

**Chinese apocrypha titled *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing*
and its material culture in the medieval Chinese
society**

Ying Chen

St Peter's College

DPhil in the School of Archaeology

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Abstract

This thesis explores changes in the content and material culture of a group of scriptures known as the *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing* 佛說父母恩重經 (the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*) during the Tang (618–907) and Northern Song (960–1127) dynasties, examining their relationship to the broader development of Buddhist beliefs and Confucian and other pre-existing non-Buddhist ideas, such as filial piety and ancestor worship. In contrast to previous philological studies that sought to identify the various versions of this scripture and determine the textual origins of its composition, this thesis pays special attention to the objects on which the scriptures are written and inscribed, such as stelae and manuscripts. By giving serious consideration to their inscriptions, material forms, and physical locations against the socio-political backdrop that encouraged their production, this project addresses questions of the uses of the stelae and manuscripts by ordinary, largely unrecorded people in rural localities of Shandong and Dunhuang and the purposes of their patronage.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Foshuo fumu enzhong jing 佛說父母恩重經 (the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*, later abbreviated as the *PPK Sutra*) is a group of Buddhist scriptures composed in China that became popular during the Tang (618–907) and Northern Song (960–1127) Dynasties. Its popularity is attested by different forms of material culture that survive till today, including manuscripts, stone stelae, sculptures, and paintings. This group of scriptures all share the theme of the profoundness of parents' kindness and how to repay it. However, the contents of the scriptures vary, and these differences range from a few sentences to whole passages. This variation and its implications for textual history have perplexed scholars.¹ Recently discovered stone stelae enrich our understanding of their textual history, which is more complex than previously assumed.² Moreover, this thesis will reveal the historical and social circumstances under which the manuscripts and stone stelae were created, which have been neglected in the past studies. The scriptures on how to repay parents'

¹ Tokushi Yūshō 禿氏祐祥, "Bumo onjū kyō no ihon ni tsuite 『父母恩重經』の異本について", *Shūkyō kenkyū* 宗教研究, 1928, pp. 116-123. Sun Xiushen 孫修身, "Foshuo fumu enzhong jing banben yanjiu 佛說父母恩重經版本研究", in Dunhuang Yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 (ed.), *Duan Wenjie Dunhuang yanjiu wushinian jinian wenji* 段文傑敦煌研究五十年紀念文集, Beijing, Shijie tushu chubanshe 世界圖書出版公司, 1996, pp. 239-249. Ma Shichang 馬世長, "Fumu enzhong jing xieben yu bianxiang 《父母恩重經》寫本與變相", in Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 (ed.), *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji* 敦煌研究文集, Gansu, Gansu minzu chubanshe, pp. 239-419. Arai Keiyo 新井慧譽, "Tonkō hon Bumo onjū kyō ni tsuite 敦煌本『父母恩重經』について", *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度學佛學研究, no.50, 2002, pp. 152-158. Zhang Yongquan 張湧泉, "Dunhuang ben Foshuo fumu enzhong jing yanjiu 敦煌本《佛說父母恩重經》研究", in *Zhang Yongquan Dunhuang wenxian luncong* 張湧泉敦煌文獻論叢, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, pp. 260-297.

² Shandong shike yishu bowuguan 山東石刻藝術博物館, "Shandong Juancheng, Chengwu, Jinxiang shike diaocha 山東鄆城、成武、金鄉石刻調查", *Kaogu* 考古, no.6, 1996, pp. 22-29. Zhang Zong 張總, "Shike fojing zhong de xincailliao yu xinjielu 石刻佛經中的新材料與新解讀", in Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 and Li Xiaocong 李孝聰 (ed.), *Zhongwai guanxishi: xinshiliao yu xinweni* 中外關係史: 新史料與新問題, Beijing, Kexue chubanshe, 2004, p. 212. Ren Xiaoxing 任小行, "Beisong Yongxi ernian Fumu enzhong jing bei 北宋雍熙二年《父母恩重經》碑", *Zhongguo wenwu bao* 中國文物報, 3 December, 2013, p. 8. Liu Xiufeng 劉秀峰 and Huang Renlong 黃仁龍, "Tang Foshuo fumu enzhongjing bei 唐《佛說父母恩重經》碑", *Guangming ribao* 光明日報, 3 July 2015, p. 6.

kindness, once composed and spread among the populace, were not texts existing aloof from society. Their popularity could not be separated from the objects that bore them, which did much more than simply record. Rather, through engagement with these objects, individuals possessing sufficient literacy could chant, transcribe, and recompose the scriptures, which in turn would facilitate transmission to the non-literate, creating opportunities for various kinds of spiritual, intellectual, and communal experience. Even the literal act of setting words in stone could be one of revivification and reinterpretation, not merely the construction of a static tradition.

1.1 The notion of ‘apocrypha’ in Chinese Buddhism and the *PPK Sutra*

The term ‘apocrypha’ is an appropriation of a term typically applied to Jewish and Christian scriptures. However, the relationship between canonical scripture and non-canonical apocrypha is significantly different in Buddhism compared with the Jewish and Christian tradition. This section first discusses the appropriateness of using the Western term ‘apocrypha’ to refer to indigenous Chinese Buddhist scriptures. Secondly, it discusses how the notion of ‘apocrypha’ is related to the study of Chinese Buddhist texts and more specifically, the *PPK Sutra*.

The word ‘apocrypha’ derives from the Greek word *apokryphos*, which refers to writings that are ‘hidden away’ or ‘secret’.³ According to R.H. Charles, there are three usages of the term in the early tradition of Jewish and Christian scriptures. First, *apokryphos* refer to writings ‘in a laudatory significance’ that were withheld from the public because they embodied mysterious or esoteric wisdom. Second, the word refers to writings that were withheld from public circulation because their value was

³ Costantino Moretti, *Genèse d’un apocryphe bouddhique : le Sūtra de la pure délivrance*, Paris, Institut des Hautes-études chinoises, 2016, p. 11.

secondary or questionable. Lastly, by extension, the word was applied to ‘what was false, spurious or heretical’.⁴ Thus, the implication of the word, whether honourable or derogatory, depends on its contexts and how it was used.⁵

The words ‘apocrypha’ and ‘apocryphal’ have had different meanings throughout history. According to W.O.E. Oesterley, who capitalizes the term ‘Apocrypha’, it was first used to designate books containing hidden teachings not to be disclosed to ordinary people. Meanwhile, Origen (185?-254?) used ‘Apocrypha’ in reference to books which are now considered as Pseudepigrapha. By the fourth century in the Greek church, the word ‘Apocrypha’ meant non-canonical books read for edification, but the adjective ‘apocryphal’ was still applied to those which were called Pseudepigrapha. From Jerome’s time to the present, ‘Apocrypha’ has referred to *libri ecclesiastici*—non-canonical but edifying books—as distinguished from *libri canonici*. The adjective ‘apocryphal’ thus acquired a new dominant denotation, referring to books that are legitimate and useful but non-canonical.⁶ Therefore, ‘Apocrypha’ does not refer to heretical books, but rather religious books that are not contained in and lack the full authority of those in the Bible.⁷

Buswell has noted several problems in applying the term ‘apocrypha’ to the corpus of Buddhist literature. First, it has been used to refer to different writings, and the meaning of the term itself is imprecise in the tradition of Jewish and Christian scriptures. Second, the Buddhist scriptural collection was an open canon and did not have a restricted body of scripture, which is comparable to the Bible. Thirdly,

⁴ For a detailed summary of the three usages of the word *apokryphos*, see Buswell, “Prolegomenon to the Study of Buddhist Apocryphal Scriptures”, in Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (ed.), *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, p. 3. R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, Vol.I, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, p. viii.

⁵ Bruce Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 5.

⁶ W.O.E. Oesterley, *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha*, New York, the Macmillan Co., 1935, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Moses Hadas, introduction to *The Apocrypha: An American Translation*, Edgar J. Goodspeed, trans., New York, Random House, Vintage Books, 1959, p. xvi.

indigenous Buddhist scriptures were often composed by learned authors, and these texts were as authoritative as canonical sutras. Therefore, the texts were hardly questioned as heretical.⁸ He argues that the term 'pseudepigrapha', or 'writings of falsely ascribed authorship', is more suitable in a Buddhist context.⁹ Pseudepigrapha and so-called Buddhist apocrypha share many similarities. For example, the Buddhist apocrypha were composed as Indian scriptures by adopting stylistic features, Sanskrit transliterations, and Indian proper names and place names. Like the Pseudepigrapha which are often ascribed to famous saints, Buddhist apocryphal texts are attributed to the Buddha.¹⁰

Scriptures that were composed in China are also referred to as 'indigenous scriptures' or 'original Chinese scriptures' by modern scholars. They are less concise compared to the single word 'apocrypha', which is probably another reason why the term 'apocrypha' is widely used. To avoid confusion caused by the ambiguous meaning of 'apocrypha' deriving from the tradition of Jewish and Christian scriptures, Buswell used the term 'apocrypha' in reference to 'indigenous Buddhist texts composed outside the Indian cultural sphere, but on the model of Indian or Serindian scripture. Such texts were sometimes written in association with a revelatory experience, but often were intentionally forged using false ascriptions as a literary device both to enhance their authenticity as well as to strengthen their chances of being accepted as canonical'.¹¹ Thus, use of the word 'apocrypha' is primarily the result of convention, and does not exactly match its original meanings in the Jewish and Christian context.

⁸ Buswell, "Prolegomenon to the Study of Buddhist Apocryphal Scriptures", p. 4.

⁹ Buswell, p. 4.

¹⁰ Buswell, p. 5.

¹¹ Buswell, p. 5.

For most scholars of Buddhism, however, the term ‘apocrypha’ should be clarified, not discarded. This thesis adopts the clarification of ‘apocrypha’ quoted above to refer to the Buddhist scriptures composed in China on the model of Indian Buddhist scriptures. In this context, the usage of ‘apocrypha’ is closely related to the modality of the introduction of Buddhism in China. Its spread in China is inseparable from the translation of texts which were originally from India or Central Asia. By the time Buddhism arrived and spread in China, there were already a large number of Buddhist texts, which contained different theories and heterogeneous contents. To understand these texts and to classify them as canonical or apocryphal, Buddhist scholars occupied themselves with compiling bibliographical catalogues.

Kuo Liying’s study has shown that Buddhist scholars who compiled bibliographical catalogues made a clear distinction between authentic and apocryphal sutras. Authentic sutras are called *zhenjing* 真經 (‘true’ or ‘genuine’ scriptures), which were directly translated from Indian or Central Asian languages. Apocryphal Buddhist scriptures, meanwhile, signifies ones of dubious origin, referred to in the sources as ‘spurious books’ (*weijing* 偽經) or ‘books of doubtful authenticity’ (*yijing* 疑經).¹² For Chinese scholar-monks, the main criterion to judge the authenticity of a text was to ask whether or not it had been transmitted from outside China and translated into Chinese. Even this standard sometimes led to confusion: some non-Buddhist Indian sources remained in the Chinese Buddhist canon because they met the criterion of being translated from Sanskrit or other Central Asian languages.¹³ However, the criteria for judging whether a

¹² Kuo Liying, “Sur les apocryphes bouddhiques chinois”, *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient*, 87,2,2000, p. 683.

¹³ Stefano Zacchetti, “Notions and Visions of the Canon in Early Chinese Buddhism”, in Jiang Wu and Lucille Chia (ed.), *Spreading Buddha’s Word in East Asia: The Formation and Transformation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 84 and note 17. For an overview of the study of Chinese Buddhist apocrypha, see Toru Funayama, “Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha”, in Jonathan A. Silk (ed.), *Brill’s Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Leiden, Brill, 2015, pp. 283-291. Yang Mei 楊梅, “Zhongguo fojiao weijing yanjiu gaishu 中國佛教偽經研究概述”, in *2006 nian*

sutra was authentic or apocryphal could also be blurred, depending on the time period. As a result, certain dubious texts were cataloged as false, but at other times, false sutras were introduced or reintroduced into the canon.¹⁴ The *PPK Sutra*, for example, was categorized as apocryphal in the late seventh and eighth centuries. For different scholar-monks, however, the classification of the sutras changed. In the ninth century, its apocryphal status was no longer mentioned in Buddhist catalogues.¹⁵

Contemporary scholars have proposed different typologies to classify Chinese Buddhist apocrypha, which implies different approaches to studying the texts. One of the common categories is scriptures that incorporate popular Chinese beliefs and synthesize differing elements in Chinese traditional thought and religion.¹⁶ Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 called such texts *shomin kyōten* 庶民經典 (ordinary people's sutras), which aim to explain the teaching of the Buddha to people of all levels of understanding, in particular to the lay Buddhists, in readily comprehensible language.¹⁷ The *PPK Sutra*, as will be shown in later chapters, is one of the most popular apocrypha in this category. Its plain language indicates that its main audience consisted of ordinary people and lay Buddhists. In addition, its theme was the profoundness of parents' kindness, which struck a chord with the Confucian teaching on filial piety.

1.2 The role of Buddhist texts and their impact on material culture

Dunhuangxue guoji lianluo weiyuanhui tongxun 2006 年敦煌學國際聯絡委員會通訊, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, pp. 60-70.

¹⁴ Costantino Moretti, *Genèse d'un apocryphe*, p. 14. For a concrete example of this phenomenon, see Antonino Forte, "The Relativity of the Concept of the Orthodoxy in Chinese Buddhism: Chih-sheng's Indictment of Shi-li and the Proscription of the Dharma Mirror Sūtra", in Robert E. Buswell (ed.), *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1990, pp. 239-249.

¹⁵ See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of the record of the *PPK Sutra* in different Buddhist catalogues.

¹⁶ Buswell, pp. 9-11.

¹⁷ Makita Tairyō, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究, Kyōto, Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1976, pp. 125-147.

‘Thus have I heard’: most Buddhist sutras open with this phrase, which embodies the original way to transmit the Buddha’s teaching through oral recitation.¹⁸ It is a few centuries after the death of Śākyamuni that his teaching was recorded in writing. Sutras were first recorded in writing in Pali, Sri Lanka around the first century BCE.¹⁹ At the end of the first century in Gandhara, northern India, the great Kushan emperor Kanishka sponsored a council of monks to compile Buddhist sutras and their commentaries.²⁰ This period marks an important development in the material culture of Buddhist scriptures, since a number of prominent Buddhist scriptures under the heading of ‘Mahāyāna’ from this period state that the act of copying Buddhist scriptures brings religious merit.²¹ It is part of what has been called ‘the cult of books’.

One of the earliest scriptures, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, states that ‘where this perfection of wisdom has been written down in a book, and has been put up and worshipped...there men and ghosts can do no harm, except as a punishment for past deeds’.²² Thus, the power of Buddhist scriptures surpasses its textual function of delivering the Buddha’s teaching. Manuscripts or printed books that bear the scriptures become the object to be worshipped, and in turn, they offer protection and blessings to its worshippers. In turn, ‘the cult of books’ also encourages the production of manuscripts and inscriptions of

¹⁸ There are at least three different interpretations of the famous opening formula “Thus have I heard” based on three different ideas of how to punctuate the phrase. For a discussion of the phrase in early Chinese Buddhist translations, see Jan Nattier, “Now You Hear It, Now You Don’t: the Phrase ‘Thus Have I Heard’ in Early Chinese Buddhist Translations”, in Tansen Sen (ed.), *Buddhism across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*. Vol.1, Singapore, ISEAS Publishing and New Delhi, Manoh, 2014, pp. 39-64.

¹⁹ Mizuno Kōgen, *Buddhist Sūtras: Origin, Development, Transmission*, Tokyo, Kōsei publishing Co., 1982, p. 160.

²⁰ Mizuno, *Buddhist Sūtras*, 1982, p. 161. Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 18.

²¹ The notion of merit goes back to at least the second century B.C. In Indian Buddhism it is believed that the production and donation of stupas, images, and monastic buildings will bring merit to the donors. The merit can also be transferred to other people, such as the donors’ parents, siblings, or other intimates. See John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 158-164.

²² The example is taken from Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, pp. 164-165. The passage is translated by Edward Conze from a Sanskrit version of the text the *Perfect of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary*, pp. 104-106. It is also discussed in Gregory Schopen, “The phrase ‘sa pthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet’ in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the cult of the book in Mahāyāna”, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17, no.3-4 (Nov.-Dec. 1975), pp. 147-187.

Buddhist texts. One of the earliest examples are fourteen miniature stupas that range in height from seventeen to ninety-six centimetres. They have been discovered in the Gansu corridor and in the Turfan District of Xinjiang. Seven of the fourteen stupas have dates ranging from 426 to 436. Most of them were made under the rule of Juqu Mengxun (r.401-433), an ardent Buddhist of the Northern Liang Dynasty (398-439). Nine of the stupas bear names of the lay Buddhist donors who commissioned them. The stupas consist of four discrete tiers. On the tier above their bases is a passage carved in Chinese from the *Ekottarikāgama Sutra*, which expounds the doctrine of dependent origin.²³ This passage has also been discovered inside votive stupas in India and was intended as a substitute for relics.²⁴ Multiple examples can be found in early Mahāyāna literature where the Dharma was identified as the true body of the Buddha.²⁵ The practice of depositing Buddhist scriptures in stupas is mentioned in the *Paṭyutapanna Sutra*, which are found in its early translations into Chinese, dating from the early third century CE.²⁶

The spread of Buddhism is very much dependent on its texts. When there was fear and anxiety concerning the extinction of Buddhism in the Buddhist community, that is, the coming of the age of *mofa* (final Dharma)²⁷, the most important thing was to preserve the texts. Stone had been a medium that was believed by Buddhists to be the

²³ Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Lerner (ed.), *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, incorporated with the Asia Society, 2002, p. 153. Hubert Durt, "A propos de 'stûpa miniatures' votifs du Ve siècle découverts à Tourfan et au Gansu", *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. 40, 1985, pp. 92-106. Yin Guangming 殷光明, *Beiliang shita yanjiu* 北凉石塔研究, Xinzhu, Caituan faren juefeng fojiao yishu wenhua jijinhui, 2000.

²⁴ Daniel Boucher, "The *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā* and Its Role in the Medieval Cult of Relics", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, no.1, 14, 1991, p. 2.

²⁵ There are many references in the *Lotus Sutra* that identify the written Dharma as the Buddha. For the examples, see Boucher, "The *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā* and Its Role in the Medieval Cult of Relics", p. 17. Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet'", p. 175.

²⁶ Yael Bentor, "On the Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics and Dhāraṇīs in Stūpas and Images", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Apr.- Jun., Vol. 115, No.2, 1995, p. 251; *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism*, Leiden, Brill, 1996.

²⁷ The age of *mofa* was supposed to follow two periods: the *zhengfa* (True Dharma), during which the teaching of the Buddha would be accessible to everyone; and the *xiangfa* (Semblance Dharma), during which only the superficial forms of the religion would remain. See Shen Hsueh-man, "Realizing the Buddha's *Dharma* Body during the *Mofa* Period: A Study of Liao Buddhist Relic Deposits", *Artibus Asiae*, 61, no.2, 2001, p. 267.

most enduring agent to carry on the teaching of the Buddha. One of the earliest large-scale sutra inscriptions is at Xiaonanhai, near Anyang in Henan province, dated to the 550s of the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577). Excerpts and a hymn of Buddhist sutras were inscribed into the façade, and inside the Central Cave of the Xiaonanhai caves.²⁸ The dedicatory inscription at the Central Cave expresses the desire of monk Sengchou, who was active in northern China from the Northern Wei (386-535) to the Northern Qi period. He ‘wished to have the golden words [of the Buddha] carved and recorded [there], so their glory would endure into later ages’.²⁹ Half a century later, a more ambitious project took place at the Yunju Monastery, located at Fangshan, seventy-five kilometers southwest of Beijing. The site contained nearly ten thousand stone slabs in a large underground structure at the southern pagoda of the monastery and almost five thousand slabs across nine cave-chambers at the nearby Shijing Mountain.³⁰ The stone slabs were inscribed with Buddhist sutras, which was an ambitious project begun by the monk Jingwan 静琬 (d.639) during the Daye reign (605-617) of the Sui Dynasty (589-618). The main purpose of the project was to carve stone scriptures to preserve Buddhist teachings when the age of *mofa* befell.

Lay Buddhists produced sutra inscriptions or manuscripts to fulfil their religious aspirations as promised in sutras. Passages from the *PPK Sutra* state the benefit of reciting and transcribing the sutras. In one edition of the sutra, it is stated that if one recites and writes the *PPK Sutra* sentence by sentence, all their bad karmas will be diminished. In another edition of the sutra, it states that if one transcribes this sutra for their parents, they can fully repay their kindness. When one volume of the sutra is

²⁸ The inscriptions include excerpts from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*, a hymn in praise of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

²⁹ Katherine Tsiang, “Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty: the Engraving of Sūtras in Stone at the Xiangtangshan Caves and Other Sites in the Sixth Century”, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol.56, no. 3/4, 1996, p. 234.

³⁰ Sonya Lee, “Transmitting Buddhism to a Future Age: the Leiyin Cave at Fangshan and Cave-Temples with Stone Scriptures in Sixth-Century China”, *Archives of Asian Art*, vol.60, 2010, p. 43.

transcribed, he or she can see one Buddha. When ten volumes of the sutra are transcribed, he or she can see ten Buddhas, and so on and so forth. The power of the sutra also guarantees that parents will be reborn in heaven.

1.3 Filial piety in Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism

This section discusses the intellectual debates on filial piety and Buddhism. An article published by Gregory Schopen in 1973, written in response to Kenneth Ch'en's works on the same topic, is key for understanding these debates.³¹

Schopen begins his article by quoting a passage from Ch'en's discussion of the Longmen inscriptions³² that date from the end of the fifth to the beginning of the sixth century:

[T]he frequent references to filial piety in the inscriptions testify to the change that had taken place in Buddhism after its introduction into China. Buddhism started as a religion renouncing all family social ties, yet in the inscriptions one meets again and again with prayers for the well-being of deceased ancestors, uttered even by monks and nuns. These expressions of piety indicate that although the monks and nuns had joined the monastic order, their ties to family and ancestors still remained strong and enduring. *This is a specific example of how*

³¹ Gregory Schopen, "Filial piety and the monk in the practice of Indian Buddhism: a question of 'Sinicization' viewed from the other side", in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 56-71. Kenneth Ch'en, "Filial piety in Chinese Buddhism", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol.28, 1968, pp. 81-97; *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973.

³² Caves in southern Luoyang, Henan Province were excavated and carved under the patronage of pious Buddhists from the end of the fifth century to the middle of the eighth century. They are collectively known as the Longmen Caves.

Buddhism had adapted itself to contemporary social conditions in China

(emphasis added by Schopen).³³

Schopen emphasizes the last sentence in this passage because it is a typical formulation of how Buddhism was transformed in China: Indian Buddhist monks were supposedly not involved in anything like 'filial piety', but Chinese monks and nuns were supposedly still concerned about their parents even though they had joined the monastic community.³⁴ By contrast, using epigraphical material from India dated both a few centuries before the Longmen inscriptions and from around the same time, Schopen shows that donors in India often did commission images or stupas for the benefits of their parents, both deceased and alive. In addition, Indian monks and nuns also actively showed concern for their parents by donating gifts in hope of benefitting them.

Schopen's study reveals a realistic picture of Indian monks and nuns in the first few centuries of the common era. They were concerned about their parents even though they had decided to leave home and join the sangha, and they expressed their concern in the inscriptions when they were donating gifts. Schopen's article also shows the importance of family and one's ties to parents regardless of one's religious belief or origin. Family is an essential component of most societies, whether Indian or Chinese, eastern or western, in forms of polygamy or monogamy.

