspects: first, to allow the Buddhist palace chaplains to perform regularly various Dharma events for different purposes in the sacred space; second, to create a holy place exclusively for the rule of the Tang Empire with the prestige and ability of the Buddhist palace chaplains; and third, more likely, to use the Buddhist palace chapel as a place to restrict the Buddhist leaders

with charismatic personality to prevent those with ulterior motives from using religion to undermine the existing order and oppose imperial rule. “A continuous reinforcement of the barriers against a free movement of charismatic persons is carried on by the custodians of the routine order” (Shils 1975, p. 130). This mentality of the Tang emperors towards the Buddhist palace chaplains, which was both exploitative and defensive, usually meant that the favor and trust from the imperial power was in fact very fragile and short-lived.⁵⁸ Only very few Buddhist palace chaplains were not treated like this, such as Wanhui. Why did Wanhui always manage to avoid political persecution without fail? His mad words and deeds might be a means of wisdom that he deliberately showed. As a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain with great charisma, he had to deal with the Tang emperor carefully so as not to arouse the emperor’s suspicion—this also confirms that Wanhui’s religious personality had a great influence on the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel. “Religious figures of more obvious historical and social significance—such as priests, prophets, and charismatic leaders—who often enjoy a widespread appeal, and at times even possess a dramatic potential for effecting far-reaching social transformations” (Silber 1995, pp. 1–2). We should recognize that when Wanhui won the great trust and favor of the imperial family of the Tang Dynasty with his charismatic religious personality and Buddha-wisdom, the status of the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel was also consolidated and even elevated, and thus the imperial rule was strengthened by the authority of the Buddhist palace chaplains and the influence of the Buddhist palace chapels—a good result of the close cooperation between the Buddhist monks and the imperial power.

4. Conclusions

As a final conclusion, let me highlight some major scholarly findings in this study. The historical sources I have used—including official materials such as the Tang inscriptions, the imperial edicts, the *Liang Tang shu*, the *Zizhi tongjian*, etc., the *Sengzhuan zhaichao* (in S.1624 of the British-collected Dunhuang documents written in the Five Dynasties (907–960)), and Buddhist hagiographies provided by Zanning in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) and Zhipan 志磐 (d. after 1269) in Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), together with literary sketches such as the *Taiping guangji*—agree that the miraculous monk Wanhui was closely related to the “rightful” successors of the Li-Tang imperial family, namely Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong. Although the available materials about Wanhui are too scattered to prove the nature of the relationship between Wanhui and the three Tang emperors, it is easy to see from the results of this study that Wanhui made political contributions by influencing public opinion with his religious prestige to win the favor and trust of the emperors. He was successful by making use of his religious identity and sublime religious appeal as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain, who “could not be understood by common sense in what he did and had a reason for what he said” (然其施作, 皆不可輒量, 出言則必有其故).⁵⁹

Although most of the literary sketches and the inscriptions only depict Wanhui as a “mad” monk whose words and deeds were mad and unpredictable, he was also regarded as a “miraculous monk” who was revered and believed by the people at that time for his efficacious predictions, his words about political affairs and his miraculous signs. In these texts, Wanhui is an outstanding person who is free from the fetters of the mundane. However, the impression left by the historical materials of monastic biographies and some official materials is very different from the image of Wanhui that the aforementioned literary sketches and inscriptions try to construct for readers.

Shi Dao’an 釋道安 (314–385), who was a Buddhist leader in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420), once argued that only under the dire survival predicament of surviving “the current famine years” (今遭凶年) could the Buddhist community be compelled to practice the expedient measure of “being unable to promote Buddhism without relying on the emperor” (不依國主, 則法事難立)⁶⁰ in order to keep the Buddhist community alive.⁶¹ Through history, there were also some monastic leaders who adhered to the principle of “not to go out of the mountains of their hermitages, not to deal with worldly people”

(影不出山、跡不入俗)⁶² for the rest of their lives, so as to minimize their dealings and entanglements with imperial power and politics as much as possible. In fact, in ancient China, Buddhist monks with vision, talent, courage and prestige—especially those in the north—either out of their subjective desire to protect and promote Buddhism or under the threat of political pressure of imperial orders, participated extensively and continuously in political activities and actively advised the emperor and planned politics. In the course of their mission to promote Buddhism and perpetuate the Buddhadharmā, they also aspired to increase their own power and wealth. In the Tang Dynasty, several emperors, out of their realistic political and religious needs, were close to or supported the Buddhist monks, who they valued in their role in consolidating of their political power and even the seizure of power by coup. Therefore, monks were involved in a series of political activities in various forms, bringing themselves and their Buddhist communities either a momentary favor from the emperor or death.