However, what Schopen does not notice is that in China, the concept of 孝 *xiao* plays a crucial role in Chinese society and does not have a direct counterpart in Indian society. *Xiao* is often translated as filial piety in English. Filial piety as a conceptual term and a theory of practice has a major effect in shaping relations between family members and forging the prosperity of families.

³³ Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, a Historical Survey*, p. 179.

³⁴ Schopen, "Filial piety and the monk in the practice of Indian Buddhism," p. 57.

The first appearance of the character *xiao* is argued to be found on a bronze vessel known as '*xiao you* 孝卣'.³⁵ It was used for ritual, and is dated to the very last years of the Shang dynasty (ca.1600-ca.1100 BCE) or the earliest years of the Western Zhou (ca.1100 -771 BCE).³⁶ The character *xiao* 孝 functions as a verb in the sense of a child supporting his aged parent.³⁷ The scanty yet precious information from more bronze vessels shows that it is clear that during the first half of the first millennium BCE, *xiao* referred to piety towards both the dead ancestors and living relations, and played a crucial role in the ritual lives of Chinese belonging to the ruling class.³⁸

Compared to scattered findings on bronze vessels, it is the text *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*the Classic of Filial Piety*) that redefined the essential nature and characteristic of filial piety. It is one of the classics of the Confucian canon, composed between 350 and 200 BCE. *The Classic of Filial Piety* consists of eighteen sections in the form of a dialogue between Confucius (551-479BCE) and his disciple 曾參 Zeng Shen (505-435BCE) on topics related to filial piety.³⁹ Feeding one's parents and ancestors only is not enough to be considered pious in this sense. Respect, submission, and obedience to parents were redefined as its essence. In addition, filial piety was considered as the root of good virtue and education.⁴⁰

³⁵ Donald Holzman, "The Place of Filial Piety in Ancient China", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 118, no.2, 1998, p. 186. Holzman's statement cites from Li Yumin 李裕民, "Yinzhou jinwen Zhong de 'xiao' he Kong Qiu 'xiaodao' de fandong benzhi 殷周金文中的孝和孔丘孝道的反动本质", *Kaogu Xuebao* 考古學報, 1974, p. 19.

³⁶ Holzman, p. 186.

³⁷ For the summary of the studies of the etymology of the character "xiao", see Alan Chan and Sor-hoon Tan, "Introduction", in Alan Chan and Sor-hoon Tan (eds.), *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, London and New York, Routledge Curzon, 2004, p. 1 and p. 10. Keith Knapp, "The *Ru* Reinterpretation of *Xiao*", *Early China*, 20, 1995, pp. 197-198; Kang Xuewei 康學偉, *Xianqin xiaodao yanjiu* 先秦孝道研究, Taipei, Wenjin chubanshe, 1992, p. 9; Hsiao Hsin-I, "A Preliminary Interpretation of the Origin of the Concept of *Hsiao* in the Shang Period", *Chinese Culture*, 19, no.3, 1978, pp. 9-11; Li Yumin, p. 19.

³⁸ Holzman, pp. 186-187.

³⁹ By the eleventh century, scholars debated about two versions of the then extant texts, although differences between them are only marked by a few characters. For the historical and textual background of the *Classic of Filial Piety*, see Henry Rosemont and Roger Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, pp. 6-11.

⁴⁰ For the gradual change of the multiple meanings of *xiao* from the Western Zhou to Western Han (202BCE-8CE), see Knapp, "The *Ru* Reinterpretation of *Xiao*", pp. 201-221.

At the beginning of the text, it is stated that, 'You receive your physical body with its hair and skin from your parents. Vigilance in not allowing anything to injure your body is where filial piety begins. To establish ourselves and to practice the way, so that we will perpetuate our name in later generations, thus glorifying our parents. This is where filial piety ends. Filial piety begins in service to your parents, continues in service to your lord, and culminates in distinguishing yourself in the world.'⁴¹ According to Confucian thought, one was also required to serve one's ruler in the same way as one serves one's father. Filial piety extended from one's service to his or her parents to one's loyalty to his or her lord, which was beneficial to political authorities.

During the Han Dynasty (206BCE-220CE), when Confucianism was established as a state orthodoxy, filial piety was promoted officially. Unfilial conduct was considered a crime by law, and acts of filial piety were rewarded.⁴² Dynastic histories also recorded stories of outstanding exemplars of filial sons, brothers, and officials from the end of the Eastern Han (25-220CE). For Chinese school children, the canonical *Classic of Filial Piety* played an important role in their curriculum. Xun Shuang 荀爽 (128-190CE) wrote a long essay in 166 that insists on the importance of filial piety. It states: "The statutes of the Han Dynasty require the entire empire to intone the *Xiaojing* by heart."⁴³ The *Classic of Filial Piety* received imperial attention in later times as well. In 722, the Tang emperor Xuanzong (685-762) authorized an imperial edition of the *Classic of Filial Piety*, with a commentary and preface written by himself. About two hundred and fifty years later, a second imperial edition was authorized by the Song emperor Taizong (939-997).

⁴¹ The original Chinese text is "身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也。立身行道，揚名於後世，以顯父母，孝之終也。夫孝始於事親，中於事君，終於立身。" Translation after Kenneth Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, p. 14 and Rosemont and Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*, p. 105.

⁴² Textual record that confirms unfilial conduct as a crime can be dated back to "Announcement to the Prince of Kang 康誥" in the *Shangshu* 尚書. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1961, p. 392.

⁴³ Fan Ye 范晔, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*Later Han History*), Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1997, *juan* 62, p. 2051.

Originating in India, Buddhism extolls the virtues of celibate life and encourages devoted believers to leave their household and join the sangha. How can monks or nuns attend and pay respect to their parents as required in the *Classic of Filial Piety*, while leaving their households and denouncing their attachment to the secular world? Such conflicts were pointed out by Chinese intellectuals from the beginning of Buddhism's arrival in China. Among the earliest writings that attacked Buddhism as being unfilial are the *Taiping jing* 太平經 and the *Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論 in the late Eastern Han.⁴⁴ Arguments against Buddhism include that celibacy results in having no descendants, and shaving and tonsuring violate the duty of keeping intact one's body, skin, and hair, which are given by one's parents.

Faced with the Chinese charges against Buddhism as being unfilial, Buddhists advocated their own ideas about filial piety. Kenneth Ch'en concludes that Chinese Buddhists reacted in two ways.⁴⁵ First, they employed sutras in the canon that stress filial piety, and successfully made the stories about filial conduct in the sutras well-known among the Chinese. One such example is the story of Shanzi 睺子 (Syaama in Sanskrit) told in the *Pusa Shanzi jing* 菩薩睺子經, which was first translated in the Western Jin (266-316). Another example is the story of Mulian 目連 (Maudgalyaayana in Sanskrit) from the *Yulanpen jing* 盂蘭盆經⁴⁶, also translated in the Western Jin by

⁴⁴ Some scholars date *Mouzi lihuo lun* as early as the end of the Eastern Han, while others argue it consists of materials added in the fifth century. For a bibliography of the argument, see Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 509.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Ch'en, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol.28, 1968, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁶ Ogawa Kan'ichi 小川貫式 postulates that the *Yulanpen Sutra* developed from the Dharmagupta sect in northwest India around 400 CE. *Bukkyō bunkashi kenkyū* 佛教文化史研究, Kyōto, Nagata Shōbundō, 1973, pp. 159-171. Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 argues that the text was composed in China in the early sixth century. *Gikyō kenkyū*, pp. 49-50 and p. 84. The *Yulanpen Sutra* tells the story that the Great Mulian saved his departed mother who was reborn among the hungry ghosts. His mother never saw food or drink, so Mulian filled his bowl with food and sent it to his mother. His mother received the bowl of food, but the food turned into flaming coals before it entered her mouth. In despair, Mulian rushed to the Buddha and told what had happened. The Buddha told him that the roots of his mother's sins were deep and Mulian's individual power cannot change her situation. He must rely on the spiritual power of the assembled monks of the ten directions in order to obtain her deliverance. To do so, Mulian should gather food, basins for washing and rinsing, incense, etc. and offer them to the assembled monks on the fifteenth day of the seventh

Dharmarakṣa. Mulian's story and the *Yulanpen jing* was widely accepted among the populace. During the Tang dynasty, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the *Yulanpen* festival was celebrated across society, from the imperial household to lay Buddhists.

Another way in which Buddhists argued against the unfilial charges was to develop the concept that Buddhist filial piety was superior to Confucian. Filial Buddhists convert their parents to Buddhism and, in such manner, they would enjoy the benefits of being the Buddha's followers and reaching emancipation. Buddhist scholars such as Sun Chuo 孫綽 (ca.300-380) and Hui Yuan 慧遠 (334-416) developed such views in their writings. In Sun's treatise *Yudao lun* 喻道論, he states that no act of filial piety can be greater than the glorification of the Buddha's parents, who ascended the place of enlightenment when the Buddha returned to his native country and spread the Buddhist doctrine.⁴⁷ In line with this argument, *daxiao* 大孝 or 'great filial piety' was further contended to be far superior to Confucian piety. As the thinking went, Confucian piety is limited to one's own parents and family, whereas the 'great filial piety' in Buddhism can benefit all living beings, since Buddhist monks aimed at not only the salvation of their parents, but also the emancipation of all sentient beings.⁴⁸

In conclusion, becoming a Buddhist monk or nun entailed many aspects that conflicted with Confucian teaching on filial piety. The debates that can be tracked are mainly from the works of intellectuals, who had the ability to air their views and have them recorded. Faced with challenges from Confucian intellectuals, Buddhist scholars

month. When he makes offering to the monks, his current parents, seven generations of ancestors, and six kinds of relatives will obtain release from suffering in the three evil paths of rebirth. In the end, the Buddha instructs that all the future disciples of the Buddha who practice filial devotion should present yulan bowls as required to save their parents and seven generations of ancestors. *Foshuo yulanpen jing* 佛說盂蘭盆經, T.16.0685.

⁴⁷ *Hongming ji* 弘明集, *juan 3*, T.52.2102.0016b07-0017c25.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Ch'en, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism", p. 95.

responded by arguing that their religion advocated filial piety and even transcended the Confucian concept of filial piety. On the level of daily life, however, the common people who believed in Buddhism may have never thought about why reciting Buddhist sutras or worshipping the Buddha conflicted with the Confucian teaching on filial piety. As a filial son or daughter, he or she may have often prayed for the benefits of his or her parents.

1.4 Material sources and research questions

This thesis will study two types of material sources of the *PPK Sutra*: stone stelae from Shandong into which the sutra was carved and manuscripts of the sutra from Dunhuang. There are other types of material sources of the sutra, such as paintings and sculptures, but these two types of sources are chosen to be studied side by side in this thesis for two reasons.⁴⁹ First, both stone stelae and manuscripts are material objects bearing religious texts. Their textual aspects have been the focus of scholarship, such as the textual development of the sutra, but the material aspects of these objects have largely been neglected. Who produced them and for what reasons? How were they produced and used? What are the identities of their commissioners? By investigating the stone stelae and manuscripts as physical objects, this thesis aims to answer the above questions. Secondly, these two types of sources were produced on different materials—stone and paper. By studying them systematically in this thesis, I will explore some questions related to their materiality. For example, how did different materials shape people's engagement with these objects? How did the cultural

⁴⁹ For a brief summary of the paintings and sculptures illustrating the *PPK Sutra*, see Zheng Acai 鄭阿財, "Fumu enzhong jing chuanbu de lishi kaocha: yi Dunhuang ben wei zhongxin 《父母恩重經》傳佈的歷史考察：以敦煌本為中心", in *Dunhuang fojiao wenxian yu wenxue yanjiu* 敦煌佛教文獻與文學研究, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011, pp. 11-17.

implications carried by certain material affect the production of the stone stelae or manuscripts?

While my approach to the Dunhuang manuscripts will be discussed in Chapter Four, this section will focus on the sources of the stone stelae, which have not been systematically studied until now.

Information about the stone stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* are scattered across different kinds of sources, including recent archaeological journals, newspapers, and scholarly articles. My search for the stelae resulted in the identification of nine stelae dated between the Tang (618-907) and Northern Song (960-1127) Dynasties.⁵⁰ Among these, six stelae have survived, and three are no longer extant. Fortunately, rubbings of the lost ones, which preserve the images and texts on them in great detail, are preserved.

A survey that aimed to collect rubbings in Shandong led to the discovery of three stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra*, which were published in a report in the academic journal *Kaogu* 考古 (*Archaeology*) in 1996.⁵¹ According to the report, in 1993, the Shandong Carved-Stone Art Museum conducted a survey in three counties in Shandong, with the purpose of collecting rubbings of carved-stones that dated before the Song Dynasty.⁵²

The report is brief, and the quality of the published photos of the stelae is not good enough to document them in detail. Nor does the report provide detailed information about their inscriptions. However, it did introduce the three stelae carved with the sutra to a wider audience because of its publication and led to further scholarly research on

⁵⁰ See Table 3.1 for general information of stelae or rubbings of lost stelae that contain the *PPK Sutra* from Shandong.

⁵¹ Shandong shike yishu bowuguan 山東石刻藝術博物館, "Shandong Juancheng, Chengwu, Jinxiang shike diaocha", pp. 22-29.

⁵² Shandong shike yishu bowuguan, "Shandong Juancheng", p. 22.

them. One scholar who conducted further research is Sun Xiushen. He published the transcription of a few versions of the *PPK Sutra*. Sun's study primarily focuses on how the contents of the Buddhist texts titled *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing* (the *PPK Sutra*) or with similar titles vary from each other, and how different sutras can be categorized into various versions.⁵³

Sun did not make any transcription of the historical inscriptions⁵⁴ carved on the stelae, but he commented on two aspects of the historical significance of the stelae carved with the sutras.⁵⁵ Firstly, Buddhist culture is well developed in regions of Chengwu County in Shandong, which can be recognized from the three stelae carved with the sutras and two stelae carved with the *Banruo boluomiduo xin jing* 般若波羅蜜多心經 (the *Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sutra*). Sun assumes that Confucian culture had been the mainstream in Chengwu, since it is close to Qufu 曲阜, the hometown of Confucius (551-479BCE) and a cultural and ritual centre of Confucianism. Sun therefore expresses his surprise at the number of Buddhist stelae found near the cultural centre of Confucianism.

Secondly, Sun argues that the stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* show that Buddhism was not only popular in regions of Chengwu County, but also deeply rooted in Chinese society by absorbing aspects of traditional Chinese culture, such as filial piety.⁵⁶ He argues that the reason for the Sinicization of Buddhism in Chinese society is that the cultural gap between traditional Chinese ideology and Buddhism had been filled by the

⁵³ Sun Xiushen 孫修身, "*Foshuo fumu enzhong jing* banben yanjiu", pp. 239-249. Sun Xiushen, "Shandong Chengwu Baifutucun *Fumu enzhong jing* bei jiaoji 山東成武白浮圖村《父母恩重經》碑校記", *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究, no.2, 1997, pp. 128-133.

⁵⁴ For convenience, in this thesis, "historical inscription(s)" is used to refer to any inscription carved on stelae that is not Buddhist sutras.

⁵⁵ Sun Xiushen, "Shandong Chengwu", p. 130.

⁵⁶ Sun points out that in this region, it is popular to construct memorial halls for filial paragons, and popular for filial sons to commission stelae carved with sutras. However, he does not provide any evidence and analysis to support this argument. Sun Xiushen, "Shandong Chengwu", p. 130.

time of the Tang and Song, when the stelae carved with the sutras were produced.

However, his analysis is very brief and does not explain how the cultural gap was filled.

Other information about the stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* are scattered across articles by multiple scholars including Arai Keiyo and Zhang Zong. Arai Keiyo published many articles on the *PPK Sutra*. Most of them are concerned with comparing different manuscripts of the sutra and how to provide a chronology of their development. He does not discuss any historical or social aspects of the stelae.⁵⁷

One stela from Juye County in Shandong Province appears in an article by Zhang Zong. It appears in a list of newly discovered stone inscriptions across China.⁵⁸ According to Zhang, it is kept in the Museum of Juye County.⁵⁹ It is thought to have been used as a tomb stela, because on its top is carved “*Hedong jun Xueshi Zangfen Qibei* 河東郡薛氏 葬墳七碑記” (Hedong County surnamed Xue, a record of the stela for the seventh funeral ritual).⁶⁰ In contrast to Sun Xiushen and Arai Keiyo, Zhang gives a brief description of the stela, and some transcription of its inscription. Zhang’s list is also valuable as it summarizes sources from a wide range of regions across China, including Shandong, Hebei, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Qinghai provinces.⁶¹

The stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* from Shandong are also included in an ongoing project in Heidelberg titled ‘Buddhist Stone Sutras in China’ by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften). The project aims to provide a comprehensive record of stone sutras in China by cataloguing

⁵⁷ Arai Keiyo, “*Bumo onjū kyō* no ‘kohon kōi’ 「父母恩重經」の古本校異”, *Nisogakusha daigaku ronshū* 二松學舎大學論集, no.40, 1997, pp. 161-184; “*Bumo onjū kyō* no ‘hōhon’ no fukugen tekisuto 「父母恩重經」の「報本」の復元のテキスト”, *Kokusai seikei* 国際政経 no.6, 2000, pp. 105-111; “*Bumo onjū kyō* no ‘hōhon’ no tokuchō 「父母恩重經」の「報本」の特徴”, *Nisogakusha daigaku ronshū*, no.44, 2001, pp. 175-184; “*Bōsan sekkyō* no *Bumo onjū kyō* 房山石經の「父母恩重經」”, *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度學佛教學研究, no.50, 2002, pp. 37-43.

⁵⁸ Zhang Zong, “Shike fojing zhong de xincailiao yu xinjiadu”, p. 212.

⁵⁹ No photos about the stela are published.

⁶⁰ Zhang Zong, “Shike fojing”, p. 212.

⁶¹ Zhang Zong, “Shike fojing”, pp. 205-224.

them with descriptions, photos, rubbings, and transcriptions.⁶² The volume on Shandong that will include the stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* is in progress.⁶³ The unpublished materials include photos of four stelae from Chengwu County and some drafts of the transcriptions of their inscriptions. Among these sources, the drafts of the transcriptions of the historical inscriptions on the stelae are most meaningful for this chapter, since the historical inscriptions provide much information about the historical and social context for our understanding of the stelae as objects that had been used in local religious practices.

I personally examined a stela carved with the *PPK Sutra*, which is dated to 834 from the Tang Dynasty and now kept in a private collection in Hebei. Its information is introduced in an article in the *Guangming Daily Newspaper*.⁶⁴ It is a well-preserved stela, but it has not been much studied or published. Zhang Zong published an article and provides a transcription for the sutra carved on the stela, but does not discuss its historical inscription and other features, such as its design and images.⁶⁵ By comparison with the current available sources, the new data I collected contribute to our understanding of the stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* and of its historical significance by filling in the gaps in existing scholarship.

⁶² Wang Yongbo and Lothar Ledderose (eds.), *Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China: Shandong Province, Vol.1*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz and Hangzhou, China Academy of Art Press, 2014.

⁶³ I would like to express my special thanks to Prof. Jessica Rawson for helping me contact the project in Heidelberg. I am also deeply thankful to Dr. Tsai Suey-Ling for providing me with their unpublished sources of the stelae from their field trips.

⁶⁴ The private collection named Moxiangge 墨香閣 locates in Zhengding, Hebei province. See Liu Xiufeng 劉秀峰 and Huang Renlong 黃仁龍, "Tang *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing* bei", p. 6.

⁶⁵ Zhang Zong 張總 and Qun Wei 全蔚, "*Fumu enzhong jing* kexie ji diaoban jignben xintan 《父母恩重經》刻寫及雕版經本新探", in Fangshan shijing bowuguan 房山石經博物館 and Fangshan shijing yu Yunjusi wenhua yanjiu zhongxin 房山石經與雲居寺文化研究中心 (ed.), *Shijing yanjiu* 石經研究 vol.1, 2017, Beijing, Yanshan chubanshe, pp. 88-103.

1.5 Approach to the stelae and their historical inscriptions

In this thesis, the stelae are studied using a holistic approach. Their different aspects, such as form, size, historical inscriptions, and pictorial representation, are considered together. Past studies have mainly focused on the sutra carved on the stelae, while the historical information recorded on the stelae has largely been neglected. However, as objects that once were meaningful to their donors and members of the community, the stelae were important components of social and religious life. Historical information provides crucial context for us to understand the stelae in their original settings.

Chapter Three in particular will focus on the stelae, especially the historical inscriptions carved on them. They usually tell us the main function of the stelae, which makes it possible to study them in groups according to their functions. My main method of interpretation is to use the historical inscriptions carved on the stelae to understand why and for whom they were made. Contemporary historical sources are used to understand the relationships between historical events and the making of the stelae. Useful contemporary historical sources include the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (*Old History of Tang*), *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志 (*Maps and gazetteer of the provinces and counties in the Yuanhe era, 806-14*), and *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 (*Gazetteer of the world during the Taiping era, 976-83*). They contain place names that appear in the stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra*, which allow us to locate the stelae on historical maps and understand their geographic relationships. Tomb epitaphs from the Tang are used as comparisons to understand how the inscriptions on the stela from Yucheng was composed.

1.6 Chapter Outline

The *PPK Sutra* has a rich and complex textual history. Chapter Two focuses on the textual development of the scriptures, first examining the group's shared features. Significantly, they all bear the same title on the theme of repaying parents' kindness—a Buddhist teaching that struck a chord with indigenous Chinese beliefs in filial piety—and became popular in different regions during the Tang and Song. However, there are significant differences in terms of each scripture's composition, length, and in-text references. The main part of this chapter analyses all available texts of the *PPK Sutra* by categorizing them into three editions according to contents, and examining the textual sources, compositions, and the historical implications of each. In the last part, this is used to demonstrate that this group of texts has been modified and rewritten in various ways throughout its history. A time sequence for this development of the text and how the scriptures and their ideas circulated in medieval China are then presented.⁶⁶

The following chapters shift attention from textual development to the material culture of the scriptures. Chapter Three investigates eight stone stelae in rural Shandong that are engraved with passages from the *PPK Sutra*. The stelae are dated between 811 and 1070 and records pertaining to their existence have been found dating to the late Qing.⁶⁷ This chapter first reviews studies on the stelae and their discovery, which have largely ignored the historical notes concerning the stelae, as well as the style and location of the stelae. The main body of the chapter analyses the aspects mentioned above and reveals that the Confucian concept of filial piety, Chinese ancestor worship,

⁶⁶ The term “medieval” is contested in the context of Chinese history. In this thesis, I use it to refer to the period from the Tang to the Song (seventh to thirteenth centuries).

⁶⁷ I received a generous number of photos and drafts of transcriptions for six stelae from the project “Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China” of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Die Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften), Germany. Additionally, my own visit to a personal collection allowed me to examine one stela that has not been reported.

tomb culture, and official policies relating to Buddhism were all contributing factors in the production of the stelae.

Chapter Four focuses on manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* from Dunhuang, among which over fifty survive in relatively complete form. This chapter first outlines current studies on this group of manuscripts, which have been approached in ways similar to the stelae: they have been treated as evidence for how the text developed, while the social and material aspects of the manuscripts have been overlooked. This chapter first examines the two manuscripts as case studies and ask how they may have been used. Secondly, colophons, where available, are discussed in terms of how the manuscripts may have functioned and for what purposes they were intended.

Chapter Five provides new theoretical perspectives for examining the materials discussed in Chapter Three and Four. It draws on theories of materiality and representation and applies them to the study of the stone stelae from Shandong and manuscripts from Dunhuang. The last section of this chapter is a conclusion of the thesis that summarizes my research and arguments by responding to the research questions set out at the beginning.

Chapter Two: The *PPK Sutra* and its development in medieval China

Chapter Two focuses on the textual development of the *PPK Sutra*. It discusses the shared features of a group of Buddhist scriptures on the profoundness of parents' kindness and how to repay it in a Buddhist way. Significantly, all the texts in the group bear the same or a very similar title on the theme of repaying parents' kindness—a Buddhist teaching that struck a chord with indigenous Chinese beliefs in filial piety—and became popular in different regions during the Tang and Song. However, there are significant differences in terms of each scripture's composition, length, and in-text references. This chapter first examines the textual history recorded in Buddhist catalogues. The main part of this chapter analyses the texts by categorizing them into three editions according to their contents. A time sequence for this development of the text and how the scriptures and their ideas circulated in medieval China is presented. In the last part, this is used to demonstrate that this group of texts has been modified and rewritten in various ways throughout its history.

2.1 The *PPK Sutra* recorded in Buddhist catalogues

The *PPK Sutra* is recorded in a few Buddhist catalogues. From the commentaries on the sutra in the Buddhist catalogues, we learn not only when the sutra was noticed by monk scholars, but also what their attitudes are toward it. The following section is a list of the appearances of the sutra in different Buddhist catalogues in chronological order, and what they tell us about the development of the sutra.

The sutra's first appearance in Buddhist catalogues can be found in the *Dazhou kanding zhongjing mulu* 大周刊定眾經目錄 (*Corrected and Authorized Catalogue of Scriptures of the Great Zhou Dynasty*) compiled in 695 by Mingquan 明佺 (died after 712).⁶⁸ The title of the sutra appears in the last volume of the catalogue. This volume is titled "catalogue of apocryphal sutras". It is a list of apocryphal sutra titles, which counts to two hundred and twenty-eight entries in total.⁶⁹ The exact name of the sutra recorded in the volume is *Foshuo bao fumu enzhong jing* 佛說報父母恩重經 (the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents*). It appears in the middle of the list without a comment or note on it. Therefore, all we know about this sutra is that in 695, it was already regarded as apocryphal. Mingquan stated this position when he commented on the authenticity and quality of a group of one hundred and eighteen entries of sutras together, among which was this sutra:

These sutras were transmitted from long ago and what they say is all false and absurd. Their texts are superfluous and miscellaneous, the arguments and meanings weak and superficial. Although they steal the name of being spoken by the Buddha, eventually it will be revealed that they were forged by ordinary people.⁷⁰

Mingquan considered the *PPK Sutra* as a poorly fabricated apocryphon.

⁶⁸ This catalogue has fifteen volumes and is compiled by monk Mingquan following the order of Empress Wu (r.690-705). The number of titles contained in this catalogue exceeds any other catalogue in the Chinese Buddhist canon. T.55.2153. For its purported goal and political background, see Tanya Storch, "Fei Changfang's records of the *Three Treasures Throughout the Successive Dynasties* and its role in the formation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon", in Jiang Wu and Lucille Chia (eds.), *Spreading Buddha's Word in East Asia: the formation and transformation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 129.

⁶⁹ Each entry is followed by its number of volumes. Occasionally there is a short note after an entry, providing relevant information such as other known titles of the same sutra, years of appearance, and names of composers.

⁷⁰ I translate the text from Chinese to English. T.55.2153.0474c 11-13.

Three decades later, the *PPK Sutra* appeared in the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Kaiyuan-Era Catalogue of Śākyamuni's Teachings*) compiled by Zhisheng 智晟 in 730.⁷¹

In the *Daozhou kanding zhongjing mulu*, Mingquan commented about a group of sutras whose apocryphal nature he believed was obvious. In the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, Zhisheng recorded more specific albeit brief reasons why he regarded it as apocryphal:

The *Sutra on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*. One volume (the sutra cited Ding Lan, Dong An, and Guo Ju, etc. Therefore, it is known that the sutra is composed by humans. Three sheets⁷²)

Ding Lan 丁蘭, Dong An 董黯 and Guo Ju 郭巨 are all historical figures from the Han dynasty. They are known as exemplars of the virtue of filial piety in Chinese society through widespread stories with supernatural phenomena about their filial conduct.⁷³ Thus, Zhisheng pointed out that the mention of these Chinese exemplars of filial piety showed that the sutra is not authentic.

⁷¹ T.55.2154.0673a7.

⁷² The writing material for the scripture is paper and each sheet measured 26 by 39 or 26 by 52 cm. The standardization of the size of paper sheet can be dated back to the third century when the principal writing material was wooden slips. See Fujieda Akira, "The Tunhuang Manuscripts: a General Description (I)", *Zinbun Kagaku Kenkyusyo*, vol 1, 1966, pp. 16-17.

⁷³ In filial piety tales, children go to extremes to take care of their parents. Ding Lan lost his mother (or his father in Eastern Han versions of the tale) while young. He missed her so much that he created a wooden statue of her and served it as if it were alive. When someone wanted to borrow something from the family, he would ask the statue for permission. When a neighbor damaged the statue, he even killed him. When his wife burnt the statue, he beat and divorced her. In a different version of the tale, he forced her to mourn the statue for three years. For variants of the Ling Lan tale, see Keith Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, pp. 191-194. Dong An was poor but very filial. His neighbor Wang Ji 王寄 was rich but he did not care his mother. Wang Ji's mother mentioned to Wang Ji that he was unfilial whereas his neighbor Dong An was filial. Upon hearing this, Wang Ji was very angry and went to insult and torment Dong's mother. Dong An was very upset when he learned that his mother was hurt by Wang Ji. After Wang Ji's mother passed away, Dong An chopped Wang Ji's head and brought it in front of his mother's tomb for sacrifice. Birds and beasts surrounded him and mourned the loss of his mother. Keith Knapp, "There are Maggot in My Soup! Medieval Accounts of Unfilial Children", in N. Harry Rothschild and Leslie V. Wallace (eds.), *Behaving Badly in Early and Medieval China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2017, pp. 21-25. Guo Ju's family was poor. He and his wife had a three-year old child. There was not enough food to feed both his old mother and his child. As a result, Guo Ju decided to bury his child to save food for his mother. His wife was very sad, but she obeyed her husband. When Guo Ju began to dig, he discovered a golden vessel, on which characters were inscribed. They read that the vessel was a gift from Heaven for the filial Guo Ju and not to be taken by anyone else. Guo Ju and his wife accepted the vessel without burying their child. Huang Renheng 黃任恆, *Guxiao huizhuan* 古孝匯傳, Guangzhou, Juzhen yinwuju, 1925, p. 2. Chen Menglei 陳夢雷, *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* 欽定古今圖書集成, 79 vols, Taipei, Dingwen shuju, 1977, p. 611.

In the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄 (*Newly Confirmed Zhenyuan era Catalogue of Śākyamuni's Teachings*) compiled by Yuanzhao 圓照 in 799, the *PPK Sutra* is listed in the twenty-eighth volume under a title 'Another record of false scriptures pretending to be authentic, the seventh'.⁷⁴ All the titles listed are regarded as forged and absurd. After the entry "*Fumu enzhongjing yijuan* 父母恩重經一卷" (the *Sutra on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*, on volume), Yuanzhao commented that it was known that this sutra was apocryphal because it cites stories about Dinglan, Dong An, and Guoju. What distinguishes this entry from the previous two catalogues is that the length of the sutra has significantly increased. It is ten sheets long, over three times longer than the *PPK Sutra* recorded in the two catalogues discussed previously. This indicates that by the end of the eighth century, the content of the *PPK Sutra* was greatly expanded.

One catalogue that mentions a commentary on the *PPK Sutra* but has not been discussed by scholars to date is the *Rutang xinqiu shengjiao mulu* 入唐新求聖教目錄, compiled by the Japanese monk Ennin 圓仁 (793-864). Ennin stated that there was a one-volume commentary on the sutra⁷⁵ written by the monk Tiqing 體清⁷⁶ (date unknown) from the Ximing Monastery. Unfortunately, his commentary does not survive. However, Ennin did not list the *PPK Sutra* and Monk Tiqing's commentary on it as an apocryphal text. This indicates a different attitude toward the sutra in the ninth century. The sutra was probably accepted by monk Ennin as authentic.

⁷⁴ T.55.2157.1016b04.

⁷⁵ T.55.2167.1083b22. Ennin was one of eight Japanese Buddhists who studied in China during the Tang. He also wrote a four-volume diary titled *nittō guhō junreikōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記 (*The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*). For an English translation from Chinese of Ennin's diary, see Edwin Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*, New York, Ronald, 1955.

⁷⁶ Monk Tiqing is mentioned in the Manuscript S.3475 from Dunhuang. He is recorded to explain sutras for monks and nuns in the Kaiyuan monastery in Guo Prefecture in 772. See Yang Fuxue 楊富學 and Wang Shuqing 王書慶, "Tangdai Chang'an yu Dunhuang fojiao wenhua guanxi 唐代長安與敦煌佛教文化之關係", in *98 Famensi Tangwenhua guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 98 法門寺唐文化國際學術研討會論文集, 2000, Shaanxi, Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, pp. 174-181.

In conclusion, the *PPK Sutra* must have been composed before 695, since it is first recorded by that year in the catalogue *Dazhou kanding zhongjing mulu*. There are two changes about the sutra worth noting. First, its length changed from three sheets as recorded in the *Kaiyuan shijiaolu* to ten sheets as recorded in the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu*. Second, in the eighth century, all the catalogues list the sutra as apocryphal, but by the end of the ninth century, it seems that the sutra was accepted by the Japanese monk Ennin.

2.2 Textual Development of the *PPK Sutra*

The *PPK Sutra* is preserved in manuscripts and stone inscriptions. There are over fifty manuscripts from Dunhuang, and dozens of stone stelae or stone inscriptions in Buddhist caves, which provide scholars the opportunity to read and study the texts.

The sutra was probably considered apocryphal at the beginning of its circulation. From the Song Dynasty onward, it was not included in any major Chinese block-print canons. It is probably due to these two reasons that the sutra was transmitted with no standard version, and its textual history turns out to be rich and complex.

A few scholars have studied the textual development of the *PPK Sutra*, including Tokushi Yūshō, Arai Keiyo, Ma Shichang, Sun Xiushen, Zheng Acai, Zhang Yongquan.⁷⁷ Tokushi's study in 1928 is the earliest major work on the versions of the text. He

⁷⁷ Tokushi Yūshō, "*Bumo onjū kyō* no ihon ni tsuite", pp. 116-123. Arai Keiyo, "*Bumo onjū kyō* no 'kohon' kōi 『父母恩重經』の『古本』校異", *Nisogakusha daigaku ronshū* 二松學舍大學論集 no.40, 1997, pp. 161-184; "Kyōmon kara mita *Daihō Bumo onjū kyō* no keitō 經文からみた『大報父母恩重經』の系統", *Mikkyō bunka* 密教文化, no. 201, 1998, pp. 60-87; "*Bumo onjū kyō* no 'hōnhon' no fukugen tekisuto 『父母恩重經』の『報本』復元テキスト", *Kokusai seikei* 国際政経, no.6, 2000, pp. 105-111; "Tonkō hon *Bumo onjū kyō* nit tsuite", pp. 680-686. Ma Shichang, "*Fumu enzhong jing* xieben yu bianxiang", pp. 239-419. Sun Xiushen 孫修身, "*Foshuo bao fumu enzhong jing* banben yanjiu", pp. 239-249; "Shandong Chengwu Baifutucun *Fumu enzhong jing* beijiaoji", pp. 128-133. Zheng Acai 鄭阿財, "*Fumu enzhong jing* chuanbu de lishi kaocha: yi Dunhuang ben wei zhongxin", pp. 1-25. Zhang Yongquan 張涌泉, "*Dunhuangben Foshuo fumu enzhongjing* yanjiu", pp. 260-297.

categorized them into six groups according to their contents. According to Tokushi, the earliest version is named the 'Ding Lan Edition', because the text contains names of Chinese exemplars of filial piety such as Ding Lan.⁷⁸ A later edition, which Tokushi called the 'Old Edition', is a shorter version of the Ding Lan Edition. It excludes the references of the Chinese exemplars, which might have been edited to avoid the accusation of the text being apocryphal.⁷⁹ Tokushi noted that a much longer edition appeared afterwards. Its length is about ten sheets as recorded in the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu*, which was compiled in 799. Tokushi named this edition the 'Augmented Edition' and speculated that it was composed around the time when the monk Zongmi was active.⁸⁰ The other three editions that Tokushi discussed are dated to the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), whose contents are very different. Since they were transmitted via manuscripts that were dated to much later times, which exceeds the scope of this thesis, these three editions are not discussed here. Arai Keiyo and Sun Xiushen's categorization of the text is similar to Tokushi's, but different terms are applied to the group names.⁸¹

In conclusion, the rich and complex textual development of the *PPK Sutra* has been the major focus of scholars' attention. There are three major editions of the text. Their contents and relevant records in Buddhist catalogues and commentaries suggest that the later editions evolved from the earliest one, that is, the Ding Lan Edition. As the sutra was transmitted via manuscripts and stone inscriptions, furthermore, variants often emerged among texts considered to represent the same edition.

⁷⁸ Tokushi, "*Bumo onjū kyō*", pp. 116-117.

⁷⁹ Tokushi, "*Bumo onjū kyō*", p. 117.

⁸⁰ Tokushi, "*Bumo onjū kyō*", pp. 118-119.

⁸¹ Arai Keiyo, "Tonkō hon *Bumo onjū kyō* nit tsuite", pp. 680-686. Sun Xiushen, "*Foshuo bao fumu enzhong jing* banben yanjiu", pp. 239-249.

2.3 Content of the *PPK Sutra*

All the editions of the text open with the Buddha at Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha, where he preaches to a great assembly.

2.3.1 The Ding Lan Edition and Old Edition

In the Ding Lan Edition and Old Edition, the Buddha first describes the incredible kindness of parents toward their children when they raise them with measureless love and care. Ānanda asks the Buddha how to repay parents' kindness. The Buddha answers that a filial son can repay parents' kindness by sponsoring sutra-copying and Buddhist rituals, such as making offerings to the Buddha and Sangha on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

The sutra goes on to describe parents' love for children in more detail, including scenes from daily life such as a mother feeding a child milk from her breast. When the child at home cries for the parents, they return immediately. When the parents have meals outside home, they bring delicious food back for their child.

The sutra then describes the bad behaviour of a grown-up child who is unfilial. When a parent becomes old and suffers loneliness and coldness in their shabby home, the unfilial child does not attend to them. The parents feel regret and cry in grief. They wish that they had never given birth to the child.

In the Ding Lan Edition, stories of Chinese filial exemplars such as Ding Lan and Dong An are referenced to show that when there is ultimate filial conduct, heaven shall be moved, and miracles appear. This part does not appear in the Old Edition.

The scripture ends with the Buddha telling Ānanda how to repay parents' kindness. One should reproduce and disseminate the scripture, burn incense, perform devotional service for the Three Gems, and provide food and drink for the Buddhist sangha.

2.3.2 The Augmented Edition

Some parts of the Augmented Edition resemble the two preceding editions, but with significant differences in content, structure, and language.

Without the Buddha describing the profoundness of parents' kindness, Ānanda raises the question about the kindness of parents. Then the Buddha replies by categorizing parents' kindness into ten kinds. Afterwards, the Buddha explains parents' kindness in great detail, incorporating additional examples from daily life beyond those found in the Ding Lan Edition and Old Edition.⁸² Similarly, it proceeds to describe how unfilial conduct occurs when the carefully raised up child grows up. The contents, however, differ from the other two editions by using different expressions and expounding on various kinds of unfilial conduct. The unfilial child not only does not attend to their elderly and weak parents, but also turns out to be a troublemaker and law-breaker, which causes the parents great anxiety.

After this lengthy description of forms of unfilial conduct, the assembly is terrified and asks the Buddha how to repay parents' kindness. The Buddha replies that no matter how terribly one suffers physically, it is not enough to repay the profound kindness one receives from their parents.

The Buddha then exhorts that if one can read the sutra and perform ritual services for their parents, one can be a filial son. Otherwise, one will fall into hell. Then the sutra

⁸² This section is composed by using different expressions compared with the Ding Lan Edition and the Old Edition.

describes details of different kinds of suffering in hell and lists eighteen levels of hell. Upon hearing this, the assembly is terrified and vows to follow the Buddha's teaching.

The sutra ends with Ānanda asking the name of this sutra. And the Buddha replies that the sutra is named the *Sutra on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*.

The summaries of the contents of the three editions have shown that the Augmented Edition differs greatly from the Ding Lan Edition and Old Edition. Although the three editions bear the same title and theme, the Augmented Edition can be regarded as a 'recreation' of the theme of the *PPK Sutra*.

2.3.3 Variants of the Augmented Edition transmitted by stelae

In this section, I utilize newly discovered and published stone inscriptions carved on stelae from Shandong to show how the sutras developed during the Tang and Song in Shandong. There are five stelae that survive in complete form and contain the *PPK Sutra*. Among them, four can be categorized as the Augmented Edition, and one belongs to the Old Edition.

Earlier discussion in this chapter showed that the sutra is not recognized as an authentic sutra in official Buddhist catalogues, and is not included in any woodblock print. Therefore, its transmission depended on manuscripts, inscriptions, and probably people's memories and dictations. As a result, the texts carved on the stone stelae differ from each other to an extent ranging from a few words to a few sentences or even paragraphs. Table 2.1 show how the four variants of the Augmented Edition of the sutra vary from each other. For example, in the first sentence, all the texts state that the Buddha is at *qishejue shan* 耆闍崛山, but the text on the stela dated to 834 records it as *yishajue*

shan 伊莎崛山. It is possible that when the sutra was inscribed on the stelae, different manuscripts were used, which resulted in differences in the texts.

There are two major points of difference between the four variants that should be noted. The first occurs in section IV in Table 2.1. After the Buddha explains what the ten kinds of parents' kindness are in section III, the variants from the stelae dated to 950 and 1070 have an extra section that expands on the ten kinds of parents' kindness spoken by the Buddha. The expanded part in these two variants is more or less the same, with a few exceptions where the variant carved on the stela dated to 1070 has a few more sentences compared to the one on the stela dated to 950.

Guang Xing's study has shown that this expanded part on the ten kinds of parents' kindness is very similar to the Monk Fazhao 法照 (746-838)'s *Fumu enzhong zanwen* 父母恩重贊文 (the *Eulogy on Parents' Profound Kindness*), which was composed around 788.⁸³ Table 2.2 shows that the *Eulogy on Parents' Profound Kindness* is composed in verse, with each short sentence containing five characters. This is also the case for the expanded part on parents' profound kindness. This implies that the composition of the expanded part on parents' profound kindness in the Augmented Edition of the *PPK Sutra* might have been inspired by the content of Fazhao's eulogy. Many sentences are drawn directly from the *Eulogy on Parents' Profound Kindness*. The sixth and seventh kinds of parents' kindness are the only two sections where there is no reference to Fazhao's eulogy.

Guang Xing also points out another possible inspiration for the composition of the ten kinds of parents' profound kindness based on Buddhist scriptures. He speculates that

⁸³ Guang Xing 廣興, "Fumu en nanbao jing yu Fumu enzhong jing de yanjiu 《父母恩難報經》與《父母恩重經》的研究", in Zhang Fenglei 張風雷 (ed.), *Zongjiao yanjiu, 2014 qiu* 宗教研究 2014 秋, Beijing, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2015, pp. 35-37.

the idea of summarizing parents' kindness into ten kinds in the *PPK Sutra* might have been inspired by the *Dacheng bensheng xindi guan jing* 大乘本生心地觀經, which is translated by Prajña 般若 (b.734) in 790.⁸⁴ The sutra teaches how one should enter the Buddhist order, live in a quiet abode, observe the mind and attain enlightenment. It is famous for its explanation the four kinds of compassion, which is the compassion of parents, all creatures, the king, and the Three Treasures. Guangxing notes that in the second volume of the *Bao'en pin* 報恩品 (*the section on repaying kindness*) from the *Dacheng bensheng xindi guan jing*, the text focuses on the mother's kindness when it describes parents' kindness. In this section, it classifies motherly virtue into ten kinds.⁸⁵ Therefore, the variant of the Augmented Edition that contains ten kinds of parents' kindness should have been composed between 788 and 950.

The other major differences among the four variants lie toward the end of the sutra. The texts from the stelae dated to 948 and 1070 both have a paragraph that does not appear in the other two variants.⁸⁶ The paragraph addresses how to repay parents' kindness, saying:

The Buddha says: if there are good men and good women, who respectfully produce a copy of this sutra for their parents, they are truly repaying the profound kindness of their parents. If one can produce one volume, he can see one Buddha; if one can produce ten volumes, he can see ten Buddhas; if one can produce a hundred volumes, he can see a hundred Buddhas; if one can produce a thousand volumes, one can see a thousand Buddhas; if one can produce ten thousand volumes, one can see ten thousand Buddhas. In recognition of the goodness of this man who produces the sutra, the Buddhas and others will all embrace and protect him and will cause his parents to be reborn in heaven and prevent them from the pain of falling into hell.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ T.3.0159.

⁸⁵ Guang Xing, "*Fumu en nanbao jing*", p. 38.

⁸⁶ It is to be noted that this paragraph appears in different places in the two variants. In the variant from the stela dated to 948, it appears in the end of section X. Whereas in the variant from the stela dated to 1070, it appears after section XIII.

⁸⁷ I translate this part after Section XIV in Table 2.1.

The language of this paragraph uses parallelism to encourage people to reproduce this sutra, and in return promises compensatory power of two kinds: first, one can see the Buddha if one reproduces this sutra, and the more it is produced, the more Buddhas one can see; second, by reproducing the sutra, one's parents are guaranteed to be freed from the danger of falling into hell. In the text from the stela dated to 1070, a detailed description of the terrifying hell and how unfilial children are tortured there precedes this paragraph.⁸⁸ The two kinds of power further illustrate two phenomena: copying and reproducing sutras is encouraged by the Buddhist scripture itself, which has long prevailed in Buddhist teachings; secondly, detailed descriptions of the hell and the horrifying torture that one suffers were added in the "Augmented edition", which seems to further enhance the necessity for people to follow the instructions of the sutra in order to save their parents from falling into hell.⁸⁹

In conclusion, the four variants share many similarities. Most of their contents are the same, which allows us to categorize them into like editions. However, there are two major differences among the four variants. First, in the variant from the stelae dated to 948 and 1070, the benefits of reproducing the *PPK Sutra* spoken by the Buddha appear at the end of the text. Second, the expanded part on the ten kinds of parents' kindness appears only in the two later variants, which are dated to 950 and 1070.

⁸⁸ The description of hell does not appear in the text from the stela dated to 948, but in the two variants dated to 834 and 950.

⁸⁹ Buddhist literature describes various hells with great details, providing their names and features. Scenes representing the hells also played an important didactic role in the space of Buddhist temples and caves. For a general discussion on hell descriptions in Buddhist literature see Léon Feer, "L'enfer indien, I. — Bouddhisme", *Journal Asiatique* (8e série), 20, 1892, pp. 185–232; Bimala Law, *Heaven and Hell in Buddhist Perspective*, Calcutta, Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1925, pp. 92–126; Constantino Moretti, *Genèse d'un apocryphe bouddhique*, 2016, pp. 156–217; Marc Tiefenauer, *Les enfers indiens: Histoire multiple d'un lieu commun*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, pp. 89–146. For studies on the representation of hell in the mural paintings of Dunhuang, see Yin Guangming, "Dunhuang shiku zhong de diyu tuxiang yu mingbao sixiang 敦煌石窟中的地獄圖像與冥報思想", in Zheng Binglin 鄭炳林 and Hua Pingning 花平寧 (eds.), *Maiji shan shiku yishu wenhua lunwenji 麥積山石窟藝術文化論文集*, vol. 2, Lanzhou, Lanzhou daxue chubanshe, 2004, pp. 21–52; Yin Guangming, *Dunhuang bihua yishu yu yiwei jing 敦煌壁畫藝術與疑偽經*, Beijing, Minzu chubanshe, 2006; Constantino Moretti, "Scenes of Hell and Damnation in Dunhuang Murals", *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol.74, 2019, pp. 5–30.