On the one hand, the monks in medieval China had to deal with such unfavorable external factors as the control and fetters imposed on Buddhism by the national religious system, the moral reprimands, economic exploitation and political interference by disbelieving court officials and local officials against Buddhism and monks, the destruction by disasters such as drought, famine, pestilence and war, and the infestation by thieves, among other challenges. On the other hand, they also had to face the rhetorical attacks from various sects within Buddhism. All these factors forced Buddhist monks to re-examine their on-the-ground situation and take the initiative to improve their relationship with the state power, and to establish and maintain limited cooperation between the state and Buddhism. Sometimes, however, circumstances forced them to give up their religious independence for a time, relying entirely on the support of state power and obeying the arrangement with the imperial family. In order to maintain the complex state-*sangha* relationship between the Buddhist community and the secular regime—full of tension but interdependent and mutually desirable—the leaders of the Buddhist community usually considered satisfying the ruler's real political interests with the religious skills they could provide. These skills included knowledge of Buddhist scriptures and non-Buddhist classic books, Buddhist rituals and even supernatural powers and divinations, which could build up religious momentum and advocate for public opinion to prove the legitimacy and sacredness of the regime in exchange for political support, resource supply and a guarantee of safety from the secular regime.

As the son of a garrison militia and the younger brother of an active-duty conscript at a frontier post, Wanhui was a monk from an ordinary family from the time of the Tang Dynasty, but he was able to rise to his high position as the leader of the Buddhist community in a few decades. We cannot say with confidence that there were no political factors involved. Admittedly, he grew up with miraculous abilities and behaved differently from ordinary people. “When Wanhui was a boy, he stacked tiles and stones to form a pagoda at Xingguo Temple of Wenxiang. Upon entering, the pagoda emitted light. Therefore, the people built a large loft to cover the pagoda” (先為兒時，於閩鄉興國寺累瓦石為佛塔。入內之後，其塔遂放光明，因建大閣而覆之)⁶³. Because of Wanhui's miracle of making a 10,000-mile round trip in a day, he was known to the imperial family, and was then called into the imperial palace to become a Buddhist palace chaplain. At the same time, he was given the opportunity to get close to the Tang imperial family. However, there were many Chinese monks, barbarian monks (*huseng* 胡僧; that is, a monk from Central Asia) and Sanskrit monks (*fanseng* 梵僧; that is, a monk from India) in the Tang Dynasty who were adept at supernatural powers and divinations—why was Wanhui the only one who had the ability to perform supernatural powers through the reigns of four emperors and have his holy favor remain intact? After reviewing the existing historical materials, we did not discover any reliance on Wanhui's familiarity with Buddhist scriptures and non-Buddhist classic books, proficiency in Buddhist rituals nor transmission of sectarian lineage. However, we often find in the literature that Wanhui was politically active during the reigns of Gaozong, Empress Wu, Zhongzong and Ruizong, and defended the “legitimacy” of the Li-Tang im-

perial family by means of predicting efficaciously and rebuking those who usurped and disturbed the imperial power of the Li-Tang, but unfailingly avoided political persecution.

The most common phenomenon in the world of politics and faith in the Tang Dynasty was that eminent monks who once had great power and prestige would retire from the stage of history with the succession of the new emperor, or that the ruler, because of his changing religious feelings and political interests, would ruthlessly wipe out his favored monks whom he once trusted and respected. Combined with the results of recent academic research on the state–*samgha* relationship of the Tang Dynasty, this phenomenon can be summarized as follows:

By studying the last ten years of Xuanzang’s life, Liu Shufen attributes his political disillusionment and spiritual hardship to the political storm in which Gaozong regained political dominance from the faction of old ministers who assisted in politics, in which Xuanzang was classified by Gaozong as being close to the old ministers (Liu 2009, pp. 1–98). By studying Degan 德感 (active in the seventh century AD), a disciple of Xuanzang and one of the “Ten *bhadanta*-monks” of Empress Wu, Sun Yinggang demonstrates that a monk proficient in Consciousness-only study played an important role in the incubation and creation of the Wu-Zhou 武周 (the dynasty established by Empress Wu) regime, but the historical truth was deliberately obscured due to the subsequent political sensitivity (Sun 2015, pp. 217–44); Jinhua Chen discusses the military activities and political relations of Faya 法雅 (?–629), a “Villain Monk” who was favored by Gaozu (r. 618–626), and points out that the main reason for his historical vilification is that his relationship with the regime collapsed in a catastrophic manner.⁶⁴ As for the notorious “Evil Monk” Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義 (?–694) and the “Villain Monk” Huifan 惠範 (also written as Huifan 慧範, ?–713) (Chen 2016, pp. 140–221), both of whom were reviled by the monks and laymen, they were quite talented and had made great political achievements. However, how could Wanhui, as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain with remarkable powers, win the favor and trust of four emperors throughout his life and keep himself safe through several coups?

First of all, unlike other monks of the Buddhist palace chapel, Wanhui was not appointed by the emperor to be a Buddhist palace chaplain to provide religious services such as sutra translation, conducting ordination, Buddhist services, and offering Buddhist relics to the Tang imperial family. The personal relationship between Wanhui and the imperial family was more intimate, which is especially obvious from the two facts: that Empress Wu asked Wanhui whether Crown Prince Huizhuang would live or die, and that Xuanzong personally visited Wanhui and asked for his future. Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–757) once wrote a poem to praise Wanhui’s high status: “When Wanhui acted foolishly, he would scare everyone; but when he was wise, he could become the emperor’s teacher. He acted in accordance with this era; there is no more capable person produced by heaven and earth” (愚也駭蒼生, 聖哉為帝師。當為時世出, 不由天地資).⁶⁵ As we can see, Wanhui was not only a spiritual teacher in the usual religious sense, but also an adviser, prophet and even imperial teacher with great wisdom and insight, advising the emperor and his heirs and foreseeing the future. “This ability to know the future in advance was highly valued; the monks also claimed that they had the same ability” (流俗之重, 莫如先知, 故沙門之見附會, 多在於此) (Lü 1982, p. 964). Wanhui was praised for his ability to predict the future, which attracted the imperial family and ministers to inquire about future fortune and misfortune. He was able to accurately predict the downfall of the powerful Empress Wu’s male favorite, Zhang Yizhi 張易之 (?–705), the execution of Empress Wei and Princess Anle, the restoration of Ruizong, the succession of Xuanzong and the rebellion of An-Shi. Wanhui’s accurate predictions satisfied the Tang imperial family’s need for political security; and the imperial family, out of their own practical considerations to avoid misfortune in the struggle for political power and their worries about danger, also needed a miraculous monk and a wise man such as Wanhui, who was an outsider to secular politics, to be prepared to explain the confusion encountered in real political affairs. In return, they gave Wanhui their long-term favor and trust.

Secondly, Wanhui always remained loyal to the “rightful” regime of Li-Tang, and rejected and showed his dislike of Empress Wu and Empress Wei, who usurped the imperial power of Li-Tang. Zanning’s historical writings revealed this for us. Wanhui saved the life of Crown Prince Huizhuang from Empress Wu, and prophetically implied that Ruizong’s sons were united in brotherly love. He publicly announced in the streets that Ruizong would regain the throne, predicted that Xuanzong would reign for fifty years, and deliberately revealed this to Xuanzong’s followers. It is hard to say that these are not political displays planned in advance by Ruizong, Xuanzong, and Wanhui, with the intention of using Wanhui’s popular ability of foresight and his religious identity as a miraculous Buddhist palace chaplain. These demonstrations would thereby create religious momentum and political propaganda in support for them to seize imperial power and succeed to the throne. As the most capable of Ruizong’s sons, Xuanzong must have been approved and assisted by Ruizong before he staged the “Tanglong Coup” and the “Xiantian Coup.” The final decision on the choice of crown prince was made after a political show in which the order of succession was determined by merit and the two brothers resigned one after another, but Ruizong and his sons must have already discussed the matter and made Xuanzong the crown prince. At the same time, Wanhui, who had become the leader of the Buddhist community in the year of Shenlong, could also influence the Buddhist community’s support for the imperial family of Li-Tang—a political force that could not be underestimated. In order to fight against political enemies and seize the throne, Ruizong and Xuanzong had to take care of the political interests and religious sentiments of Buddhist monks, and it was only right that they continued to honor Wanhui. Of course, it should also be understood that Wanhui predicted the demise of Zhang Yizhi, Empress Wei and Princess Anle, which objectively accelerated their political defeat, dealt a blow to those who usurped and disturbed the “rightful” imperial power of Li-Tang with public opinion and religious prediction and used the belief of the imperial family and bureaucrats in Wanhui to inspire the imperial family and bureaucrats loyal to the Li-Tang regime to rise up against them and set things right.