2.4 The popularity of the sutra in rural Shandong

The earliest record of the Augmented Edition of the *PPK Sutra* is in 799 by monk Yuanzhao. However, we do not know the specific text that he saw when he compiled his catalogue. Thanks to the stela dated to 834, we have a dated text of the sutra. During the first half of the ninth century, the text was enriched by adding new contents, which made it much longer than before.

Thanks to the stelae that are dated and bear historical records, it is known that in rural Shandong, the Augmented Edition of the *PPK Sutra* was very popular in this region during the Five Dynasties (907-960) and early Northern Song (960-1127). Among the four stelae carved with the Augmented Edition of the text, three are from rural Shandong. One, however, bears location information that consists only of the village name, which does not inform us where the village was located.

The Old Edition may have also been popular during the Northern Song in Shandong, although so far only one complete stela has been discovered. More stelae might have been destroyed over time. Two incomplete ones have been found. One is dated to 811. Although it is broken and only the middle part survives, it can be recognized that the stela is carved with the Old Edition of the sutra.⁹⁰ Another one is a fragment of a stela with an incomplete date. Zhang Zong also mentions that there is a rubbing of a stela dated to 960 and that it contains the Old Edition of the sutra.⁹¹ A stela dated to 984 from the early Northern Song is carved with the Old Edition of the sutra. Its patrons are recorded to come from Qinghe Prefecture.

In conclusion, the dated stone stelae, which usually carry information about their provenance, allow us to map where different editions of the *PPK Sutra* were popular.

⁹⁰ Shandong shike yishu bowuguan, "Shandong Juancheng, Chengwu, Jinxiang shike diaocha, pp. 22-29.

⁹¹ Zhang Zong and Qun Wei, "Fumu enzhong jing kexie ji diaoban jingben xintan", pp. 88-103.

Although the ‘Augmented Edition’ appeared later than the ‘Old Edition’, both were popular during the same time in rural Shandong. Current discoveries show that it was particularly popular in rural Shandong to make stelae carved with both the ‘Old Edition’ and the ‘Augmented Edition’ of the *PPK Sutra*.

2.5 The text from Jinxiang: a new creation on the theme of parents’ kindness

A text dated to 985, carved on a stela from Jinxiang County, is different from all the other editions, except for two similarities: the title and the theme of parents’ profound kindness. It consists of about six hundred and fifty words and in its time was a completely new creation on the theme of parents’ profound kindness. Some characters are eroded away, but the majority of the inscription is legible.⁹²

2.5.1 The content of the text

The text begins with describing the Buddha as a gentleman with great virtue.⁹³ His name is known as Shizun⁹⁴ and his teaching explains that every sentient being has Buddha nature. Afterwards the Buddha is asked where the body comes from. The Buddha replies how life is formed and how much danger the mother faces during labour. When the child grows up, he forgets the kindness of parents. Yet if one’s mother had not fed him with sweetness, he would have died.

⁹² See Appendix 2.1 for the transcription of the text. See Appendix 2.2 for my translation of the transcription.

⁹³ The Buddha is referred as “君”, which is a term that reminds the reader the Confucian term “君子”.

⁹⁴ Shizun is often translated as the World-honored. It is one of the ten epithets of the Buddha. See Lewis Hodous and William E. Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms: with Sanskrit and English equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index*, London, K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and co., ltd, 1937, p. 52.

The Buddha further instructs that one should support his parents just as he respects the Buddha. If one supports his parents for many years, he can achieve the path of the Buddha. If one does not repay parents' kindness, heinous crime will be visited upon him. If one believes in the sutra, however, they can ascend to the heaven of the arhats and walk in the realm of lotus flowers. The text ends with parallelism stating that all sentient beings shall not leave their parents.

Compared with other editions of the *PPK Sutra*, the language of the text is often obscure and unclear. In other editions, there are many concrete descriptions of behaviours relating to parents' kindness or the unfilial conduct of children. In this occurrence of the text, the descriptive sentences are few, but the text uses an instructive tone to dictate what one should do to repay the kindness of their parents.

2.5.2 A different way to repay parents' kindness: a twist of aim and method

This unique instance of the text raises several questions: What is the nature of the text? How should we understand its obscure content? What does it tell us about the development of Buddhism in rural Shandong? In this section, I argue that this text is very likely to be a local new creation inspired by the Buddhist text titled the *Sutra on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*. It shows how Buddhism, Confucianism, and even Taoism are integrated together in one text. Although the text claims itself to be a Buddhist sutra and uses Buddhist terms, its content is syncretic.

Zhang Zong has noted that the text contains elements of both Buddhism and Taoism.⁹⁵ The most obvious reference to Taoism appears towards the end of the text. It says that 'Yin and yang...earth, metal, gold, and wood all ... parent's emperor'. Due to the

⁹⁵ Zhang Zong and Quan Wei, "*Fumu enzhong jing*," p. 94.

erosion a few characters, it is difficult to understand the meaning of this sentence. ‘Yin and yang’ are terms in Chinese philosophy referring to an abstract concept of dualism. The concept of yin represents a set of characteristics associated with receptiveness or passiveness, and yang those associated with activeness. ‘Earth, gold, and wood’ are three of the five phases or ‘elements’, which is a conceptual scheme that Taoists used to explain a wide range of phenomena, such as cosmic cycles, interactions between internal organs, and properties of medicinal drugs.

In addition, there is a Taoist scripture on the profound kindness of parents that is directly inspired by the Buddhist sutra. Its title is *Taishang Laojun shuo baofumu enzhong jing* 太上老君說報父母恩重經 (*The Scripture Spoken by Lord Lao on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents*).⁹⁶ The Buddhist sutra on parents’ kindness was adapted to a Taoist text, which follows the structure of its Buddhist counterpart and copies a great portion of expressions from it. At the beginning of the Taoist text, a disciple named Haikongzhizang 海空智藏 among the audience asks the Lord Lao how to repay parents’ kindness. The Lord Lao replies by first explaining the positive consequence of filial conducts and the negative outcome of unfilial conducts. He continues to describe the effort and suffering of parents to bring up their children. The description contains many expressions that were borrowed directly from the Buddhist *PPK Sutra*. The Lord Lao uses his power to tremble the earth and the scene of the hell appears where countless people suffer from terrifying torture, which horrifies Haikongzhizang, and he asks what sin has led them to the hell. The Lord Lao replies that it is due to their unfilial conducts that they end up in the hell. The Taoist sutra ends with the Lord Lao’s instruction of how to repay

⁹⁶ *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏 662, edited in 1445, reimpression in Shanghai in 1923-1926. Numbered according to Kristofer Schipper (ed.), *Concordance du Tao-tsang: Titres d'ouvrages*, Paris, École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1975.

parents' kindness, including copying the scripture, making offerings, and performing the Zhaijiao ritual on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

According to Mollier, it was very common from the sixth century onwards for Buddhist and Taoist textual production to mirror one another. This overlap and mutuality represented a means for Buddhists and Taoists to spread their own religion while both borrowing from and challenging the other. The Taoist scripture on parents' kindness was produced soon after the creation of the Buddhist sutra.⁹⁷ However, the text from Jinxiang does not share the least similarities with the Taoist scripture on parents' profound kindness. Therefore, the obscurity of the Jinxiang text suggests that it might have been a local invention.

What most differentiates the Jinxiang text from other editions of the *PPK Sutra* is that it presents a different logic of how to repay one's parents' kindness. In other editions of the sutra, the method of repaying kindness is a purely Buddhist one, which is to make offerings to the sangha, reproducing the sutra and sponsoring ritual service. The text from Jinxiang, however, does not contain any of these methods. It requires one to believe in the sutra and carry it out by loving and supporting one's parents. It also requires one not to leave their parents, which implies that one should not cut oneself off from one's family and become a monk or nun. Rather, the text from Jinxiang promises that if one can support their elderly parents for a thousand years, they can attain Buddhahood.

In conclusion, the text from Jinxiang aims to persuade people to stay at home and take care of their parents, which is in line with Confucian teachings. Although filled with Buddhist terms, the text does not offer religious method for one to repay parents' kindness. It does, however, use religious achievement, such as attaining Buddhahood, and

⁹⁷ Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, pp. 13-14. Akizuki Kan'ei 秋月観嘆, "Dōkyō to Bukkyō no Bumo onjū kyō 道教と佛教の父母恩重經", *Shūkyō kenkyū* 宗教研究 39/4, 1996, pp. 23-54.

being reborn in heaven, as promises to encourage people to be filial and support their aging parents.

The text from Jinxiang further shows how Buddhism were integrated into Chinese society during the early Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). The nature of the text is a mixture of local people's belief in Buddhism and filial piety. Although it bears a title originating in a Buddhist scripture, it presents a rather non-Buddhist method to repay one's parents' kindness, which strikes a chord with Confucian filial piety. On the other hand, Buddhist terms and concepts, such as the Buddha nature, heaven, and hungry ghosts, are prevalent in the text.

2.6 The *PPK Sutra* and Zongmi's *Commentary on the Yulanpen Sutra*

Despite the fact that the *PPK Sutra* is categorized as a Chinese apocryphal text in Buddhist catalogues, the renowned scholar-monk Zongmi 宗密 (780-841) cited it heavily in his famous *Yulanpen jing shu* 孟蘭盆經疏 (a Commentary on the *Yulanpen Sutra*). Zongmi's reference to the sutra shows that it was not only popular among common people, but was also treated seriously by important monks such as Zongmi.

In the Old Edition and Ding Lan Edition of the *PPK Sutra*, it says:

If there is a son who is submissively and compassionately filial, and if he accumulates merits and produces sutras for his parents, or on the fifteenth day on the seventh month, he produces an ullambana tray and offers it to the Buddha and the sangha, then he can attain numerous merits and repay his parents' kindness.

The Yulanpen Festival, also known as the Ghost Festival, falls on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.⁹⁸ The word Yulanpen comes from the *Ullambana Sutra* (*Yulanpen jing* 孟

⁹⁸ For the reconstruction of the Early Middle Chinese of the word "Yulanpen", see Edwin Pulleyblank, *Middle Chinese: a Study in Historical Phonology*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1984.

蘭盆經).⁹⁹ The word *ullambana* means 'hanging down'. The sutra tells a story of a Buddhist disciple named Mulian 目連 (Maudgalyāyana in Sanskrit). He learns that his mother is reborn in hell as a hungry ghost after death. The sutra describes the terrible fate of those who fall to hell and suffer while hanging upside down. When Mulian offers food to his mother, the food turns to flame in her mouth. Desperate from being unable to save his mother, Mulian asks the Buddha and is told that his mother's bad karma in the past is so great that he cannot save her. The Buddha tells Mulian that people should make offerings to the sangha on the fifteenth day of the seventh month so that they can accumulate great virtues for their parents to account for the present time and the past seven generations. During the festival, rituals called 'Feeding the Hungry Ghosts of Flaming Mouths' are performed in order to save deceased people from suffering after death, and food and wealth are offered to the Buddha and sangha as well.

The ghost festival was celebrated widely by all classes of people throughout medieval Chinese society. Even people who were not Buddhists joined the festival and made offerings to the sangha.¹⁰⁰ Since the festival's crucial function relates to ancestors and parents, which are important in Chinese religious life, it not only spread widely in Chinese society, but also has survived into modern times. The involvement of the emperor and the state also further helped the festival to spread. For example, the Tang emperors performed rituals and made offerings in the Imperial Ancestral Temple on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.¹⁰¹

Most people learned the story of the ghost festival from the *Transformation Text on Mulian Saving his Mother from the Dark Regions*, which is a 'transformation tale' (*bianwen*

⁹⁹ T.16.0685.0779a26-c23.

¹⁰⁰ See Stephen Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Stephen Teiser, pp. 5-6.

變文) told by professional storytellers.¹⁰² The tale is based on the *Yulanpen Sutra*, but more details and plotlines were added to make it attractive and edifying.¹⁰³ Compared with the *Yulanpen Sutra*, the transformation text pictures the underworld in great detail. Mulian's journey in the purgatorial hells is the focus of the drama. He witnesses terrifying scenes such as ox-headed gaolers forcing sinners across the great river running through the underworld. At the end of the tale, Mulian finds his mother nailed down with forty-nine long metal spikes in Avīci Hell. Reborn as a hungry ghost, Mulian's mother can never satisfy her appetite due to her needle-thin neck. The following plot is the same as what is told in the *Yulanpen Sutra*. When Mulian sends his mother food, it bursts into flame just as the food reaches her mouth. The Buddha instructs Mulian to provide a grand feast of "yulan bowls" on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when monks end their summer retreat.

An equally important text is the commentary on the *Yulanpen Sutra* by the renowned scholar-monk Zongmi.¹⁰⁴ Although lay Buddhists might not have had the opportunity to read Zongmi's commentary, it demonstrates how the ghost festival is closely related on a theoretical level to the real life of common people during the Tang. His commentary also retains an important place in Chinese Buddhist exegesis. By the

¹⁰² The term *bianwen* appears in titles of several manuscripts from the library cave in Dunhuang dated to the tenth century. The meaning of *bian* has parallels in the Indian and Tibetan languages and was used to mean "design, figure or mural painting." Although *bienwen* today is widely used to refer to popular Buddhist texts, it originally refers to scripts that describe paintings used by story-telling monks. See Karashima Seishi 辛嶋静志, "Hen, hensō, henbun no imi 「変」、 「变相」、 「変文」 の意味", *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 印度學佛教學研究, Vol.65 (2), 2017, pp. 732-739.

¹⁰³ The *Transformation Text on Mulian Saving his Mother from the Dark Regions* is collated in Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 (ed.), *Dunhuang bianwen huilu* 敦煌變文彙錄, Shanghai, Shanghai chuban gongsi, 1955, pp. 149-185. For a translation of the transformation text, see Victor Mair, *Tun-huang Popular Narratives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 87-122.

¹⁰⁴ Zongmi was born in 780 in an elite family in the Guo prefecture (present day central Sichuan). When he was young, he received traditional Confucian education, aiming for a career in government. Around the age of twenty, he studied Buddhist scriptures. His early traditional education played a key role in shaping his understanding of filial piety in Chinese Buddhism. For Zongmi's biography, see *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 T.50.2061.741c-43a; *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 T.49.2035.293c; Peter Gregory, *Tsungmi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 27-92.

Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the commentary had become the standard commentary on the *Yulanpen Sutra*, and inspired many sub-commentaries.¹⁰⁵

Zongmi wrote his commentary on the *Yulanpen Sutra* between 822 and 841.¹⁰⁶ The text is a systematic expression of Confucian Buddhism, represented by a synthesis of core Chinese values of filial piety and ancestor worship with Buddhist teachings and tenets. The commentary is over eleven times longer than the *Yulanpen Sutra*. It consists of two chapters, the first chapter discussing the significance of the *Yulanpen Sutra* and the second chapter providing a phrase-by-phrase exegesis.

Zongmi quotes from the *PPK Sutra* in the second chapter, when he explains the use of the phrase ‘repaying parents’ kindness’ in the *Yulanpen Sutra*. Table 2.3 shows that Zongmi transcribes verbatim over five hundred words from the *PPK Sutra*. He comments that the text in the sutra is ‘easy to understand and plain’ (*qianpu* 淺樸). He further notes that such a plain text is intended to educate the ‘mean people’ (*xiaoren* 小人) rather than the gentlemen or ‘noble people’ (*junzi* 君子).¹⁰⁷ At the end of Zongmi’s quotation, he comments: ‘Think carefully about the issue of repaying kindness, [for] the sutra has its rightness. Among a hundred people there is not a single mother or son who is not like this.’¹⁰⁸

When Zongmi wrote about repaying parents’ kindness in his *Commentary on the Yulanpen Sutra*, he quoted extensively from the *PPK Sutra* and made further comments. He also noted insightfully how the sutra, whose language is plain and sometimes even vulgar, corresponded to the realities of common people’s lives. Although he might have

¹⁰⁵ For a list of Chinese sub-commentaries, see note 84 in Stephen Teiser, p. 92.

¹⁰⁶ Furuta Shōkin 古田紹金, “Keihō shūmitsu no kenkyū 圭峯宗密の研究”, *Shina bukkyō shigaku* 支那佛教史學 2.2, 1983, pp. 88-90.

¹⁰⁷ T.39.1792.0508b12-13.

¹⁰⁸ T.39.1792.0508c03-04.

been aware of the fact that the sutra was considered apocryphal, Zongmi agreed with its revelation of parents' profound love and discourse on the tendency for unfilial conduct among grown-up children.

On a theoretical level, Zongmi's *Commentary on the Yulanpen Sutra* confirms the popularity and importance of the *PPK Sutra* in the ninth century. Having stayed in Chang'an since the 820s, Zongmi might have witnessed the popularity of this sutra, especially during the occasion of the ghost festival. On a practical level, both the ghost festival and the *PPK Sutra* struck a chord with the Chinese convention of filial piety and ancestor worship. The ghost festival provides an opportunity for performing various rituals that direct religious merit to parents and ancestors.

2.7 Conclusion

The *PPK Sutra* was recorded in a few Buddhist catalogues from the end of the seventh century onwards. When it was first recorded in the Buddhist catalogue *Dazhou kanding zhongjing mulu* in 695, it was regarded as apocryphal. However, by the end of the ninth century, it had become very popular and its nature of being apocryphal was no longer noticed. Commentaries on the sutra had been written and even the great scholar-monk Zongmi cited the sutra in his *Commentary on the Yulanpen Sutra*. Most scholars categorize the sutra into three editions, which are the Ding Lan Edition, Old Edition, and Augmented Edition. Among the Augmented Edition, four variants are carved on the stelae that were made during the early Northern Song from Shandong. A single text carved on the stela from Jinxiang, Shandong, dated to 985, differs from all the other editions even though it is also titled the *PPK Sutra*. Although filled with Buddhist terms, the text from Jinxiang instructs people to repay parents' kindness differently. Instead of asking people to make offerings to the Buddha and the sangha, the text from Jinxiang instructs people to serve

their parents and not to leave their parents, which will result in their attainment of Buddhahood. In conclusion, the textual history of the *PPK Sutra* is very rich and complicated. It was popular in medieval Chinese society, and its content was revised and rewritten throughout the medieval period.

Chapter Three: Stelae Carved with the *PPK Sutra* from rural Shandong

My previous chapter centred on textual aspects of a group of Buddhist scriptures composed in China, which all share the theme of filial piety and have a title that is or is similar to *Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經. In that chapter, I analysed the content and nature of this group of texts, and their historical development. This chapter shifts from textual sources like Buddhist manuscripts and catalogues to archaeological materials, namely stone stelae carved with Buddhist sutras titled the *PPK Sutra* in today's Shandong province. The aim of this chapter is to enhance our understanding of cultural mechanisms in Chinese society, empowered by both Buddhist and Chinese beliefs, from the lenses of the stelae carved with the sutra. By focusing on people and social practices that are related to the stelae, I show how these stelae can contribute to our understanding of Buddhist beliefs among the rural communities in China during the Tang and Song Dynasties.

This chapter focuses on the historical inscriptions on the stelae. These historical inscriptions provide valuable social and historical information: beyond the text of the *PPK Sutra* itself, the historical inscriptions on the stelae include names of the stelae donors, time of commission, geographical location, and so on. This type of information allows us to ask how the stelae and the sutras were used and how they were meaningful to their donors and other people.

3.1 A merit stela carved with the *PPK Sutra* from Yucheng, Shandong Province

This section provides basic information about a stela carved with the *PPK Sutra*, which is currently held in a private collection. According to an account of its collector, Liu Xiufeng 劉秀峰, the stela was discovered around the year 2010 in a river near the border of present-day Hebei and Shandong Provinces. The specific place or time is not recorded. The stela is carved not only with the sutra, but also with figural images, the *Heart Sutra*, and historical inscriptions. For a survey of the stela and its authenticity, see Appendix 3.1. I discuss the content of the sutra in Chapter Two. In this section, by studying its historical inscriptions, I will explain how to understand the stela by addressing the most basic yet often challenging questions: by whom and for whom was this stela made? Where may this stela have been placed? What are the other significant specificities of its material existence in context?

3.1.1 The historical inscription of the Yucheng stela and its significance

This section first summarises the content of the historical inscription carved on the Yucheng stela, and then analyses it by answering the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter: who were the donors and what was their identity? By whom, for whom, and for what purpose was this stela made?

The historical inscription of the stela can be divided into three parts according to their content.¹⁰⁹ The first three lines are the title of the historical inscription, from which it is known that the stela was made in Boyi village, which belonged to Yifeng Township, Yucheng County. It states that the following passages include a preface and a piece of poem.

¹⁰⁹ For my transcription and translation, see appendix 3A.

The second part is from the fourth line to the twelfth line, which is referred to as the preface mentioned in the title. It provides information about the donor's family, their intentions in creating it, and dates of the manufacture of the stela. The preface begins with names and official titles of Geng Shike and three generations of his male ancestors. Afterwards, it states that three brothers of the Geng family, including Shike, made offerings to their parents and the spirits of their ancestors in the previous seven generations by making a merit stela, one volume of the *PPK Sutra*, one volume of the *Heart Sutra*, and a set of the Amitābha Buddha. Shike, together with his four nephews, and on behalf of his deceased elder brothers, made this stela for their ancestors. Finally, it states that the stela was made from the first year of the Changqing era (821) to the eighth year of the Dahe era (834).

The third part of the inscription is composed in a literary style that expresses strong emotions. It emphasises the hardship of parents raising up children and cites a few sentences from the *PPK Sutra* to express the deep debt one owes to their parents. It ends with a poem, which again expresses the donors' will to repay the profound kindness of their parents.

I argue that the composition of the historical inscription is a mixture of two genres of writings: Chinese tomb epitaphs of the same period provide the overall structure within which Buddhist prayers and sutras were placed.

The structure of the text resembles a typical Tang epitaph in three ways. First, it bears a title inscribed before the main text, and the title ends with the two characters 並序 *bingxu*, meaning 'together with a preface', which appears in almost all the titles for tomb epitaphs from the Tang. Buddhist stelae from earlier times, particularly the Northern Dynasties (386-581), when they were in vogue, were usually dominated by

pictorial representations, such as images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, scenes from Buddhist sutras, and images of the donors.¹¹⁰ Inscriptions carved on stelae, moreover, were often placed besides sculptures or pictures, or on the reverse side, and usually had no title. When a Buddhist stela did have a title, it did not end with *bingxu*. For example, a stela dated to the first year of the Zhengshi era of the Northern Wei dynasty (504CE) was patronised by a nun named Faya and over a thousand people. At the very top of the stela appears the title 'Respectfully for the Emperor Xiaowen a piece with nine grades is made'.¹¹¹

Second, a typical Tang tomb epitaph begins with the most basic information of the person who passed away. After that, when one's ancestors held important or noteworthy official titles, their name, honorary titles, and places where they worked or lived were listed following the tomb owner's name.¹¹² Three preceding generations of ancestors are usually traced back, which also applies to the text that records the Geng family's history. At the beginning of the inscription, Geng's great-grandfather, grandfather, and father's names and titles are listed in order.

Lastly, almost all the Tang tomb epitaphs end with a poem or eulogy marked by the words *qici yue* 其詞曰 (its poem says) or *qiming yue* 其銘曰 (its eulogy says). After that, a text is composed in verses consisting of four characters, and is carved by beginning a new paragraph. It often counts to dozens of words and marks the end of the memorial texts.¹¹³ The historical inscription of the Yucheng stela ends the same way as Tang tomb epitaphs. On the twenty-third line, 其詞曰 *qici yue* is carved, and in the next line, thirty-

¹¹⁰ Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004.

¹¹¹ Yan Juanying 顏娟英, *Beichao fojiao shike tapian baipin* 北朝佛教石刻拓片百品, Taipei, Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 2008, p. 17

¹¹² Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Zhao Chao 趙超 (eds.), *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓志匯編, vol. 2, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992, pp. 2095-2168.

¹¹³ Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi*, pp. 2095-2168.

two characters in verses are carved to praise the virtue of the Geng family as being filial and pious Buddhists.

On the one hand, the historical inscription is composed by adopting an available genre of writing, which is for tomb epitaphs; on the other hand, the main content of the historical inscription is closely associated with Buddhist sutras and teachings. The lines from the eighth to the tenth in the preface part is a statement about this stela and its content. From the commissioner's perspective, by carving one volume of the *PPK Sutra*, one volume of the *Heart Sutra*, and a set of the Amitābha Buddha, the stone slab is transformed into a *gongde jie* 功德碣(merit stela), which will benefit their parents and the spirits of the previous seven generations of the family.

The concept of merit plays a major role in defining the practices of devoted Buddhists. Early Buddhist scriptures state that merit offsets the negative effects of past actions and helps to create positive conditions in this and future lives.¹¹⁴ Seeking these favourable effects of merit-accumulation, lay Buddhists are encouraged to participate in a variety of merit-gaining activities, such as supporting the sangha community by donating food and supplies, sponsoring vegetarian feasts and ritual services, and making images and statues. The Geng family might have participated in many forms of merit-gaining activities other than making the stela, but they did not leave any trace as durable as the stone slab.

3.1.2 Geng Shike and the Geng Family

¹¹⁴ Wendi Leigh Adamek, "Merit-Cultivation Practices and Image Making in the Northern Dynasties", in *Treasures Rediscovered: Chinese Stone Sculpture from the Sackler Collections at Columbia University*, New York, the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, 2008, p. 27.

The historical inscription states that the Geng family commissioned this stela to be made. I argue that among the members of the Geng family, it was Geng Shike who might have initiated the making of this stela. First, his name and title are listed in the first place following the title of the stela, which indicates his importance in the making of the stela. Secondly, all the other family members are addressed from Shike's point of view, such as his brothers and nephews.

Geng Shike held an official title of fifth grade, but it is not clear what his exact post was. His name is not recorded elsewhere.¹¹⁵ All we know about Shike is that his ancestors were officials, and some held important roles.

The inscription tells us about the Geng family members and their relationships. When the stela was made, Geng Shike was the eldest in the family, as well as the only surviving member of his generation. His two elder brothers' names were referred to by using *hui* 諱, which is only used for people who are dead. They each had two children, namely Geng's four nephews, whose names are also listed in the inscription.

Having understood the relationship between the Geng's family members, I propose it is therefore possible to relate them to the figures carved on the stela. Geng Shike, who was the eldest among the family when the stela was made, must have been the figure who is carved with long beard standing right next to the title of the inscription on the obverse of the stela. His wife and children are not mentioned in the inscription, but the female figure, who is carved on the left side on the obverse, might be her. The two younger figures standing next to the figure with long beard might be Geng Shike's sons. As for the four male figures carved on the left side of the stela, they must have been Geng Shike's four nephews. What appears interesting is that the new wife

¹¹⁵ Geng Shike's name does not appear in any historical record.

with the family name Wang, together with two children, also appears in the third register on the left side of the stela. Since it took fourteen years for the stela to be completed, I propose that it is possible that they were added in a later phase of the making of this stela, as the Geng family grew and gained new family members.

3.1.3 Commemoration of Geng's ancestors

The historical inscription shows how ancestor commemoration is expressed in a Buddhist context. The commemoration of Geng's ancestors can be discerned in three places in the inscription.

First, at the beginning of the text, the inscription lists the official titles and names of Shike's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Such a composition resembles the convention for tomb epitaphs of the same period. The mentioning of the ancestors from three generations also conforms to the Confucian hierarchical ritual requirement. In Confucian ritual requirement, only the emperor can commemorate seven generations, whereas officials can commemorate three generations.¹¹⁶

Second, in the eighth line of the inscription, it says that the three brothers of Shike made offerings to their parents and the spirits of the previous seven generations of the Geng family. During the Northern Dynasties, people usually prayed for seven generations of parents, which derives from teachings in the Buddhist sutras.¹¹⁷ The seven generations of parents do not refer to the secular parents who brought up their children. Rather, in Buddhist teaching, the seven generations of parents are the parents of sentient beings in the past seven kalpa, which is the longest period in the Indian

¹¹⁶ Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, "Tang Song shiqi de gongdesi : yi chanhui yishi wei zhongxin de taolun 唐宋時期的功德寺：以懺悔儀式為中心的討論", *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊, issue 2, no. 82, 2011, p. 276.

¹¹⁷ Liu Shufen, "Tang Song shiqi", p. 272.

cosmology. In the late Northern Dynasties period, the wording ‘seven generations of parents’ started to change to ‘seven generations of the deceased’ in one family.¹¹⁸ The object of prayer thus had shifted from a religious concept to secular family lines.

Third, in the eleventh line of the inscription, it says that the four nephews of Shike respectfully had the stela made for their ancestors on behalf of their deceased fathers. Even though their fathers had passed away, it was necessary to mention them so that Shike’s brothers did not miss the family commemoration for their ancestors.

3.1.4 Buddhist activities at rural villages in Shandong

The place names in the second line of the historical inscription are informative in two capacities. First, the place names are specified as Boyi Village, in Yifeng Township, Yucheng County. Geng Shike, the main donor of the stela mentioned later in the historical inscription, held an official title of the fifth grade. However, it is not known whether the title is honorary, or whether he held any position in the local government at Boyi Village. What can be inferred from the official title of Shike’s ancestors is that his great-grandfather was a county administrator in today’s Gu’an, Hebei, and his grandfather was a county administrator in today’s Xizhou, Shaanxi. It might have been in Shike’s father’s generation that the Geng family settled in Shandong.

Secondly, historical records of place names allow us to locate the county from which the stela originated on a historical map. Place names from four levels of administrative units are recorded: Qi Zhou 齊州 (Qi Prefecture), Yuchengxian 禹城縣 (Yucheng County), Yifeng Xiang 移風鄉 (Yifeng Township), and Boyi Cun 伯宜村 (Boyi

¹¹⁸ Liu Shufen, “Tang Song shiqi”, p. 272.

Village). The last place name, which includes ‘*cun*’, show that the stela came from a rural region belonging to Yifeng Township.¹¹⁹

Although there is no record of Yifeng Township and Boyi Village, multiple records of Yucheng County appear in historical sources from the same period.¹²⁰ They show that before the first year of the Tianbao era (742CE) in the Tang dynasty, Yucheng County was named Zhu’a County 祝阿縣, which had been established from the Han Dynasty (206BCE-220CE). The local gazetteer *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志, compiled in 813CE, records the geographic span of Qi Prefecture and the relative distance of counties within it, including Yucheng County.¹²¹ According to the historical map of the Tang dynasty edited by Tan Qi Xiang, the Yucheng County mentioned in the historical inscription of the stela is located near today’s Yucheng City, which is about seventy kilometers to the northwest of today’s Jinan City, the capital of Shandong Province.¹²²

Unfortunately, there is no archaeological trace of Yucheng County left, let alone the villages, so we have no information as to how the villages in Yucheng County were laid out, how many local temples were in each village, and whether the villagers carried out their daily religious activities in local temples or at home. However, recently published

¹¹⁹ Place names are listed in descending order of the administrative scale in Chinese convention. According to the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (*the Old Record of the Tang Dynasty*, compiled in 945CE), from 624 onwards, one hundred families was called one *li* 里, and five *li* is called one *xiang* 鄉. Units in the city are called *fang* 坊 (‘neighbourhood’ or ‘block’), and units in the countryside are called *cun* 村 (‘village’). Therefore, there were at least over a thousand people belonging to Yifeng Township, which is located in the countryside, and further named as Boyi Cun. *Jiu Tangshu*, vol. 5, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1975, p. 1289.

¹²⁰ Records of Yucheng county can be found in *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書, *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣志 (compiled in 813CE) and *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 (compiled during the Taiping xingguo era 976-983CE), according to China Historical GIS (Harvard University and Fudan University). For detailed information, see http://maps.cga.harvard.edu/tgaz/placename/hvd_45085. In the thirty-eighth volume of the *Jiu Tangshu*, it is recorded that “汉祝阿县，天宝元年，以为禹城，以县西有禹息故城” (‘Zhu’e County in the Han Dynasty was named as Yucheng in the first year of the Tianbao era, because in the western part of the county, there is the ancient Yuxi cheng’). *Jiu Tangshu*, vol. 5, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1975, p. 1452.

¹²¹ Li Jipu 李吉甫 and He Cijun 賀次君, *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 280.

¹²² Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集, Vol.5, Shanghai, ditu chubanshe, 1982, pp. 44-45.

papers containing stone inscriptions from the site of the Lingyan Temple in Jinan shed some light upon the Buddhist activities in rural regions in Shandong.

The inscriptions show that a few centuries later, people from different villages of Yucheng County had donated in groups for the construction of the Pizhi pagoda in the Lingyan Temple.¹²³ Located to the west of the Thousand Buddha Hall, Pizhi Pagoda is made of stone and brick in an octagonal shape. It has nine floors and measures fifty-four meters in height. From the inscription carved on the first floor, it is known that it took about sixty years for the pagoda to be completed. Its donors came from over twenty counties nearby, among which was Yucheng County.¹²⁴

The inscription carved on the pagoda informs us that villagers from Boyi Village continued to be active in Buddhist activities from the mid-Tang to early Northern Song. Among the donors who contributed to the construction of the Pizhi Pagoda, three groups came from the same villages as the Geng Family and in total six groups came from Yifeng Township. The donors bear titles of Buddhist associations, which vary from group to group, indicating that diverse form of Buddhist organisations existed in rural Shandong, even within a single village.¹²⁵

In the inscriptions carved on the pagoda that record information about the donors, all entries start with the place names of the donors' origin. I argue that this was a way to show the collective identity of the donors, especially when their patronage was juxtaposed with many other villages. Each entry specifies its place name to the level of township (*xiang*) and village (*cun*), such as Qi Prefecture, Yucheng County, Yifeng Township, Yang Village. For the villagers who spent considerable effort and money for

¹²³ Tan Jingyu 譚景玉, "Beisong qianqi Shandong diqu de fojiao jieshe chutan 北宋前期山东地区的佛教结社初探", in *Minsu yanjiu* 民俗研究, no. 4, 2014. pp. 94-101.

¹²⁴ Tan Jingyu, "Beisong qianqi", p. 95.

¹²⁵ Tan Jingyu, "Beisong qianqi", pp. 94-101.

the construction of the pagoda, it was essential that their religious merit was recorded and that their hometowns, together with their names, would be recorded and remembered for generations.

The specific mention of the village name at the very beginning of the stela from Boyi Village, Yifeng Township, Yucheng County, indicates Shike and his family's recognition of and attachment to the place. Including the place names and the titles of Shike's ancestors reflects the conscious choice to show Shike and his family's sense of belonging and attitudes toward the place they lived. Other Buddhist activities in which the Geng family might have participated are not recorded in the stela, but one may guess that they must have been familiar with a few Buddhist sutras, which certainly included the *PPK Sutra*.

3.1.5 The Buddhist way to repay parents' kindness

From the fourteenth line onwards, the style of writing shifts from a record of the making of the stela to ornate prose, which expresses strong emotional attachment to Geng Shike's parents and the great debt that one owes to one's parents. It quotes a few sentences from the *PPK Sutra*, which says that no matter how much suffering one physically bears, it is impossible to repay parents' kindness. Even bloody physical torture, such as scooping out one's eyeballs and piercing one's body, is not enough to repay one's parents' kindness.

These horrifying sentences are copied faithfully from the *PPK Sutra*. After this strong visceral depiction of one's debt to their parents, the scripture offers a solution to repay parents' kindness, which is to copy and disseminate the *PPK Sutra*. The latter half of the inscription shows that the Geng family is so convinced by the sutra that it is

necessary to have its excerpt composed into this passage. What they believe in most is probably the solution that is offered in the sutra. By reproducing the sutra, they can repay their parents' kindness. The Geng family carried this solution further by having the scripture carved in its full length on the merit stela.

3.2 Tomb stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra*

Although the long inscription of the Yucheng stela bears much information about the Geng family and the stela itself, we do not know where the stela was placed.¹²⁶ It is possible that it was placed in a local temple or in the Geng family shrine, but there is no evidence to support such speculations. About a hundred years after the Yucheng stela was made, four stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* were made. Thanks to their inscriptions, we know that they were erected in front of tombs. One of the stelae is from the Five Dynasties (907-960) and dated to 948. The other three are from the Northern Song and dated to 984, 985, and 1074. Since the stelae dated to 948 and 984 share many similarities, they will be discussed together in the following section.

3.2.1 Two tomb stelae of similar size

The stela dated to 948 bears historical inscriptions on its obverse and left side, which provide information about the stela and its donors. On its obverse, the inscription says:

Orphan Zhiqian, Zhilu respectfully had the old tombs of their deceased parents reopened and constructed another new tomb. They also had a stone stela and a merit shrine made. Together with all the family members alive, make offerings forever and exalted by millions of generations.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Some Buddhist stelae contain inscriptions that provide self-referential information about provenance and spatial context. According to Dorothy Wong's research, the first category of use of Buddhist stelae is as spatial markers in public spaces. And the second category of their placement is within the courtyard of Buddhist temples. See Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, pp. 67-69.

¹²⁷ I translate the inscription after the transcription provided by the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften). For the Chinese transcriptions, see Appendix 3B.

Another paragraph of the inscription carved on its obverse says:

Orphan Feng Zhiqian, brother Feng Zhilu, on the fifth day, tenth month in the first year of the Qianyou era, respectfully had a stone stela made for the deceased ancestors and parents.¹²⁸

The inscription states clearly that the stela was made when Zhiqian and Zhilu had a new tomb constructed for their parents. The stela is dedicated not only to Zhiqian and Zhilu's parents, but also to their ancestors, including their great-grandfather, grandfather, and father, whose names are mentioned at the very beginning of the inscription.

From the historical inscription, it is known that the surname of Zhiqian and Zhilu was Feng, who came from Fengjia Zhuang, Guoman Village, Jinxiang County in Shandong. Feng must be the dominant family name in Fengjia Zhuang, since the literal translation of Fengjia Zhuang is 'Feng Family Farmstead'. This Feng family mentioned in the stela might have been one of the Feng families with many extended relatives, since there are in total fifty-one names from the Feng family and the extended Feng family recorded in the inscriptions. They might have all made some contributions to the construction of the new tomb and the commission of the stela dedicated to their ancestors. The large extended family of the Fengs included Zhiqian's and Zhilu's wives' children, nieces and nephews, and many other relatives.

A stela made just two years later than the Feng family's was also used as a tomb stela. The original stone slab is lost, but its rubbing survives, and its historical inscription says that in the third year of the Qianyou era (950), orphan Meng Zhijin had a stone stela made for his deceased parents and the three previous generations of the Meng family.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ I translate the inscription after the transcription provided by the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

¹²⁹ The transcription of the inscription is provided by the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. For the Chinese transcriptions, see Appendix 3C.

Another example from the Northern Song Dynasty dated to 984 shares a few similarities with the one dated to 948.¹³⁰ First, it was commissioned as a tomb stela. The inscription carved on its obverse says that it was erected in front of a tomb. Due to erosion of the inscription, the owner of the tomb is unknown.

Second, the making of the stela involved many people. The names recorded in the inscription total over sixty people. Nearly fifty of them share the family name Zhang. Thus, it is likely that they came from the same household. However, a dozen patrons recorded having different family names. Some of their family names have two characters, such as Jianpo, which indicates that their origins were outside sedentary China, or 'China proper'. Due to the erosion of the inscription, it is difficult to tell the relationship between the Zhang family and the Jianpo family, and other people recorded in the stela.

Third, the stela dated to 948 and the stela dated to 984 are similar in size and design. The stela dated to 948 measures 1.64 meters in height and 0.45 meters in width.¹³¹ In comparison, the stela dated to 984 measures 1.52 meters in height and 0.52 meters in width. They both feature a niche at the top, in which a Buddha and two bodhisattvas are carved. The similarities shared by the two stelae show that it might have been a common practice for people living in rural Shandong in the second half of the tenth century to commission a tomb stela carved with the *PPK Sutra*, in order to commemorate their deceased parents and ancestors. In addition, such tomb stelae may have followed similar design as the stela dated to 948 and 984, and more tomb stelae of similar kinds must have been made in the region during the tenth century.

¹³⁰ The transcription of this stela is generously shared from the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. For a partial translation of its transcription, see Appendix 3D.

¹³¹ Shandong shike yishu bowuguan, "Shandong Juancheng, Chengwu", pp. 22-29.

In conclusion, the stelae discussed in this section were used as tomb stelae and for family commemoration, a function observable for such objects since the Han Dynasty (206BCE-220CE). Among all the stelae dated to the Han Dynasty, nearly half are tomb stelae.¹³² Stone stelae were the preferred medium to embody the ritual text composed for the dead. A Buddhist sutra carved on a stela endows it with a religious function empowered by the words of the Buddha. By having the sutra inscribed, a family's descendants are promised to be able to repay the kindness of their parents in the correct way instructed by the sutra.

3.2.2 A tomb stela commissioned by a filial son

A stela dated to 985 differs from the stelae discussed above by pointing out Confucius's filial piety at the beginning of its historical inscription. It says:

Jin Xiang County, Zunhua Township, Zhonglecheng Village, Weijun...Yanlang heard that the world began when heaven was separated from earth. Only when there was the doctrine of filial piety did the five teachings come into being...because Confucius [taught filial piety] to Zeng Shen...Filial piety is the origin of [proper ritual] practices. From the top [emperors] to the common people, there is nobody who does not practice filial respect yet can successfully distinguish himself...Yanlang always regrets that [his parents] passed away when he was young...Although he wants to serve [and greet] his parents in the morning and dawn.¹³³

The donor Yanlang states his belief in the importance of filial piety, which is considered as the origin of good practices and the most crucial moral criterion for one to meet. By patronising the stela and having the inscription carved, Yanlang is portrayed as a filial son who followed the teaching of Confucius. At the end of the inscription, it mentions that one volume of the *PPK Sutra* is carved and erected in front of his parents' tomb.

¹³² Dorothy Wong, *Chinese steles*, p. 27.

¹³³ My translation is after Ren Xiaoxing's transcription of the inscription. See Ren Xiaoxing 任小行, "Beisong Yongxi ernian *Fumu enzhong jing* bei", p. 8. For the full transcription and translation of the historical inscription, see Appendix 3E.

Thus, Yanlang follows the Buddhist convention of using the sutra to repay parents' kindness.

The inscription carved on the stela reveals how Confucian and Buddhist conventions could be integrated in rural Shandong. Yanlang is obliged to behave as a filial son as required by the Confucian teaching. He also expresses his sadness for not being able to serve his parents because they passed away when he was very young. The obligation of respecting, submitting to, and serving one's parents, which are Yanlang's concern, are expressed in the inscription. However, for Yanlang, it seems that a tomb stela carved with an articulation of his mourning and regret was not considered sufficient to commemorate his parents, since Buddhism offers a more direct and straightforward way to ensure that the kindness of parents can be repaid. Therefore, he had a volume of the *PPK Sutra* carved on the stela. The Confucian obligation for one to serve their parents is realised by following the Buddhist way to repay one's parents' kindness.

3.2.3 A tomb stela dated to 1074

In addition to the stelae discussed above, a stela dated to 1074 is also carved with the *PPK Sutra* and used as a tomb stela. Information about this stela is limited, as it is only mentioned briefly in one article by Zhang Zong.¹³⁴ He provides some basic yet crucial information about the stela, which makes it possible to interpret the stela in comparison with the other contemporary stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra*.

¹³⁴ Zhang Zong, "Shike fojing", p. 212.

According to Zhang, the stela is made in a simple fashion. Three pieces of historical inscription on the stela shed light on this humble object. At the top of the stela, it records the surname of the stela's patron, his origin, and a title for the stela. The patron is a certain Xue from Hedong County, and the inscription is a record of the stela for the seventh funeral ritual. In front of the sutra is carved: 'the great Song State, Ji Prefecture, Juye County, Huangjian Township, Qufang Village, Xue Zhen respectfully had a stela made for his parents'.¹³⁵ Although brief, the sentence records the exact place name where Xue Zhen came from and lets us know that this stela is for his parents.

The last part of the historical inscription, which is carved behind the sutra, provides further information about the participants in the funeral ritual that Xue held for his parents. It records: '[Dedicated by] the filial son and benevolent grandsons from the Xue family, and nun Qingxuan, who is the host of the great pagoda court, the master for burial Ma Jiugao, [and] the inscriber Shao Wen'.¹³⁶ This information is valuable in that it not only confirms that the stela played a role in the funeral ritual of Xue's parents, but also informs us who else was involved in the burial and funeral ritual of Xue's parents. Religious figures such as the nun Qingxuan and the burial master were indispensable to ensure that the funeral ritual was carried properly.

Together with the tomb stelae discussed before, this stela shows that in rural Shandong during the Five Dynasties and Northern Song, it was popular to incorporate Buddhist conventions into funeral rituals, especially the making of tomb stelae for one's deceased parents. The *PPK Sutra* is very popular thanks to the power of the sutra and its content, which is about the great kindness of parents, and how one can repay one's parents' kindness in a straightforward and promising Buddhist way, that is, by copying

¹³⁵ Zhang Zong, "Shike fojing", p. 212.

¹³⁶ Zhang Zong, "Shike fojing", p. 212.

the sutra. The plain and down-to-earth language may also have been the reason for its wide acceptance among the rural lay Buddhist communities, which made the sutra likely to be chosen to be carved on stelae and thus easy to reproduce and disseminate.

3.3 Historical inscription of the stela dated to 1070 and Buddhism in rural Shandong in the Northern Song

This section carries the conclusion from the previous section further by considering what light the stela dated to 1070 sheds on our understanding of the reception of the *PPK Sutra* in the lay Buddhist communities in the early Northern Song in Shandong. The lengthy historical inscription carved on this stela allows us to explore the purposes for which the stela was made and the factors that might have resulted in the decision to embellish it with a carving of the sutra.

What distinguishes the stela dated to 1070 from the other stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* is the identity of its commissioners and the purpose of its commission. All the other stelae were commissioned by a single family and were dedicated to deceased parents and ancestors from that one family. By contrast, this stela was produced under the patronage of members of different households within the same village. What is more, it was not dedicated to any specific parents or ancestors.

3.3.1 The circumstances of the making of the stela

The historical inscription provides a clear explanation for why the stela was commissioned, although it does not mention explicitly why it is the *PPK Sutra* that was chosen to be the appropriate sutra to be carved on it.