Finally, we need to note that religious beliefs, as ideologies, have a huge impact on human activities in the real world. “Religion, then, maintains the socially defined reality by legitimating marginal situations in terms of an all-encompassing sacred reality . . . Such situations may occur as the result of natural catastrophe, war or social upheaval. At such times, religious legitimations almost invariably come to the front. Furthermore, whenever a society must motivate its members to kill or to risk their lives, thus consenting to being placed in extreme marginal situations, religious legitimations become important” (Berger 2011, pp. 56–57). As the “rightful” successors of the Li-Tang regime, Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong fell into the political situation of Empress Wu’s reign, Empress Wei’s and Princess Anle’s chaotic rule and Princess Taiping’s interference in the regime for several decades. In order to regain the political power of Li-Tang, it was necessary to eliminate political enemies and consolidate political power through political blows and military interventions. At this point, the actions that the eminent monks could provide to rationalize the coup and legitimize the regime are particularly important. Wanhui, at the right time, assumed the responsibility of rationalizing and legitimizing the coups that allowed the Li-Tang imperial family to regain its “rightful” place in the sacred religious veneer. By virtue of his great religious appeal, he led the force of the Buddhist community, the political power of the imperial court and a group of believers to support the political actions of the imperial family, which to a certain extent reduced the resistance to the palace coup and provided religious rationalization for the reunification of the Li-Tang regime.

In summary, the interdependence and interaction between the sacred spaces of the Buddhist palace chapels and the religious personalities of the miraculous Buddhist palace chaplains in the Tang Dynasty emerge. As the Buddhist palace chapel was set up by the Tang imperial family in the palace, it naturally had the authority and legitimacy of imperial power. In return, its religious sacred space gave Wanhui, a monk living in the Buddhist palace chapel, a rich religious sacredness, mystical charm and strong political support,

which provided a political guarantee for Wanhui to establish an intimate personal relationship with the imperial family. At the same time, Wanhui's incomparable charisma and the methods of religious momentum won the favor and trust of the Tang imperial family, which in turn strengthened the religious and political functions of the unique Buddhist institution in the service of imperial power. This power manifested itself in the consolidation and elevation of the status of the Buddhist palace chapel's sacred space.

This study provides an academic discussion of the reasons shaping the political and religious images of Wanhui by reorganizing and examining the historical documents on Wanhui. As we have seen above, a large number of hagiographies and literary sketches have consciously portrayed Wanhui as an anti-traditional eminent monk with both the personality of a "mad monk," whose words and deeds were mad and unpredictable, and the personality of a "miraculous monk," whose predictions were always efficacious and whose miracles were frequently seen. The former is the outward secular appearance of the latter, and the latter is the inner sanctified character of the former. The combination of these two identities in Wanhui's religious personality made him a charismatic and distinctive Buddhist leader. It is essential that the influence of Wanhui's displayed charisma is recognized or regarded as such: "On the one hand, the charisma may lead to excesses of derangement and deviance, on the other hand charismatic personalities or collectivities may be the bearers of great cultural social innovations and creativity, religious, political, or economic" (Weber 1968, p. xx). Thus, Wanhui was able to display his accurate prophecies and unparalleled charisma to the fullest extent under the guise of his mad words and deeds, and to gain the favor of emperors and the worship of the nobles, scholar-officials and ordinary people while defending the "legitimacy" of the Li-Tang imperial family and helping others compassionately. His charismatic religious personality not only greatly enhanced the political status of the Buddhist palace chapel, which could serve as a shortcut for Buddhist monks to cooperate with the highest secular authority, but also played an important role in promoting the development of Buddhism and maintaining its religious influence in the Tang Empire.

In this article, the author tries to conduct textual research on the content of different hagiographies by means of comparative material research as far as possible, and thus has discovered the deep meanings contained in the descriptions of the hagiographies and drew several valuable historical conclusions. However, at the same time, we have to admit that whether for political purposes or religious intentions, the compilers deliberately exaggerated the political influence and religious appeal of Wanhui, overplayed the influence of the sacred space in the Buddhist palace chapel on Wanhui's status, and reinterpreted or distorted certain narrative elements in the historical background. Additionally, they often added some incredible legendary elements to attach historically verifiable facts to highlight that Wanhui, as a miraculous monk, had great skills and powerful abilities to save the common people with Buddha-wisdom and supernatural powers. The self-consistent reason of its inner logic can be attributed to the unimaginable sacred religious personality of Wanhui and the infinite use of the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel. Robert Campamy says: "Precisely because hagiography intends to inspire belief, veneration, and perhaps emulation, its depictions of the contexts of religious life must be, for the most part, realistic, which is to say, recognizable and familiar to readers" (Campamy 2002, p. 101). More importantly, we should be aware that any given hagiography contains both verifiable historical details and hidden hagiographical elements that deserve to be reinterpreted, and it is a matter of serious consideration how to properly treat the materials provided by the Buddhist hagiographies. In addition, a comparative material study of various hagiographical texts about Wanhui can more clearly verify the interdependence and interaction between the sacred space of the Buddhist palace chapel and the religious personality of Wanhui. Therefore, we can uphold the spirit of serious academic criticism and the ability of prudent historical research to discover the intrinsic logical connections in the complex and fragmentary hagiographical materials, and conduct a comparative study both with various documents passed down through generations and inscriptions on stone

tablets, with a view to reconstructing the obscured historical stories and characters as much as possible. With this, we restore the political and religious image of Wanhui to the greatest extent in accordance with textual research on comparative hagiographical materials and the characteristics of Buddhism itself.

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Notes

- 1 On Wanhui, see Cui (2016, pp. 110–17); Cui (2008, pp. 75–87); Hu (2019, pp. 112–14); Yang (2019, p. 14).
- 2 Chen (2007, p. 7). The third approach is from John Kieschnick’s academic viewpoint. See Kieschnick (1997, p. 1).
- 3 See the footnote written by the translator. Eliade and Wang (2002, p. 5).
- 4 On sacred space, see Chen and Sun (2014, pp. 10–466); Huang (2020, pp. 1–212); Lin (2014, pp. 25–178).