The record for making the stela, which has over two hundred words, is carved on one of its sides and records the circumstances for the making of the stela:

In the middle of the first month of the fourth year of the Zhiping era in the great Song (1067), [we] received royal graciousness from the Yingzong emperor. An imperial edict declared that in any village, town, county, or prefecture of the state, the emperor promised to endow any anonymous temple that has over thirty rooms with a plaque of 'lasting holiness'. Now Liujing Village has only an ancient stela dated to the Tang Dynasty, which was carved with the name of Zhenyuan Temple. Zhang Wenchang from this village and over four hundred households with various surnames carry the good luck of their deceased ancestors, and once again expanded into...various halls for the Buddha and bodhisattvas, galleries, and gates numbering over seventy. Wenchang and others in this *Shu*¹³⁷ are Prime Scholars¹³⁸. [They] presented a memorial about the plaque on the twenty-sixth day of the third month in the second year of the Xining era (1069). With honour the current emperor endows the plaque *Shoushengsi* 壽聖寺 [the Temple of Lasting Holiness]. Wenchang, Cao Fei, and others are all lay Buddhist followers among the families. They sincerely had one stela made. The imperial edict authorised a yellow band¹³⁹, whose title is carved on this stela. Out of concern that later generations would have no means of knowing this, thus it is recorded. The fourth day of the sixth month in the third year of the Xining era (1070), inscriber Liang Yu records.¹⁴⁰

In sum, the record states that the stela was commissioned in order to record and commemorate that the villagers from Liujing Village received a royally endowed plaque in 1070. The plaque was for a newly completed temple in the village, whose construction was inspired by an imperial edict announced two years earlier issued by the Yingzong emperor (r.1063-1067). According to the record here, the Yingzong emperor promised to grant a plaque of 'lasting holiness' for any anonymous temple in the state that possessed over thirty rooms. When the edict was announced, Liujing Village was not qualified for such a plaque. The only trace of a temple in the village was

¹³⁷ *Shu* can refer to an administrative unit. However, it is not clear where the *shu* here is located or to which higher administrative unit it belonged.

¹³⁸ *Zhuangyuan* 狀元, translated as Prime or 'Number One' Scholar, was a title granted to persons who came first in the highest imperial exam.

¹³⁹ It is not clear what *huang* (translated as 'yellow band') refers to here.

¹⁴⁰ The transcription in Chinese below is mainly after an unpublished draft, which is generously shared from the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' of Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. The translation from the Chinese transcription into English is my own. For the Chinese transcription, see Appendix 3F.

a stela dated to the Tang, on which the title 'Zhenyuan Temple' was inscribed. However, the villagers took advantage of the edict and expanded the former 'temple' into seventy rooms in two years and three months. Even though the Yingzong emperor had already died when the temple was completed in 1069, the villagers sent their request for the plaque, and successfully gained one from the succeeding Shenzong emperor (r.1067-1085) in 1070.

The endowment of these 'lasting holiness' or *Shousheng* plaques to Buddhist temples mentioned in the inscription was a court policy that was part of the celebration of the Shousheng Festival recorded in the *History of the Song*.¹⁴¹ According to this official history, the Shousheng Festival was established four months after the Yingzong emperor's enthronement in 1063. Shousheng was designated as a festival to celebrate his birthday, which took place in the first month of every year. Although there was no mention of the emperor granting titles to temples for the Shousheng Festival in the *History of the Song*, it was documented in three Buddhist records. In the fourth year of the Zhiping era (1067), the same year recorded on the stela when the imperial edict was announced, the Yingzong emperor proclaimed that he would endow a Shousheng plaque for any unofficial temples possessing over thirty rooms.¹⁴² This practice is termed *ci'e* 賜額 (authorised plaque) in the records.

Liu Shufen's research shows that authorising plaques for Buddhist temples was regarded as a state measure to regulate and control Buddhism from the Tang (618-907) to the Northern Song (960-1127).¹⁴³ Her paper argues that during the Tang and Five

¹⁴¹ Tuotuo, 脱脱, *Songshi* 宋史, vol.13, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985, p. 2398.

¹⁴² See *Fozu tongji*, T.49.2035.0414a15-16, T.49.2035.0464b16. Nianchang 念常, *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, T.49.2036.0668a28-29. Jue'an 覺岸, *Shishi jigulue* 釋氏稽古略, T.49.2037.0817b13-14.

¹⁴³ Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao zhengce yu sheyi de zhuanxing 中古佛教政策與社邑的轉型", in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 (ed.) Rong Xinjiang, vol.13, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2007, p. 252. Huang Min-chi 黃敏枝, "Songdai zhengfu duiyu siyuan de guanli zhengce 宋代政府對於寺院的管理政策", *Dongfang zongjiao yanjiu* 東方宗教研究, no. 1

Dynasties (907-960), *ci'e* was a way to assume strict control of the construction and quantity of Buddhist temples.¹⁴⁴ An example can be found from a record titled 'Permission for not closing down the Dapi Temple', dated to 958.¹⁴⁵ In the fifth year of the Xiande era in the Later Zhou (951-960), the Shizong emperor (r. 954-959) released an edict to abolish all Buddhist temples and monks. After pleading from officials and Buddhist monks from the Dapi Temple, the emperor issued an edict to preserve rather than abolish it. In the record, it says:

Thus the order from Heaven is delivered. Laws and ordinances [were issued to regulate] the monasteries. Temples with authorised plaques stay. Temples without plaques must be abolished. This is not to eliminate Buddhism, but to admonish people without land to farm.¹⁴⁶

The record shows that an authorised plaque for a Buddhist temple in the Later Zhou served as recognition of its official status. When the state's policy toward Buddhism became strict, an authorised plaque was the crucial criterion for deciding on the preservation or elimination of Buddhist temples.

3.3.2 *Ci'e* policy and the Shousheng Temple recorded in the stela dated to 1070

State policies toward Buddhism during the first one hundred years of the Northern Song were mostly supportive, but there was a visible change in terms of the effectiveness of the policies along with the succession of emperors. At the beginning of the Northern

September 1987, pp. 104-112. Zhang Gong 張弓, *Han Tang fosi wenhuashi* 漢唐佛寺文化史, Beijing, Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1997, pp. 232-234.

¹⁴⁴ Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao", p. 252.

¹⁴⁵ Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao", pp. 252-254.

¹⁴⁶ The original Chinese is "乃頒行天命，條貫僧居，有勅額者存，無勅額者廢。非輕釋氏，用誠游民". The translation into English is my own. From *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編, vol. 121, 28, quoted from Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao", p. 254.

Song, they started as a strict and effective form of controlling Buddhism, but later became loose regulations and impotent orders.¹⁴⁷ Although the first two emperors of the Northern Song displayed personal affinity with Buddhism, the scale of Buddhism, which was crucial to the economy and stability of the state, was carefully controlled during the first forty years of the Northern Song.¹⁴⁸ But as a result of continuous support for Buddhism from the court and less rigorous regulation of the expansion of Buddhism, the numbers of Buddhist monks and temples reached a peak during the reign of the third Northern Song emperor, Zhenzong (r. 997-1022).¹⁴⁹ This situation persisted until the reign of the Huizong emperor (1100-1125), who favoured Taoism over Buddhism.¹⁵⁰

As part of state control over Buddhism, *ci'e* during the Northern Song functioned in ways that were not entirely the same as *ci'e* in the Tang and Five Dynasties. Huang Min-chi's research shows that *ci'e* in the Northern Song became an expedient policy to show tolerance for Buddhism and gain control of private temples.¹⁵¹ Illegal and private temples often became shelters for criminals at large, tax and corvée dodgers, and thus a threat to the state economy and social security if left unattended by the government.¹⁵² However, instead of eliminating private and illegal temples, the policy of *ci'e* during the Northern Song allowed them to remain and incorporated them into official records and administration.

¹⁴⁷ For a summary of state policy toward Buddhism during this period, see Gu Jichen 顧吉辰, *Songdai fojiao shigao* 宋代佛教史稿, Zhengzhou, Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1993, pp. 1-11.

¹⁴⁸ The first two Northern Song emperors were the Taizu emperor (r.960-976) and Taizong emperor (r. 976-997). For their attitudes and state policies towards Buddhism, see Gu, *Songdai fojiao shigao*, pp. 1-7.

¹⁴⁹ Gu, *Songdai fojiao shigao*, pp. 7-9.

¹⁵⁰ Gu, *Songdai fojiao shigao*, pp. 9-11; Patricia Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2014.

¹⁵¹ For the state policies of the Northern Song Dynasty to legitimise and control Buddhist temples, see Huang Min-chi, "Songdai zhengfu", pp. 104-112.

¹⁵² Huang, "Songdai zhengfu", p. 111.

The Northern Song was not the first period when illegal Buddhist temples were permitted to exist. Two edicts dated from the Tang and Later Tang (923-936) show that privately constructed temples were permitted to remain when new temples were forbidden to be built.¹⁵³ But Huang Min-chi's study shows that it was during the first hundred years of the Northern Song that there were a few times in which the state issued authorising plaques to private illegal temples on a large scale.¹⁵⁴

During the Northern Song, it was common to endow plaques for Buddhist temples on the occasion of festivals celebrating the Song emperors' or empresses' birthdays. Inscriptional and archaeological evidence show that the number of Shousheng plaques endowed for the Shousheng festival was so great that it exceeded that associated with any other birthday festival.¹⁵⁵ According to a record dated to the Song from the Teng Prefecture in Shandong, among the three thousand private temples constructed before the Shousheng festival in 1067, over two thirds of the temples successfully gained Shousheng plaques as they met the criterion of possessing over thirty rooms.¹⁵⁶ The number in the record testifies to the large quantity of private and illegal temples during the reign of the Yingzong emperor, at least in the Teng prefecture in Shandong. By receiving Shousheng plaques to celebrate the emperor's birthday, these temples became registered through official recognition, and probably also came to be governed under

¹⁵³ One edict was ordered by the Xuanzong emperor (r. 712-756) titled "Edicts forbidding the construction of temples" (*jin chuangzao siguan zhao* 禁創造寺觀詔), from *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文, vol.26, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 4875. Another example is an edict ordered by the Mingzong emperor (926-933), titled "Forbidding the construction of Buddhist temples and private tonsure" (*jinzao fosi bing si tidu* 禁造佛寺並私剃度). Quoted from note 10 in Huang, "Songdai zhengfu", p. 133.

¹⁵⁴ According to Huang, there were four times of large-scale *ci'e*, which took place in 978, 1018, 1062, and 1067. See Huang, "Songdai zhengfu", p. 111.

¹⁵⁵ Huang Min-chi, pp. 111-112.

¹⁵⁶ Huang cited the record from Sheng Kezhao 生克昭, "Song sansheng tongfeng shengzhi cunliu baotayuan ji 宋三省同奉聖旨存留寶塔院記" in *Tengxian jinshizhi* 滕縣金石志, 1944, Beijing, Fayuansi, pp. 59-60. Huang does not mention where the record is from or its date. The character *yuan* 院 is missed in her note. See Huang, p. 111 note 18.

some administrative control rather than left with complete freedom in hands of the local people.

Information on surviving archaeological sites published in mainland China also suggests that temples endowed with the Shousheng plaque around the 1070s are evident in parts of China other than Shandong. Two temples titled Shousheng are reported to be found in Shanxi. The one in Yushe County, Shanxi is said to have received its title in 1067, the same year when the Liujing Villagers heard of the edicts about endowing plaques.¹⁵⁷ The other Shousheng Temple in Ruicheng County is dated around 1078, and its abbot received his official license during the Shousheng festival in 1067.¹⁵⁸ In Henan, two stone towers, one in Zhongmou County and the other in Shangshui County, are recorded to have been built together with the Shousheng Temples during the early Northern Song.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the Shousheng Temple on Liujing Village recorded in the stela dated to 1070 is one of the thousands of temples across China that acquired the Shousheng title during the early Northern Song.

In line with Huang's argument, the inscription of the stela indicates a flexible state policy in the early Northern Song, revealing a different relationship between an authorised plaque and the legitimisation of Buddhist temples. In this case, Liujing Village had nothing but a stela dated to the Tang that can be related to a Buddhist temple before the announcement of authorising Shousheng plaques in 1067.

¹⁵⁷ The date and origin of the temple's name is recorded in the stela dated to 1763, during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), found inside of the temple. See Li Huizhi 李会智, "Yushe Haobicun Shoushengsi shanmen Shidai kao 榆社郝壁村壽聖寺山門時代考", *Wenwu shijie* 文物世界, no. 1, 1996, p. 19.

¹⁵⁸ The stela found inside of the tower at the Shousheng Temple is about its abbot Monk Huirun, which provides crucial information about the development of the temple. For the postulation of the temple's date, see Liu Haibo 刘海波, "Ruichengxian Shoushengsi jieshi heshang Rungong taming 芮城縣壽聖寺戒師和尚潤公塔銘考析", *Wenwu Shijie* 文物世界, no. 3, 2009, pp. 24-25.

¹⁵⁹ Zhoukou diqu qunyiguan 周口地區群藝館 and Shangshuixian wenhuaguan 商水縣文化館, "Shoushengsi ta diaocha 壽聖寺塔調查", *He'nan wenbo tongxun* 河南文博通訊, no. 4, 1978, p. 17 and p. 29. Song Xiulan 宋秀蘭 and Bie Zhiming 別治明, "He'nan Zhongmou Shoushengsi shuangta 河南中牟壽聖寺雙塔", *Wenwu* 文物, no. 9, 2012, pp. 81-89.

Nonetheless, the local villagers, who must have been enthusiastic lay Buddhists, took the *ci'e* policy for the celebration of the Shousheng festival as an opportunity, and built a new temple to meet the criterion of possessing over thirty rooms and finally gain an authorised plaque. Thus, the *ci'e* policy recorded in the stela in fact inspired and encouraged the emergence and expansion of the Shousheng Temple.

3.3.3 The *PPK Sutra* carved on the stela

Why was the *PPK Sutra* chosen as the appropriate sutra for the stela dedicated to commemorate gaining official acknowledgement? Does it indicate any function or specific purpose of the Shousheng Temple in Liuqing Village? These are only two of the many questions that are pertinent to the stela, which may help us to understand its genesis. This section investigates the inscription from another angle by looking into the rest of its inscriptions, namely those carved after the *PPK Sutra* on the obverse, and those on its two sides.

The contents of the inscription carved on the obverse after the main text of the sutra consist of two parts: a prayer that it was hoped would be realised by making the stela, and a list of names of twenty-four people. The prayer is not long and contains both secular and religious wishes:

上報四恩，下資三有。奉為皇帝萬歲，重臣千秋，國界安寧。法輪常轉，
一切眾生同成佛果。

Upward repaying four kinds of obligations for kindness received; downward aiding three kinds of existence. [We] humbly offer [this sutra] so that the emperor may live ten thousand years, distinguished officials [may live] a thousand autumns, and the borders of the empire [may remain] safe and quiet. [Moreover],

may the wheel of the Dharma always turn, and may all sentient beings attain Buddhahood.¹⁶⁰

To comprehend the prayer, I am inclined to divide it into three sections: first, it expresses gratitude and the donors' resolution to help others; second, it prays for the longevity of the emperor, the well-being of important officials, and the stability of the state; and third, it prays for the permanent endurance of the teachings of Buddhism and that all sentient beings attain the bliss of reincarnation.

The first and third section use Buddhist terms, and express prayers relevant to Buddhist concerns. The second section is purely secular, and is directed solely to the emperor, state, and court of the Northern Song. Since the temple's official plaque was royally endowed for the celebration of Yingzong emperor's birthday, the second section of the prayer carved after the sutra corresponds to the genesis of the stela. To conclude, the prayer reflects the donors' concern in two realms: a Buddhist one and a secular one, and the latter concerns the prosperity of the state. Although none of the donors for the stela held a position in the government, they expressed their prayers for the well-being of the emperor and the state.

The inscription carved after the prayer says: 'Everyone from the sutra society (*jingshe*) including Shanchi, Shan..., Shan..., Shanqing, Shanming, etc. kowtow. [We] kindly offer the sutra titled the *Sutra on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness*.'¹⁶¹

Carved after the sutra, this section of the inscription informs us that there is a sutra society (*jingshe*), and its members not only bow down, but also offer the *PPK Sutra*. The scale of the sutra society is not known, but there are about twenty-four names carved right after the above-translated text, who must have been its members.

¹⁶⁰ I translate the inscription after the unpublished transcription generously provided by the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

¹⁶¹ I translate the inscription after the transcription provided by the project 'Buddhist Stone Sūtras in China' by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

Sutra society is one type of organized associations which create bonds between members for all kinds of activities as an act of piety, including casting statues, organizing festivals, copying and reciting sutras. Records of Buddhist associations can be found in the stele inscriptions from Northern China, the manuscripts from Dunhuang, and historical sources.¹⁶² They were often named *she* 社 from the seventh century onwards.¹⁶³

Before the long list of names of the members of the sutra society, five representatives are mentioned who led the group to kowtow. Each of them bears a title of *shan* 善, whose meanings include kindness, benevolence, beneficence, and goodness, in the sense of both virtue and skill. However, it is not clear what the exact roles of the Shanchi, Shanqing, Shanming, and so on were in the sutra society. One possibility is that these titles are personal names that the members used in the sutra society. On a stela, which is dated to the seventh century by Chavannes, there is a list of members of a Buddhist associations who had all received personal names that shared an identical first character *hui* 慧.¹⁶⁴

This sutra society was one of the many that were popular in the Northern Song society, the prevalence of which is known from contemporary literary sources and inscriptions.¹⁶⁵ The writings of two important officials of the Northern Song, Zhang

¹⁶² The inscriptions mostly are from the end of the fifth century to the first century of the Tang dynasty. The Dunhuang manuscripts are dated largely from the ninth and tenth centuries. Historical sources supplement the archaeological findings and provide some information about the spread and development of Buddhist associations in Chinese society. Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: an Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 259-260.

¹⁶³ Earlier associations were known as *yi* 邑, *yi yi* 邑義, or *yi hui* 邑會. *Yi* designates the inhabitants of the same town, and *she* refers to the ancient village assemblies for the cult of the God of the Soil. For the discussion of the usage of the term *she*, see Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, pp. 260-263.

¹⁶⁴ Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, p. 267. Édouard Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale*, vol.I, part 2, *La sculpture bouddhique*, Paris, École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1913, no.473, fig.1683.

¹⁶⁵ Studies of Buddhist society have focused mainly on periods before the Northern Song. See Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Zhongguo shiqi sheyi yanjiu* 中古時期社邑研究, Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2019. Fu Xiaojing 傅晓静, *Tang*

Fangping 張方平 (1007-1091) and Cao Xun 曹勛 (1098-1174), show sutra societies flourishing in places ranging from villages to cities and even to military camps.¹⁶⁶ In some of the sutra societies, Buddhist monks played a leading role and their main activity seems to have been to explain sutras to their audience.¹⁶⁷

Among the twenty-four names listed behind the prayer carved on the stela dated to 1070, there are no religious titles, which indicates that the sutra society consisted mainly of lay Buddhists. However, it is noteworthy that five members of the sutra society also appear in the name list of the donors who commissioned the stela, which is carved on one of the sides of the stela. This shows that the people who were in the sutra society also contributed to the making of the stela, and thus they might have been the ones who suggested the choice of the *PPK Sutra* to the donors for this sutra to be carved.

Although no monks or nuns appear in the name list of the sutra society, it is possible that the sutra society mentioned in the stela played an important role in explaining and promoting the *PPK Sutra* in local society. This speculation derives from past studies on Buddhist societies during the Tang and Song periods, when private Buddhist societies not only held activities related to Buddhism, such as regular Buddhist rituals and explanation of sutras, but also promoted social values to members and people outside its society.¹⁶⁸

Hao Chunwen's study based on Dunhuang manuscripts in the ninth and tenth century shows that regulations, merit records, and ritual texts of Buddhist societies

Wudai minjian sishe yanjiu 唐五代民間結社研究, Beijing, Jingji kexue chubanshe 2008. Meng Xianshi 孟憲實, *Dunhuang minjian jieshe yanjiu* 敦煌民間結社研究, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009. Liu Shufen, "Xianghuo yinyuan: Beichao de fojiao jieshe 香火因緣: 北朝的佛教結社", in Huang Kuanzhong 黃寬重 (ed.) *Zhongguoshi xinlun: jiceng shehui fence* 中國史新論: 基層社會分冊, Taipei, Lianjing chubanshe, 2009, pp. 219-272. Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao zhengce yu sheyi de zhuanxing", pp. 233-291.

¹⁶⁶ Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao zhengce yu sheyi de zhuanxing", p. 292.

¹⁶⁷ Liu Shufen, "Zhonggu fojiao zhengce yu sheyi de zhuanxing", p. 291.

¹⁶⁸ Hao Chunwen, *Zhonggu shiqi sheyi yanjiu*, p. 173.

contain contents that promote Confucian social values, including hierarchical social and political orders, loyalty, and filial piety.¹⁶⁹ Among the sixteen manuscripts that Hao lists, ten mention the word filial piety (*xiao*). For example, in manuscript S.6417 dated to 920, it says that members of the Buddhist society recorded in the manuscript have descendants who are officials and they pass filial piety and respect to elder brothers down in the family.¹⁷⁰ Records like this manuscript praise and promote the value of filial piety amongst Buddhist societies. In addition, merit records and ritual texts were often composed to be read or publicised to audiences beyond members of societies, by means of which the Confucian social values were praised and promoted.

There is no other information about the sutra society recorded in the inscription on the surviving stela. It can only be postulated that the sutra society might have functioned as a privately organised society and offered the sutra, whose content promotes filial piety, to be carved on the stela. The stela was meant to commemorate the reception of a royally endowed plaque. It is likely that it was kept in the temple as well. Had the sutra society held activities in the Shousheng temple? What is the relationship between the sutra society and the temple?

Unfortunately, there is so little information left that it is impossible to answer these questions. However, it is known that during the same period in Dunhuang, private Buddhist societies often did not belong to any specific temple. Some Buddhist monks participated in activities organised by Buddhist societies, such as offering incense and burning lights, but they did so not to represent the temple, but rather in their own

¹⁶⁹ Hao Chunwen, pp. 179-181.

¹⁷⁰ S.6417 is a *zhaiwen* 齋文 titled “The second month of the sixth year of the Zhenming era (920) a certain gentleman as a member of Buddhist society arranged the *zhaiwen* for Sanchang Buddhist society” (貞明六年二月社子某公為三長邑義設齋文). *Zhaiwen* is a script to be read out in public at the beginning of a vegetarian feast gathering, usually by monks. It usually contains a section called *tande* 嘆德 that praises the virtue of the donors of the feast. In the *tande* section of S.6417, it praises the filial piety of the donor. Hao Chunwen, p. 180.

names.¹⁷¹ Moreover, Buddhist societies were formed mainly on the basis of individual initiative. For example, manuscript S.6186 from Dunhuang records that when a Buddhist temple is in need of repair, a Buddhist society would form a contract with the Buddhist temple. The society offered labour for the repair, and the Buddhist temple offered the members meals in exchange.¹⁷² Therefore, the Buddhist society did not belong to the temple nor was it under its leadership.

The donors' names carved on the stela indicate that some donors came from the same households. On one side of the stela, it notes that Zhang Wenchang and Cao Fei were the trustworthy men from their family groups. On the other side of the stela, it records a name list of about sixty-eight people, who are the donors of the stela. Many of them share the same family name, which indicates that they might come from the same households or extended family. Zhang and Cao are two of the common family names that can be found in the name list. Among the donors, there were also a few Buddhist monks, one of whom is specifically noted as belonging to this temple. In addition, by the time the stela was completed, seven of the donors, among whom was Zhang Wenchang, had already passed away.

To conclude, there are about ninety people who were involved in the making of the stela. Twenty-eight belonged to a Buddhist sutra society, which must have played an important role in local Buddhist activities, such as explaining and promoting the *PPK Sutra*. Although its members were lay Buddhists, they issued prayers in Buddhist terms, and their secular wishes concerned solely the stability of the state. Compared to the number of people recorded in the sutra society, the donors for the making of the stela amounted to nearly seventy people, a few of which were Buddhist monks.

¹⁷¹ Meng Xianshi, pp. 113-125.

¹⁷² Meng Xianshi, p. 128.

3.4 Conclusion

The eight stelae discussed in this chapter are all carved with the *PPK Sutra*. They share both similarities and differences in terms of how they were used and how Buddhist belief and Chinese conventions integrated.

The earliest one, which is from Yucheng and dated to the Tang dynasty in 834, is dedicated to the ancestors of a certain Geng family from a rural locale called Boyi Village in Yucheng County. The main donor, Geng Shike, mourned the passing of his father by commissioning this stela. By adopting a writing style of Chinese tomb epitaphs and quoting excerpts from the *PPK Sutra*, the stela incorporates the Chinese manner of commemorating ancestors with Buddhist Sutras on display.

Another group of four stelae from the Five Dynasties and Northern Song Dynasty were also made for commemorating the deceased, but were placed in front of tombs. It is noteworthy that none of the patrons of these four stelae were recorded as lay Buddhists. It further shows two phenomena. First, Buddhist rituals had become an essential component in funerary rituals in rural Shandong, and the tomb stelae played a crucial role in the rituals. Second, the *PPK Sutra* was popular and to have it carved on tomb stelae for one's deceased parents had become a popular practice for people in rural Shandong.

Another stela dated to 1070 in the Northern Song was made to commemorate not deceased parents from a single family, but the successful recognition by the Northern Song court of the legalisation of a local temple. It is not known for what reason the *PPK Sutra* was chosen as the appropriate one to be carved. But the stela proves the popularity and wide acceptance of this sutra in rural Shandong among not only common people and lay Buddhists, but also Buddhist societies, nuns, and monks.

Chapter Four: Manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* from Mogao Cave 17, Dunhuang

Chapter three discussed eight stone stelae carved with the *PPK Sutra* from Shandong. It showed that most of the stelae were used as tomb stelae erected in front of tombs. This chapter shifts from stone stelae from Shandong to manuscripts from Mogao Cave 17 in Dunhuang, among which over fifty survive in relatively complete form. This chapter first outlines current studies on this group of manuscripts, which have been approached in ways similar to the stelae: they have been treated as evidence for the textual transmission of the sutra, while the social and material aspects of the manuscripts have been overlooked. By examining other parts of the manuscripts such as colophons,¹⁷³ where available, this chapter explores how the manuscripts functioned and what their intended purposes were. These findings are then contextualised in relation to the materiality and style of the manuscripts. One manuscript examined for this thesis comes in the form of a codex, which implies personal usage.

Dunhuang is an oasis city located at a religious and cultural crossroads on the Silk Road,¹⁷⁴ in today's Gansu Province in north-western China. There is a major geographical shift from Shandong in eastern China in the previous chapter to north-western China in this chapter. The main reasons for this shift are the availability of sources and the desire to highlight methodological, contextual, and analytical contrasts. It is possible that manuscripts were also produced in Shandong, but they did not leave a trace in history. Different from Shandong, which was the cultural centre of

¹⁷³ By colophons, I mean paratextual notes on the manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures. They are generally referred to as *tiji* 題記 (inscribed note) in Chinese scholarship on Dunhuang manuscripts.

¹⁷⁴ The Silk Road was a network of trade routes which stretched from China to the eastern Mediterranean. The term was coined by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, a prominent geographer who worked in China from 1868 to 1872. Although it was called 'Silk Road', silk was by no means the only commodity that was exchanged. For a recent study on the Silk Road, see Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Confucianism, Dunhuang was for many centuries a flourishing cosmopolitan city on the Silk Road and famous for its Buddhist cave temples. The Mogao Caves lie at the foot of Mount Mingsha southeast of Dunhuang and consist of over seven hundred Buddhist cave temples built from the fourth to the fourteenth century. They were sites of Buddhist activities for nearly a thousand years. As the political and cultural centre of China shifted to the south from the Northern Song onwards, the maritime route gradually replaced the overland route. Especially in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the oasis city of Dunhuang and the Mogao Caves were gradually forgotten.

In the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the Mogao Caves were located far away from the political centres of the empire and were totally neglected by officials and scholars. They were overseen by a Daoist priest, Abbot Wang (ca.1850-1931), who had no understanding and appreciation of the cultural value of the caves. On 22 June 1900, Abbot Wang cleared the sand that had accumulated over the years in front of Cave 16 together with a worker whose surname was Yang 楊. After clearing the sand, Yang discovered that there was a door behind the mural on the northern wall of the entrance corridor of Cave 16. It was smaller than the height of a person and had been sealed off with blocks of clay.¹⁷⁵ When first opened, the cave, later numbered Cave 17, was filled with countless bundles of scrolls wrapped in cloth in a highly orderly fashion.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, Cave 17 is also known as the library cave and it provides modern scholars with an invaluable source for historical and cultural studies.

¹⁷⁵ For a summary of the reasons behind the sealing of the cave, see Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Studies in Manuscript Cultures, 2), Berlin, de Gruyter, 2012, pp. 18-28. See also Rong Xinjiang and Imre Galambos, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, Leiden and Boston, 2013, pp. 109-136. Sha Wutian, "A Reexamination of the reasons for the closure of the Dunhuang Library Cave", *Chinese Studies in History*, 53:3, 2020, pp. 208-226.

¹⁷⁶ For the detailed history of the discovery of Cave 17, see Rong Xinjiang and Imre Galambos, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, pp. 81-84.

4.1 Manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* scattered across the world

Among the thousands of scrolls of manuscripts discovered in the library cave are manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra*, which are the focus of this chapter. Although originally all kept in the library cave at Dunhuang before their discovery, they are now held in both public and private collections in London, Paris, St Petersburg, Beijing, and so on. This section narrates the historical trajectory of the early dispersal of Dunhuang manuscripts and how it challenges the study of the manuscripts today.

Because the library cave was first discovered by Abbot Wang and Yang by accident, and both did not have much education, they did not realise the academic value of such a large amount of ancient manuscripts and paintings. However, Abbot Wang was indeed impressed by their fine quality, which assured him that they were valuable objects. He picked finely written scrolls and beautiful paintings and presented them to dignitaries and officials to solicit donations. Just like Abbot Wang, these people treated the ancient manuscripts and paintings as valuable artworks. Instead of ascertaining their origin, they were often presented as gifts or sold, and shifted from one personal collection to another. They are now scattered across the world, being held in China, Japan, the United States, and elsewhere.¹⁷⁷

In March 1907, the Hungarian-born British explorer Aurel Stein arrived in Dunhuang. Trained in archaeology and Oriental studies, Stein soon realised the academic value of the scrolls in the library cave. He made an inventory of the manuscripts and artefacts and categorised the bundles into two kinds. One was 'regular book bundles', which included 1,050 Chinese and 80 Tibetan scrolls. The other was 'miscellaneous bundles', which are scrolls in other languages such as Sanskrit, Khotanese, and Uyghur. It also contained artefacts such as silk paintings, silk fabric, and

¹⁷⁷ Rong and Galambos, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, pp. 85-101.

scrap paper. Stein obtained 270 'regular bundles' with Chinese and Tibetan scrolls, and even more 'miscellaneous bundles' of paintings and non-Chinese texts. Manuscripts are labelled with the initial letter S (i.e. Stein) and the numbers 1–13677 that designate the particular items.¹⁷⁸ They are now kept in the British Library, the British Museum, and the Indian Office Library.¹⁷⁹

A year after Stein's visit to Dunhuang, the French explorer Paul Pelliot visited the Mogao caves as well. He was conducting archaeological research north of the Taklamakan Desert. When he was shown two scrolls from Dunhuang, he immediately headed to the Mogao caves. After careful examination of the scrolls, Pelliot selected manuscripts of non-Chinese language, scrolls with colophons, non-canonical Buddhist writings according to his judgement, and texts of non-Buddhist nature. They are marked by the abbreviation of Pelliot's name (P.) and are held in the Oriental section of the Department of Manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF).¹⁸⁰

In the autumn of 1909, Pelliot travelled to Beijing and presented a small amount of manuscripts discovered at Dunhuang to Chinese scholars. The Ministry of Education was informed that some manuscripts remained in the Dunhuang library cave. To protect the remaining manuscripts, the Qing Ministry of Education ordered the Gansu governor to buy up all and ship them to Beijing. However, the order was not carried out thoroughly. Hundreds of scrolls were secretly kept by Abbot Wang, who sold them at a better price to foreign explorers who came later.¹⁸¹

In conclusion, the entirety of the collection from the Dunhuang library cave is sadly not preserved. The original condition of the collection could have told us more

¹⁷⁸ Rong Xinjiang and Imre Galambos, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, p. 139.

¹⁷⁹ Aurel Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 2, pp. 807-830. Rong Xinjiang and Imre Galambos, pp. 137-153. Roderick Whitfield, *The Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum*, Tokyo Kodansha, 1982-1984, 3 vols.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Pelliot, "Une bibliothèque médiévale retrouvée au Kan-sou", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 1908, 8, pp. 509-529. Rong and Galambos, pp. 153-164.

¹⁸¹ Rong and Galambos, p. 106.

about the ancient paintings and manuscripts. First, many of the manuscripts and paintings are undated. There may have been important clues about their dates when bundles of scrolls were still held together, since dated manuscripts or paintings could have offered a relative date for undated ones. Second, the loss of the original physical context of the manuscripts and paintings limits scholars to studying them as isolated objects. It is difficult to know how scrolls of manuscripts and paintings wrapped in one bundle were related to each other. Thirdly, the dispersal of the manuscripts and paintings around the world makes it challenging to view them. The manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* are now held in at least eleven institutions. Due to the condition of the manuscripts and the practical limit on my ability to travel, only ten manuscripts from the Stein Collection kept in the British Library were examined for this thesis.

4.2 Manuscripts as physical objects

Most scholars who have studied the manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* treat them as evidence of the textual transmission of the sutra, instead of objects that were once produced and used by monks, nuns and lay Buddhists in medieval Dunhuang.¹⁸² Zhang Yongquan's article on the Dunhuang manuscripts of the sutra is one of the typical examples among these studies. In his article, he categorises fifty-one manuscripts into four systems according to their contents. Zhang assumes that there is a sequential relationship between one manuscript and another, as scribes must have copied one manuscript after another.¹⁸³ His study shows how phrases or characters from one manuscript differ from others. However, his detailed work does not lead to a conclusion

¹⁸² Tokushi Yūshō, "*Bumo onjū kyō no ihon ni tsuite*", pp. 239-249. Ma Shichang, "*Fumu enzhong jing xieben yu bianxiang*", pp. 239-419. Arai Keiyo, "*Tonkō hon Bumo onjū kyō ni tsuite*", pp. 152-158. Zhang Yongquan, "Dunhuang ben *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing yanjiu*", pp. 260-297.

¹⁸³ Zhang Yongquan, "Dunhuang ben *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing yanjiu*", pp. 262-274.

that shows there is a clear sequential relationship between different manuscripts belonging to the same system, because the differences between the texts are too complicated and varied.

On the other hand, Zhang's study of the differences between the texts makes it possible to speculate how the scribes copied these manuscripts. First, given the popularity of the *PPK Sutra* in medieval China, there must have been more manuscripts of the sutra which had been circulated among the scribes other than the fifty-one manuscripts studied by Zhang. Second, the sutra may have been duplicated around the same time by different monks, nuns, or lay Buddhists. Therefore, to reconstruct a linear time sequence of the textual transmission of the manuscripts is based on the false assumption that there is only one 'original' version, whereas the real situation could have been much more complicated.

The problem of the textual development of the manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* may have hardly concerned the people who produced them and who used them in Buddhist rituals. For these people, the manuscripts were useful religious objects that could be copied, read, and chanted. This chapter intends to treat the manuscripts as physical objects and aims to show how they were engaged with people. As pointed out by Imre Galambos, the text-centric approach envisions manuscript production as a single act of copying. However, finishing the copying of a text was often just the starting point of the manuscript's life cycle. Other than the scribe, other people such as Buddhist disciples, students, teachers, and collectors may have continued to engage with the text.¹⁸⁴

There are a few studies on manuscripts in recent years that take the materiality of manuscripts seriously. Agnieszka Helman-Ważny dedicates her book *The Archaeology*

¹⁸⁴ Imre Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium*, Berlin and Boston, de Gruyter, 2020, p. 18.

of *Tibetan Books* to the description and analysis of the paper, ink, binding, and other physical features of manuscripts and prints that she examined personally. She argues that the physical properties of Tibetan books are not just textual evidence, but also artefacts that can be studied using methods similar to those used to study sculpture, painting, or common material objects.¹⁸⁵ A similar approach to manuscripts is adopted by Imre Galambos in his study of Dunhuang manuscripts. He points out the necessity to consider both text and form together and refers to them as two sides of the same coin. A manuscript should be treated as an archaeological object, as it contains clues ‘which may enhance our understanding of both the text and the social conditions which brought it into being’.¹⁸⁶ *La fabrique du lisible: La mise en texte des manuscrits de la Chine ancienne et médiévale* is another recent study on the codicological features of early and medieval Chinese manuscripts, in which the materiality of manuscripts is addressed.¹⁸⁷ It provides insight on how manuscripts were produced and used. For example, the article on the codices from Dunhuang by Drège discusses their physical features, production, and possible foreign inspiration of the format.¹⁸⁸

Although Zhang’s study does not lead to a conclusion regarding how, within a system or edition, the texts on the manuscripts of the sutra were transmitted, he lists the general information, sometimes including length, conditions, and colophons when available, of fifty-one manuscripts. The physical form and colophons of manuscripts are of great importance to understand the social and religious context of their production and use. Thus, the literary description of the manuscripts in Zhang’s article is useful for this chapter’s analysis.

¹⁸⁵ Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, *The Archaeology of Tibetan Books*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2014, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Imre Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁷ Jean-Pierre Drège and Constantino Moretti (eds.), *La fabrique du lisible: La mise en texte des manuscrits de la Chine ancienne et médiévale*, Paris, Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Jean-Pierre Drège, “Les Codices”, in Jean-Pierre Drège and Constantino Moretti (eds.), *La fabrique du lisible*, pp. 373-376.

For what purposes were the manuscripts produced and used? How did people use the manuscripts? The following sections address these questions by considering the physical attributes of a few manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra*. These case studies will show how these manuscripts played different roles in Buddhist practices in medieval Dunhuang society.

4.3 S.149 in question: a copy for a monastic library?

This section argues that S.149 is likely to be a copy intended for a monastic library. The argument is based on its physical features including the format of its paper, the presentation of the texts, and the calligraphy quality and style. Among the manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra*, other manuscripts may have been intended for monastic libraries according to Zhang Yongquan's description. S.149 is chosen for a case study because it is a relatively complete manuscript of the sutra in the form of a scroll that has been digitised at high resolution, which makes it possible to discuss it as an artefact by showing its physical features (fig. 4.1).

S.149 contains no colophon, which could have provided more information about the scroll. Only about fifteen percent of the scrolls from the library cave bear a colophon, sometimes giving the names of the copyist, donator, and owner; the date; and the aspiration behind the making of the sutra.¹⁸⁹ For the vast majority of the manuscripts that contain no colophon, how are we to know for what purpose they were produced? What are their life stories? Except for the scribe, who else may have engaged with the manuscript in religious practices? Without the aid of textual information, this

¹⁸⁹ Fujieda, "The Tunhuang Manuscripts: A General Description (I)", p. 18.

section is an attempt to study such manuscripts and to answer the above questions by paying attention to their physical features.

Most of the manuscripts in Chinese from the Dunhuang library cave are in scroll form. Texts were written vertically from right to left. After copying the text, the paper is scrolled from left to right and kept in a scroll. The scrolls from the Dunhuang library cave vary in size and shape, but when the scrolls that contained Buddhist, Taoist, or Confucian scriptures were intended for particular libraries, they often shared similar forms.¹⁹⁰ According to the observation of Fujieda, one of the few scholars of the Dunhuang manuscripts who discusses their physical forms, standardised sheets of paper were used to make long scrolls for library copies. Each sheet measured 26 by 39 cm or 26 by 52 cm. The short ends of the paper sheets were connected to form a long scroll.¹⁹¹

The beginning of the scroll S. 149 is missing and the rest measures about 25.8 by 121 centimetres. It is made up of three sheets of paper. The first sheet, which is incomplete, measures 25.8 by 38cm. The second sheet measures 25.8 by 43 cm and the last 25.8 by 38.3 cm.¹⁹² Jean-Pierre Drège's study on the size of the sutra manuscripts from the Pelliot and Stein collections according to dynastic periods shows that the height of the sutra manuscripts is relatively consistent from the Northern Wei (386-534) to the Tang dynasties, measuring between 25 cm to 26.5 cm. The length varies in different periods.¹⁹³ The length of the second sheet of S.149, which is in the middle and thus most likely to be a complete sheet, measures 43 cm. It is close to the average length

¹⁹⁰ Fujieda, "The Tunhuang Manuscripts", p. 16.

¹⁹¹ Fujieda, "The Tunhuang Manuscripts", p. 17.

¹⁹² The measurements of S.149 in this section are after my examination of the scroll in the British Library.

¹⁹³ See Table 4.1 for a summary of Drège's study on the height and length of the sutra manuscripts from the Northern Wei to the Tang dynasties. Jean-Pierre Drège, "Dunhuang Papers: Preliminary Morphological Analysis of Dated Chinese Manuscripts", in Susan Whitfield (ed.), *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries*, London, British Library, 2002, pp. 123-124.

of the paper used during the Northern Zhou (557-581). However, it is risky to date the scroll to the Northern Zhou based on its length alone.

Other elements of the presentation of S.149 meet the standards required for a library scroll. First, two horizontal lines, which are almost invisible today, marked the margins of the scroll. It seems that the lines were marked out not by using pencils but by gentle scratching or folding. They neatly limit the text between the lines.¹⁹⁴ Second, each column is evenly spaced and measures 1.8 cm. It seems that the vertical lines were also marked out by folding or other means which leaves few traces today. Third, for standard scrolls intended for libraries, a column should contain seventeen characters and each sheet 22 to 25 columns.¹⁹⁵ The first sheet of S.149 has 21 columns left. According to the content of the sutra, it can be inferred that excluding the title of the sutra, the first sheet must have contained 24 columns. The second sheet contains 23 columns. The last sheet, which is the end of the sutra, contains 17 columns. In conclusion, the formal characteristics of S.149 show that it may have been a scroll that was produced for a monastic library.

The calligraphy of S.149 suggests that it was copied by a professional scribe, who was often employed by a monastery to copy sutras. The writing style is standard script, interspersed with running-script characters. The style of the calligraphy in S.149 is very close to that in a manuscript of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra* from Dunhuang dated to 674 from the John B. Elliott Collection, which was transcribed by a professional scribe (fig. 4.2). The characters in both manuscripts have many strokes ending sharply. They are often similarly structured as well (fig. 4.3). For example, the character *he* 何 has a sharp end of its first stroke, which is casting toward the left. The *shugou* 豎鉤, which is

¹⁹⁴ This is my observation of the scroll collected in the British Library.

¹⁹⁵ Fujieda, "The Tunhuang Manuscripts", p. 17.

the vertical stroke with a hook pointing upwards, is placed at the same proportion against its horizontal stroke. The square in the middle differs and the scribe of S.149 shows a personal style by adding an extra turn at the upper right corner of the square, which is evident in other characters in S.149 as well. Other characters, such as *fo* 佛, *bu* 不, and *ci* 此 are also structured similarly in these two manuscripts, which shows that the two scribes for the manuscripts may have received similar calligraphic training.

The manuscript of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra* is signed by one Li Yihai, who may have been the collator for the transcription and was responsible for checking its accuracy against the original.¹⁹⁶ According to Wang Yuanjun's research on the signatures on extant Tang sutras, most of them were transcribed by government-employed sutra scribes or private professional scribes who copied sutras for a living. They worked under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Library and the Chancellery. It is likely that they were first trained at the Institute for the Advancement of Literature. Two masters of Chinese calligraphy, Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641) and Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), taught at this institute. Therefore, the calligraphic style of the professional scribes resembled the style of the two masters.¹⁹⁷

How was the scroll used if it indeed had belonged to a monastic library? Although the beginning of the scroll is missing, the rest of the scroll is preserved in very good condition, which suggests little or very careful usage before it was deposited in the library cave. The situation and the organization of the libraries inside the monasteries remain badly known at least until the end of Tang.¹⁹⁸ Monastic libraries are often called

¹⁹⁶ Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style", in Robert Harrist and Wen Fong (eds.), *Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, Princeton, Art Museum, Princeton University in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1999, p. 230.

¹⁹⁷ Wang Yuanjun 王元軍, *Tangdai shufa yu wenhua* 唐代書法與文化, Beijing, Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe, 2009, p. 121.

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Pierre Drège, *Les bibliothèques en Chine au temps des manuscrits*, Paris, École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991, p. 208.

jingzang 經藏 in historical sources. The terms *shangzang* 上藏, upper library, and *xiazang* 下藏, lower library are recorded in the manuscripts of Dunhuang, which suggests that the libraries could be doubled or, at the very least, divided into two floors.¹⁹⁹ The fact that the library can be divided into two generates the question that whether two copies of the Buddhist cannon were kept in the libraries separately. Although no evidence can confirm the hypothesis, the manuscripts of Dunhuang reveal that there are cases that two copies of the same sutra had been kept in the same monastery. For example, Manuscripts S.5046 records that two copies of the *Sutra of the Great Prajñâpâramitâ* in 600 volumes were kept in one monastery.²⁰⁰

In this connection, S.5642, another manuscript that contains the *PPK Sutra*, forms a sharp contrast. S.5642 is a booklet that contains two incomplete sutras. The first is an incomplete *Lotus Sutra*, which has illustrations drawn above the scripture (Fig. 4.4). The second is the *PPK Sutra* and more than half of the scripture is missing (Fig. 4.5). Some evidence suggests that the booklet was more frequently used than S.149. Firstly, the booklet shows signs of wear in multiple places, especially its corners and the middle binding part. Second, the illustration may have been intended to help the reader understand the sutra. Thirdly, a scroll requires a table and needs to be rolled out to read. But a booklet is a more 'reader-friendly' format that can be carried around and easily opened. It is more convenient to turn pages compared to a scroll.

Among the handscrolls that I examined, there are three manuscripts, S.1548, S.2084, and S.1323, which may have also been produced for library deposit. Although their sizes do not comply with the standard measurement for library scrolls, the handwriting of these scrolls is very skilled. The characters are of even size, usually

¹⁹⁹ Drège, *Les bibliothèques en Chine au temps*, p. 209.

²⁰⁰ Drège, *Les bibliothèques en Chine au temps*, p. 210.

measuring 1.2 by 1.2cm. They are in neat standard script and are often nicely structured. However, it is equally possible that these manuscripts were written by professional scribes, who were paid by their donors. By sponsoring the production of manuscripts, the donors accumulated religious merit and fulfilment of their wishes.

In conclusion, it is very likely that S.149 was transcribed by a professional scribe and its formal attributes suggest that it may have been intended for a monastic library. It is preserved in very good quality, which indicates that it may have been rendered carefully or kept as a copy in a monastic library.