- 5 According to the research of Professor Jinhua Chen, the *neidaochang* can “have three possible meanings: (1) Buddhist observances performed in the imperial palace, (2) a place within the imperial palace for Buddhist observances, and finally (3) a Buddhist chapel within the imperial palace.” See Chen (2004, pp. 101–2); Chen (2006, pp. 44–45). Since this article is discussing the sacred space of specific buildings, the *neidaochang* refers to the latter two meanings. The purpose of translating “the *neidaochang*” as “the Buddhist palace chapel” is to emphasize the religious and political characteristics of this special institution. It is necessary to add that the author believes the Buddhist palace chapel implies a fourth meaning, namely, a system of the Buddhist palace chapel. It is because only when there was a normalized operating mechanism belonging to the religious management system of the Tang Dynasty in the Buddhist palace chapel that it could respond to the orders of the imperial power at any time to meet the religious and political needs of different emperors, such as translating Buddhist scriptures, making offerings to Buddha’s finger-bone relic, holding Buddhist rituals, managing state religious affairs, regularly performing religious performances, etc.
- 6 On hagiography and comparative hagiography, see Zimbalist (2019, pp. 1–8); Rondolino (2017, pp. 1–242); Rondolino (2020, pp. 1–4); Orsi (2016, pp. 12–252); Vélez (2019, pp. 1–249).
- 7 He is also called “Wanhui” 萬迴 and “Wanhui” 萬迴 in the documents of the *neidian* 內典 (Buddhist scriptures) and the *waidian* 外典 (non-Buddhist classic books). The conclusion is roughly the same after conducting textual research and proofreading the records about “Wanhui” 萬回, “Wanhui” 萬迴 and “Wanhui” 萬迴 in the *neidian* such as the “*Song Gaoseng zhuan*” 宋高僧傳, the “*Jingde chuandeng lu*” 景德傳燈錄, the “*Fozu tongji*” 佛祖統紀, etc., and the *waidian* such as the “*Liang Tang shu*” 兩《唐書》 (including the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 and the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書) and the “*Taiping guangji*” 太平廣記, etc. It can be seen that “the differences between the traditional characters and simplified ones are changes in the circulation of ancient books, and it is impossible for two different monks to appear at the same time in the same event,” so they all refer to the same person. See Zhang (1990, p. 28).
- 8 The county town of Wenxiang is adjacent to Qinling 秦嶺 in the south, Hangu guan 函谷關 in the east, and Tong guan 潼關 in the west. Today, it belongs to a submerged area with an altitude of 333 meters below formed by the impoundment of the Sanmenxia 三門峽 Reservoir of the Yellow River.
- 9 The detailed dates of Wanhui’s birth and death can only be found in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, and other documents have no records. See *Jingde chuandeng lu* 27.433 a23-c8. “Liquan li” is the Liquan fang 醴泉坊 in the south of Chang’an city, where the dignitaries set up their private estates.
- 10 Only the *Sengzhuan zhaichao* 僧傳摘抄 in S.1624 of the British-collected Dunhuang documents written in the Five Dynasties (907–960) mentions that Wanhui was born in a family of the *Fubin* 府兵 (Garrison Militia). Hao and Zhao (2010, pp. 373–74).
- 11 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 12 *Fozu tongji jiaozhu* 40.925.
- 13 *Fozu tongji jiaozhu* 40.925.
- 14 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 15 In medieval China, Wanhui was regarded as a typical representative of miraculous or “mad” monks similar to Baozhi, Sangha 僧伽 (628–710), Shi Qici 釋契此 (?–916), etc. They formed another tradition within the group of eminent monks in Chinese Buddhist history, counteracting the tendency toward excessive rationalism and scholasticism that appeared within the Buddhist community, and prominently showing the traces of self-adjustment made by Buddhism in the process of its sinicization. In the Muromachi period (1336–1573) of Japan, Zen Master Ikkyū 一休 (1394–1481) was also regarded as such a miraculous or “mad”

monk. Let me briefly list some relevant studies, see Bruneton (2012, pp. 117–51); Fowler (2000, pp. 2–10); Huang (2010, pp. 59–98); Xie and Li (2020, pp. 47–55); Arntzen (2022, pp. 1–252).

- 16 The “bizhu” 匕筮, which is also called the “bizhu” 匕箸, refers to the spoons and the chopsticks used as the tableware.
- 17 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454–455. The *gu* 蠱, a poisonous insect, refers to a form of black magic that was outlawed during the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD). The *chenwei shu* 讖緯書 refers to the book of prophecy combined with mystical Confucianist belief which was prevalent since the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). It is also written as the *tuchen* 圖讖 because there are often pictures attached to the book. Because the books of prophecy were often used by the imperial family to gain political power and to prove the legitimacy of its source of power, from the Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, the imperial family prohibited anyone else from privately possessing the books of prophecy. Wanhui’s behavior reminded the Cui family to discover the book of prophecy in time and destroy it, so as to avoid family disasters caused by the cruel officials’ framing them.
- 18 *Jiu Tang shu* 91.2935.
- 19 *Jiu Tang shu* 91.2934–2935.
- 20 *Youyang zazu jiaojian* 3.405.
- 21 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.456.
- 22 *Jiu Tang shu* 95.3015; *Xin Tang shu* 81.3600.
- 23 *Jiu Tang shu* 95.3015.
- 24 *Zizhi tongjian* 209.6854–6855.
- 25 *Quan Tang wen* 38.415–416.
- 26 *Quan Tang wen* 38.415.
- 27 *Quan Tang wen* 293.2971.
- 28 *Taiping guangji* 92.607.
- 29 The meaning of Shuren 庶人 is commoner. Empress Wei was killed in the imperial palace during the Tanglong Coup in 710, and after her death, she was relegated to a commoner for her crime. So, she is called Shuren in the narrative of the *Taiping guangji*.
- 30 *Taiping guangji* 92.607.
- 31 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455–456.
- 32 *Jiu Tang shu* 7.150.
- 33 A summary of related discussions can be found in Ou (2018, pp. 96–103).
- 34 The term “qianlong” 潛龍 is from the “Qiangua” 乾卦 [the hexagram of Qian] in vol. 1 of the *Zhouyi* 周易 [the Book of Changes], and its political meaning refers to the period prior to the emperor’s accession to the throne.
- 35 The disaster of Lushan (*Lushan zhi huo* 祿山之禍) refers to the An-Shi Rebellion, the war launched by two Tang generals, An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757) and Shi Siming 史思明 (703–761) against the Tang central government from the end of Xuanzong’s reign to the beginning of Daizong (r. 762–779)’s reign (16 December 755–17 February 763).
- 36 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455–456.
- 37 *Jiu Tang shu* 106.3247.
- 38 *Jiu Tang shu* 8.165.
- 39 *Jiu Tang shu* 8.167.
- 40 According to the *Taiping Guangji*, “Princess Taiping built a house for Wanhui to the right of her own mansion. During the years of Jingyun, [Wanhui] died in this residence” (太平公主為造宅於己宅之右。景雲中, [萬回] 卒於此宅). *Taiping guangji* 92.607. Additionally, according to vol. 10 of the *Chang’an zhi* 長安志 [Records of Chang’an City] compiled by Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (1019–1079), “in the further south, is the Liquan fang . . . The residence of Princess Taiping is located in the southeast corner. After her death, the residence was confiscated and used as King Shaan’s Palace. To the north, it is the residence of Fanghui, a miraculous monk, which was built for him by Princess Taiping” (次南醴泉坊 東南隅, 太平公主宅。公主死後沒官, 為陝王府。宅北有異僧方回宅, 太平公主為造之). *Chang’an zhi Chang’an zhi tu* 10.336–337. The word “Fanghui” 方回 here is obviously an incorrect spelling of “Wanhui.” It can be seen that the residence of Princess Taiping was located in the southeast of Liquan fang in Chang’an City, and to the north of it was the residence of Wanhui, and the two residences were located next to each other.
- 41 *Jiu Tang shu* 106.3248.
- 42 As a Buddhist palace chaplain with deep ties to the Tang imperial family, Wanhui, despite his heretical behavior, had a political stance which was very close to the Confucian political concept of “legitimacy”—he seemed to insist that the Li-Tang regime was the legitimacy and the Wu-Zhou regime was a pseudo-regime. Although modern academic research on the history of the Tang Dynasty has long shown that this concept is mixed with excessively arbitrary value judgments and does not correspond to the actual historical impact, for the sake of convenience, quotation marks are used to emphasize that the terms “legitimacy” and “rightful” in the thesis do not use the original meaning.
- 43 On Charisma, see Weber (1968, pp. 1–369); Tambiah (1984, pp. 321–47); Cohen (2017, pp. 1–272); Silber (1995, pp. 1–221).

- 44 The term “Tripitaka Master” refers to a respectful title for a monk who is proficient in the Tripitaka, including Sutra-pitaka, Vinaya-pitaka and Abhidharma-pitaka.
- 45 See [Chen \(2004, pp. 108–56\)](#); [Weinstein \(1987, pp. 11–47\)](#).
- 46 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455. There are some punctuational mistakes in this passage of this version published by Zhonghua shuju, and the author has corrected them all in the text. The sentence that originally had punctuational mistakes is: “*Zang gui qiujian, Hui bian sheli wen xiyu, wanru muzhu*” (樊歸求見, 回便設禮問西域, 宛如目矚). In addition, “*yuzi wanhui*” (于茲萬回) is also a relatively difficult sentence. In ancient Chinese, the “*yuzi*” has many meanings such as “here,” “so far,” “this life,” “sigh,” etc. According to the content of the preceding and following texts, after the monks of Shizang Temple introduced Xuanzang to the reason for the reincarnation of the eminent monk who had previously lived in that empty room, they would naturally talk about his name in this life. We cannot understand “*yuzi wanhui*” as a distance of 10,000 miles from India to China, and it takes one day for Wanhui to go back and forth between the two places. Therefore, we confirm that the “*yuzi*” means “in this life,” and “*yuzi wanhui*” means that “he is named Wanhui in this life.”
- 47 *Taiping guangji* 92.607. The term “*sanyi pingbo*” 三衣瓶鉢 means “*sanyi yibo*” 三衣一鉢. The *sanyi* and the *yibo* (an alms bowl) are two of the six items that monks should carry with them. The *sanyi* refers to the three types of clothing that a monk can personally own according to Buddhist vinaya, including samghāti, uttarāsaṅga and antarvāsa. They can only be made into mute-colored (Skt. kaṣāya; Ch. *huai’sè* 壞色) cloths, so they are also called kasaya.
- 48 *Datang xiyu ji jiaozhu* 1.8.
- 49 In addition to “*yuzi wanhui*,” there are two explanations for the origin of Wanhui’s name: one is “*wanli er hui*,” and the other is “*kou zihu wanhui, yin’er ziyuan*” (口自呼萬回, 因爾字焉), which means that Wanhui called himself “Wanhui,” so everyone also called him Wanhui. *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454. For other related research, see [Cui \(2016, pp. 111–12\)](#).
- 50 This is obviously a double entendre. The superficial meaning of Menghong’s words is simply “to come back,” while the deeper meaning implies that “Wanhui will come into the Buddhist palace chapel.”
- 51 *Jingde chuandeng lu* 27.433 b4-6.
- 52 The Tiangong Temple was located at the Tianjin Bridge of the north of Shangshan fang in the eastern part of Luoyang, not at the Guanshan fang as stated in vol. 48 of the *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要 [Collection of Essential Material of the Tang]. The eminent monks of the early Tang Dynasty, Minglüe 明略 (572–638), Huixiu 惠秀 (c. 614–c. 713), Baosiwei 寶思維 (?–712), Shenxiu, etc., came to live in this temple by imperial decree. See *Tang Huiyao* 48.847; *Zengding Tang liangjing chengfang kao (xiuding ban)* 5.292–293; [Li \(2006, pp. 64–65\)](#). At Tiangong Temple, Chan Master [Shenxiu] received full ordination (Skt. Upasampanna or Upasampadā; Ch. *Juzujie* 具足戒) in Wude 8 [yiyou], and died in (Shenlong 2) *bingwu*. He was a monk for eighty years ([神秀] 禪師武德八年乙酉受具於天宮, 至是年丙午復終於此寺. 蓋僧臘八十矣). See the “Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu” in *Quan Tang wen* 293.2335.
- 53 In the Chinese calendar, the *Jiawang* 既望 refers to the day after the full moon, the *Zhongqiu* 仲秋 refers to the second month of autumn. That is the second day of the Mid-Autumn Festival.
- 54 The “Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu” in *Quan Tang wen* 293.2335. The word “xi” 錫 could be a incorrect spelling of “ci” 賜.
- 55 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.453.
- 56 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.455.
- 57 *Jingde chuandeng lu* 27.433 b2-4.
- 58 For the studies of several Buddhist palace chaplains who had intimate relations with the Tang emperors, see [Liu \(2009, pp. 1–98\)](#); [Sun \(2015, pp. 217–44\)](#); [Chen \(2017, pp. 208–30\)](#); [Chen \(2016, pp. 140–221\)](#); [Cui \(2016, pp. 110–17\)](#).
- 59 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 60 For related scholarly discussions, see [Wang \(2012, pp. 128–33\)](#); [Gu \(2015, pp. 154–65\)](#); [Xia \(2003, pp. 215–17\)](#).
- 61 *Chu sanzang jiji* 15.562.
- 62 The most representative figure is Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) of Lushan 廬山 (Mount Lu) in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Although he lived in seclusion on Mount Lu for more than thirty years and only stopped at Huxi 虎溪 (Tiger Stream) to welcome and send off his guests and friends, he had to communicate on multiple occasions with Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404), Yin Zhongkan 殷仲堪 (?–399) and Emperor Jin’an Sima Dezong 晉安帝司馬德宗 (382–419) by letter for the sake of the survival of the Buddhist community on Mount Lu and the promotion of Buddhism in the south. He advocated that monks should be “guests outside the secular world” (*fangwai zhi bin* 方外之賓) and maintain their own independence and that of the Buddhist community, which won the respect of the rulers.
- 63 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 18.454.
- 64 For the Chinese version, see [Chen \(2020, pp. 75–148\)](#). The English version was published in [Chen \(2017, pp. 208–30\)](#).
- 65 Wang Changling 王昌齡, “Xiangjisi libai Wanhui Pingdeng er shengseng ta” 香積寺禮拜萬回平等二聖僧塔 [Worship The Pagoda of Two Sage Monks, Wanhui and Pingdeng] in *Quan Tang shi* 141.1431.

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