4.4 S.5433: a private codex with multiple Buddhist scriptures

This section focuses on S.5433, which contains a few Buddhist scriptures. Based on its formal attributes and content, I argue that S.5433 must have been owned privately. The scriptures show two different calligraphic styles, which means that the codex was produced by two people. Its owners not only had copied a few scriptures on the booklet, but also may have carried it with them to attend Buddhist rituals. Although the main purpose of the codex is to copy Buddhist scriptures, there are two places where irrelevant and playful contents were written and drawn. They seem to be random scribbles. Compared with library copies such as S.149, which were made and copied according to certain format, S.5433 shows an aspect of informality in its making.

According to Imre Galambos, a codex is a book ‘that consists of one or more quires or gatherings (also called signatures). The quires, in turn, comprise several bifolia stacked together and folded in half, then sewn together in the middle.’²⁰¹ S.5433 was made in such a manner (fig. 4.6). Two sheets of paper that measure 9 by 17 cm were

²⁰¹ Galambos, p. 32.

stacked together and folded into half, resulting in a size of 9 by 8.5 cm. Six such stacks were sewn together in the middle and form an empty booklet, which has twenty-four leaves in total. The thread that is used to bind the quires together is visible (fig. 4.7). This manner of binding is also how modern books were bound, which spread throughout the Western world during the period of Late Antiquity.²⁰² Jean-Pierre Drège argues that the appearance of the codex in the Sinophone world is indebted to contact with Western manuscript cultures, which may have been brought by occidental religions such as Nestorianism or Manichaeism.²⁰³ Chinese ‘thread-bound books’, which became popular in later centuries, were bound differently. The folds of the paper were placed on the outside instead of at the spine, leaving the inner side of the paper blank.²⁰⁴

There are about four hundred such codices from Dunhuang. Only twenty-six of these have a date. The earliest date is 899, but it is possible that some of the undated ones are from earlier periods.²⁰⁵ According to Fujieda, manuscripts in booklet form date from the first half of the ninth century.²⁰⁶ One major shared characteristic among these codices is that their size is never large, which implies that they may have been intended for carrying around.²⁰⁷ Another common features of the codices from Dunhuang is that they often had trimmed corners.²⁰⁸ Compare to sharp corners, they are more comfortable to be held in one’s palms, like many modern notebooks sold in stationaries. Round corners would also wear out less easily when the booklet was carried around.²⁰⁹

²⁰² Galambos, p. 32.

²⁰³ Jean-Pierre Drège, “Dunhuang and Two Revolutions in the History of the Chinese Book”, in Chen Huaiyu and Rong Xinjiang (eds.), *Great Journeys across the Pamir Mountains: A Festschrift in Honor of Zhang Guangda on his Eighty-fifth Birthday* (Brill’s Inner Asian Library, 37), Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2018, p. 28.

²⁰⁴ Galambos, p. 33.

²⁰⁵ Galambos, p. 32.

²⁰⁶ Fujieda, p. 26.

²⁰⁷ Galambos, p. 34.

²⁰⁸ Galambos, p. 35.

²⁰⁹ In his study of a Coptic Biblical papyrus codex from the late third or early fourth century, Budge also proposes that the round corners may have been trimmed to for easier portability. See Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, New York, AMS Press, 1977, p. ix.

They may have been used for apotropaic purposes, as some of them have a damask cover to protect the codex from being worn out.²¹⁰

The booklet opens from left to right. On its cover, dozens of characters were written. In the middle of the cover is a column of characters saying 張興長必為之, which literally means 'Zhang Xingchang must do it' (fig. 4.8). Zhang Xingchang might be the person who owned and wrote on the codex. Or it is likely that he simply scribbled these characters on the front page. Did Zhang mean that he was determined to carry out his vows as a Buddhist or layman? Or did he resolve to participate in certain Buddhist practices regularly? Although it is not clear what the 'it' Zhang referred to is, it might have to do with the Buddhist scriptures, if he is the person who had copied the sutras in the codex.

The character *zhi* 之 was repeatedly written at the end of the column. It seems that this certain Zhang was not very satisfied with the first 之 he wrote and started practicing his calligraphy of the character 之 after his assertion. In addition, another *zhang* 張 character was written on the top left corner of the cover page, whose left part has almost faded away.

Except for the front and back cover, the codex is ruled on every page. Margins are left on the upper, lower, and outer sides. The ruled lines are drawn without careful alignment. They vary in width and often the vertical lines either cross the horizontal lines or miss them.

The booklet contains four Buddhist scriptures. The first scripture is an apocryphal text titled *Foshuo yan shouming jing* 佛說延壽命經 (the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on*

²¹⁰ P.3932, which measures 12 by 7.4 cm in size, is one of such an example, see Galambos, p. 56. There are also several manuscripts with dimensions smaller than 5 by 5 cm, which may have been used as amulets, sewn into clothes, or placed inside containers. See Galambos, p. 37.

Extending One's Life-span). This scripture is listed as apocryphal in the *Dazhou kanding zhongjing mulu* and *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*. It is found in many manuscripts from Dunhuang, attesting its popularity among Buddhist believers. A few characters were omitted or mistakenly transcribed, without correction. This may imply that the scribe did not re-examine his transcription after completing the copying. The second is *Foshuo fumu enzhong jing* 佛說父母恩重經 (the *PPK Sutra*), which is incomplete, though more than half of the scripture was copied.

Following the *PPK Sutra* is *Shangsheng li* 上生禮 (*Rituals of Upward Rebirth*), an apocryphal scripture whose full text is only known from Dunhuang manuscripts. Two other manuscripts contain the *Shangsheng li* are S.4451 and P.3840. The *Shangsheng li* records in detail information about the ritual to worship Maitreya. It contains a few mantras and the specific aspiration of being reborn in the land of Maitreya. After the mantras are numbers dictating how many times they should be repeated, which indicates that the scripture may have been intended to be chanted during rituals. Therefore, it is possible that the codex was used during rituals of worshipping Maitreya.

In P.3840, which is in the form of a scroll, a longer version of the *Shangsheng li* was transcribed. Compared with the calligraphy of S.5433, it was written by a very skilled hand (fig. 4.9). The characters are of similar font and generally nicely structured. After the *Shangsheng li*, *Shi'ende* 十恩德 (*Ten Kinds of Kindness*) is copied by a different hand and is copied only to the second kind of kindness. The *Shi'ende* is about how parents, especially the mother, suffer greatly to bear and bring up a child. It was written in worse calligraphy and probably by a different hand (fig. 4.10). Both S.5433 and P.3840 contain a complete *Shangsheng li* and incomplete scriptures about the kindness of parents. The portability and private nature of S.5433 show that it may have been carried around and

served as a manual for participation in Buddhist rituals. On the back of P.3840, it was written that *shang dafu jianjiao* 上大夫檢校 ('checked and corrected by senior official'). This indicates that it may have been produced by a sutra copying office and belonged to a monastic library.

The last scripture in S.5433 is an unfinished *Baxiang li* 八相禮 (*Rituals of Eight Appearances*). In the last two pages, two bird-shapes were drawn with a random style (fig. 4.11). Like the repeated 之 character written on the cover, the scribe seems to practice his drawing by repeating it.

When copying the *PPK Sutra*, the writer seemed to become less patient over time. In the last few pages of the sutra, the writing became more and more in a rush, especially at the end of the pages. From time to time, standard script turned into running script, and the structures of the character become loosely and poorly arranged. For example, on the page starting with the character *ban* 伴, the strokes of the characters in the last column are often abbreviated (fig. 4.12). This is also the case on the last page of the *PPK Sutra*.

The ink used for copying the *Shangsheng li* became much denser compared to that used for the *PPK Sutra*, which suggests that the *Shangsheng li* may have been transcribed on another occasion. In addition to the differences in the density of ink, differences between the handwriting of the first two scriptures (*Foshuo yan shouming jing* and the *PPK Sutra*) and the last two scriptures (*Shangsheng li* and *Baxiang li*) in S.5433 suggest that the scriptures in the codex must have been written by different hands. The differences fall into three categories.

First, the width of the strokes in the characters from the previous two scriptures is often undulating. Their beginnings or ends are often very sharp. For example, the

characters *shi* 十 and *bu* 不 in the *The PPK Sutra* have a horizontal stroke that starts with a pointed beginning and gets wider towards its end (fig. 4.13). By contrast, none of the three strokes in the character *wan* 万 in the *Shangsheng li* is obviously undulating (fig. 4.14).

Secondly, the component of *kou* 口 in characters in the first two scriptures (*Foshuo yan shouming jing* and the *PPK Sutra*) and the last two scriptures (*Shangsheng li* and *Baxiang li*) are written in a different fashion. In the first two scriptures, the vertical strokes of the 口 both slant greatly towards the middle, and the bottom horizontal stroke always protrudes, making its end visible (fig. 4.15). In the last two scriptures, the shape of 口 is much closer to a regular square (fig. 4.16).

Thirdly, aside from the shape of 口, the characters in the last two scriptures also look squarer overall. Most of the horizontal and vertical strokes do not slant to form an angle against each other. By contrast, the strokes in the characters from the first two scriptures often have a more dynamic relationship with each other, which make the characters look more structurally dynamic, yet still balanced. For example, the first two strokes of the character *wu* 无 in the *PPK Sutra* are much more slanted compared to those of the same character in the *Shangsheng li* (fig. 4.17). Its last stroke is done with careful control of the brush, first inclining to the left, then making a turn to right horizontally, and lastly lifting the brush quickly to form an upward-pointing and sharp hook. The meeting point of its strokes is in a better proportion compared to that of the 无 in the *Shangsheng li*, which leaves too much empty space in the lower part (fig. 4.18).

In conclusion, the calligraphic styles of the first two scriptures and last two scriptures are different, which indicates that other than the first scribe, another person must have involved in copying scriptures on the codex. As the writing of the *PPK Sutra*

became increasingly impatient, the scribe may have eventually lost interest in finishing copying the scripture and gave away his unfinished codex to another person, who may have been a family member or someone that was close to him.

There are also other examples of codices that contain different handwriting. For example, S.5531 is a codex that measures 12.5 by 7.3 cm and contains ten Buddhist scriptures. According to Galambos's study of its handwriting, at least four or five different hands can be discerned. However, all ten scriptures in S.5531 are complete, and Galambos speculates that the codex is an example that 'represents the collective work of individuals, possibly from the same family, acting as donors together'.²¹¹ It seems important that the codex was produced as a single object by individuals offering it together as a group.

4.5 Five manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* with colophons

Among all the scriptures of the *PPK Sutra* discovered in Dunhuang, five manuscripts contain colophons. This section focuses on the manuscripts with colophons and asks for what purposes these manuscripts were produced, and how they may have been used.

4.5.1 Manuscript S.1907

S.1907 is a handscroll that measures 24 by 100.5cm.²¹² The scripture was written in standard script with a very steady and skilled hand. Each character is of a similar font and is nicely structured. At the end of the scroll, there is a colophon in three columns, which says:

²¹¹ Galambos, pp. 55-56.

²¹² The measurement is after my examination of the scroll.

開運三年²¹³丁未歲十二月廿七日報恩寺僧

海詮慈心念誦父母恩重經一卷上寶²¹⁴四種恩

四無量色

The third year of the Kaiyun era (946), [in] the year of Dingwei, the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month, monk Haiquan from the Bao'en Monastery chanted one volume of *The Sutra on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness on the Profoundness of Parents' Kindness* with a benevolent heart, to repay four kinds of kindness and four uncountable forms.²¹⁵

It is not known how monk Haiquan obtained the scroll. Since the calligraphy of the scripture is highly skilled, it must have been written by a professional scribe. The colophon was written by Haiquan in less skilled calligraphy compared to that of the scripture. He may have hired a professional scribe to copy the scripture for him. Or he may have attained the sutra by other means.

In any case, he left his mark at the end of the scripture to record his pious action of chanting. From the colophon, it is known that monk Haiquan chanted the *PPK Sutra*, and he recorded an aspiration at the end of the scripture. Although the scripture centres on the kindness of one's parents, monk Haiquan made vows to repay not just the kindness of his own parents', but four kinds of kindness. In the *Dasheng ben shengxin di guan jing* 大乘本生心地觀經, the four kinds of kindness refer to the compassion of parents, the compassion of sentient beings, the compassion of rulers, and the compassion of the Three Treasures.²¹⁶ It seems that monk Haiquan perceived the scripture of the *PPK Sutra* as a text that possesses the power of not only repaying the kindness of one's parents, but also the power of repaying a wider range of kindness.

²¹³ Zhang Yongquan transcribed the beginning four characters as “開軍三奉”, whose meaning is obscure. Costantino Moretti proposes that they are perhaps 開運三年, discussions during the viva meeting.

²¹⁴ 寶 seems to be written mistakenly. According to the context, the homophone 報 may have been the character that was originally intended.

²¹⁵ Zhang Yongquan did not mention any colophon in S.1907 in his article. I transcribe the text according to the original scroll.

²¹⁶ T.03.0159.0301a18.

4.5.2 Manuscript P.2285

P.2285 is a complete scripture of the *PPK Sutra*. Not much information about its physical features is known. At the end of the scripture, it has a colophon saying: 丁卯年十一月廿九日奉為亡妣寫畢。孤子比丘智照。(['In] the year of Dingmao, the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month, [I] finished writing for [my] deceased mother. Orphan monk Zhizhao.)²¹⁷ Like S.1907, this scripture is also dated according to the sexagesimal cycle without a concrete reign date. It is possible it originated during the Tibetan period, either in the year 787 or 847.²¹⁸ Unlike monk Haiquan, monk Zhizhao produced the scripture with a specific motivation, which was to benefit his deceased mother. The colophon states clearly that monk Zhizhao copied the sutra by himself. Although monk Zhizhao did not specify the reason for choosing the *PPK Sutra*, it is possible that he regarded its theme and content as an appropriate one for him to repay his mother's kindness and pray for her benefit in her afterlife.

4.5.3 Manuscript SB.56

SB.56 is a scroll dated to 822.²¹⁹ Its beginning is missing, and there are forty-two columns left. Each column has sixteen to nineteen characters.²²⁰ It contains a colophon saying:

于唐中和貳載壬寅中夏六月上旬四日，清何（河）張奉信因酒泉防戍，與孔奴奴寫《恩重經》，愿先亡考妣得生西方；后沾二人，所求稱意，作者遂心；法界倉（蒼）生，各顧少分。故記。

[In] the second year of the Zhonghe era, in the middle of Renyin year, summer, the fourth day of the sixth month, because of guarding at Jiuquan, Zhang Feng from Qinghe and Kong Nunu wrote *Enzhong jing*, wishing their deceased parents could be reborn in the western paradise. [Wishing also for

²¹⁷ Zhang Yongquan, p. 267.

²¹⁸ Ma Shichang, p. 316.

²¹⁹ SB. stands for Shanghai bowuguan (Shanghai Museum), where this manuscript is collected.

²²⁰ Zhang Yongquan, p. 269.

the] benefit of the two persons. What they ask for can be after their own will. The person who writes [the sutra] can fulfil what he or she wishes. Each and every sentient being in the Dharma realm shall be cared for. Thus it is recorded.

Similar to P.2285, SB.56 is also dedicated to the donors' deceased parents. Zhang Feng and Kong Nunu, perhaps a couple living in Jiuquan, copied a volume of the *PPK Sutra* for their deceased parents, and wish for their rebirth in the western land. In addition to aspirations for their deceased parents, they also directed the religious benefits of copying the sutra to themselves and all sentient beings.

4.5.4 Manuscript S.4476

S.4476 is a handscroll dated to 875. Its beginning is missing. The rest of the scroll has fifty-three columns. Each column has sixteen to nineteen characters. The bottom parts of the first twenty-two columns are incomplete, and three to ten characters from each column are missing.²²¹ At the end of the scripture, it has a colophon saying:

乾符貳年伍月日為亡女辛興進敬寫此經，愿神生淨土，所有罪障，並皆消滅。

[In] the second year of the Qianfu era, the fifth month, [I] respectfully wrote this scripture for [my] deceased daughter Xin Xingjin, wishing her spirit to be reborn in the pure land. All her sins and transgressions shall be eliminated.²²²

Although the person(s) who wrote the colophon left no name, his or her intention for copying the sutra is clearly stated. It is produced for his or her deceased daughter, with aspirations that her spirit could be reborn in the pure land and her bad karma could be eliminated. Why did the parents of Xingjin choose the *PPK Sutra*, which is a scripture on the kindness of parents, for their deceased daughter? Did they understand the content of the scripture? The scripture itself says that by copying the sutra, one is able to repay

²²¹ Zhang Yongquan, p. 269.

²²² Zhang Yongquan, p. 269.

parents' kindness. But for Xingjin's parents, it also has the power to promise one's rebirth in the pure land and eliminate bad karma. It is possible that they did not understand the sutra, and they chose it to be copied because of its popularity. Or they perceived the sutra as an omnipotent tool to benefit her daughter in her afterlife. Another possibility could be that they understood it and were deliberately adjusting the purpose by enacting parents' kindness rather than repaying it.

4.5.5 Manuscript P.3919-2

P.3919-2 is a handscroll that contains ten Buddhist scriptures, including two editions of the *PPK Sutra*. The Augmented Edition is complete and has forty-eight columns, each with about thirty-five characters.²²³ In the case of this manuscript, the Old Edition is copied after the Augmented Edition, but it is incomplete. It is dated to 959.²²⁴ The scroll has twenty-two columns, and each column contains about thirty-five to thirty-nine characters.

In the same scroll, *Pusa xiuxing sifa jing* 菩薩修行四法經 and *Foshuo shixiang jing* 佛說十想經 are also copied. After these two scriptures is the line 沙彌戒輪書 ('written by monk Jielun').²²⁵ After the colophon is the scripture *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni zhou* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼咒. Following the scripture is the colophon 三界寺觀音院僧戒輪書記 ('Sanjie Monastery, Guanyin Court, monk Jielun wrote and recorded').²²⁶ After the colophon is the scripture *Daweiyi jing qingwen shuo* 大威儀經請問說, followed by another colophon saying 己未年三月廿八日戒輪書 三界寺善惠受持 ('[In] Jiwei year, the twenty-eighth day

²²³ Zhang Yongquan, p. 273.

²²⁴ There is no date on this scroll, but Zhang Yongquan observes that its calligraphic style is the same as the scroll dated to 959. Therefore, he thinks that P.3919-2 is also dated to 959. Zhang Yongquan, p. 274.

²²⁵ Zhang Yongquan, p. 273.

²²⁶ Zhang Yongquan, p. 273.

of the third month, written by Jielun, Sanjie Monastery, upheld by Shanhui').²²⁷ Zhang Yongquan observed that except for the seven characters of 三界寺善惠受持, all the other characters were written with the same calligraphic style.²²⁸ Therefore, it is known that all the scriptures in P.3919-2 were written by the monk Jielun, except for the last colophon by Shanhui. Unlike the scriptures discussed above, monk Jielun did not mention any personal aspiration in his colophons. He may have been the scribe for the Sanjie Monastery, whose responsibility was to transcribe Buddhist scriptures.

In conclusion, the five scriptures are dated from the ninth to mid-tenth centuries, suggesting the popularity of the *PPK Sutra* during this time in Dunhuang. Two out of the five scriptures contain colophons that aim specifically to generate religious merit by copying the scripture, to be directed to the donors' deceased parent(s). It is highly likely that the donors chose the sutra on purpose, as its theme of repaying the kindness of one's parents suits their intention to commemorate their parent(s). However, there is also a case as shown by S.4476 that the donor copied the *PPK Sutra* for his or her deceased daughter. It seems to the modern reader that the theme and content of the scripture is irrelevant with what he or she wished for. The patron may have perceived the sutra differently. As the scripture was very popular in medieval China, he or she may have treated the scripture as an omnipotent solution for any religious wishes they wished to fulfil.

4.6 Conclusion

In the Dunhuang library cave, over fifty manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* were discovered. Due to the limitation of access to original manuscripts, this chapter is not a

²²⁷ Zhang Yongquan, p. 273.

²²⁸ Zhang Yongquan, p. 274.

comprehensive study of all the manuscripts of the sutra, but focuses on a few case studies, which are available to be viewed and have been digitised.

As this chapter reveals, the motivations behind the duplication of the sutra can be categorised into two groups: some may have been intended for monastic libraries, and some were produced for personal uses, which involves chanting and fulfilling wishes. The format and calligraphic style of S.149 show that it is very likely to have been a copy that belonged to a monastic library. An examination of S.5433 shows that it was written by two different persons. Among the four scriptures copied in the codex, the *PPK Sutra* is incomplete and was written in a rushed manner toward the end, which implies that the writer may have lost his or her patience in copying the sutra and eventually gave up. Other manuscripts with colophons inform us that they were copied to fulfil other religious wishes.

Chapter Five: materiality, belief, and conclusion

The *PPK Sutra*, as a group of indigenous Buddhist texts on parents' kindness, has a more complex and dynamic history than previously assumed. By summarising the materials discussed in previous chapters, I will theorise them from different angles to better understand the cultural mechanisms that resulted in the production of the material culture of the sutra. Significantly, the material cultures of the scriptures served to validate their production and roles in contemporary society, as shown through the comparison of the Buddhist notion of repaying parents' kindness with actual usage of the objects and non-Buddhist beliefs, such as Confucian filial piety and mortuary practice. Building on discussion of the historical inscriptions on the stone stelae from Shandong in Chapter Three, this chapter will focus on their materiality and how the agency or power of stone stelae and inscriptions shaped people's belief and their patronage of the stelae. In contrast to stone, the medium of paper allows the sutra to be multiplied in larger quantities. The second section of this chapter will review the manuscript culture of the *PPK Sutra*, by applying Stuart Hall's theory of 'culture circuit' and representation. This chapter ends with a conclusion of the thesis.

5.1 Stone stelae and their materiality

In his discussion of theories of materiality, Miller provides a 'vulgar' theory of things as artefacts, which should transcend the dualism of subjects and objects. He observes that 'we are brought up with the expectations characteristic of our particular social group

largely through what we learn in our engagement with the relationships found between everyday things'.²²⁹ The exterior environment and things around us habituate and prompt our daily behaviour and engagement with things. To take this point further, Miller turns to Latour's theory of material agency. It applies the concept of agency—a capacity to effect changes typically attributed to persons, institutions, or historical forces of human making—to the nonhuman world: 'Where material forms have consequences for people that are autonomous from human agency, they may be said to possess the agency that causes these effects.'²³⁰

The inherent nature of things can endow objects with agency. Their nature can be physical, chemical, or biological. Either consciously or unconsciously, ancient Buddhists and laymen depended on stone sculpture, stelae, scrolls, and booklets to carry out their religious practice and realise their religious aspirations. By attaching their wishes and emotions to religious objects, Buddhists believed the objects would act according to their will and offer what they hoped.

5.1.1 Stone Stelae prior to the Tang and Song

By reviewing the history of stone stelae in China prior to the Tang and Song, this section shows how the stone stelae from Shandong were shaped by the conventions of stone stelae-making in Chinese history.²³¹ In China prior to the second century BCE, aboveground funerary structures were made of wood, using timber frames. No stone stelae or statues have been found in a pre-Han (206BCE-220CE) graveyard. During the Eastern Han (25-220CE), stone stelae and funerary monuments made of stone became

²²⁹ Daniel Miller, *Materiality*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2005, p. 6.

²³⁰ Daniel Miller, *Materiality*, p. 11.

²³¹ My review of the history of Chinese stelae is indebted to Dorothy Wong's study of Chinese stelae, Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, 2004.

popular.²³² The reason for the change is not clear, but beginning in the Eastern Han, stone became the material primarily reserved for the dead, ancestors, and immortals. The natural characteristic of stone was constantly referred to in the inscriptions on the funerary structures or stelae expressed by their patrons: its plainness, durability, and strength were considered to make it the suitable material for commemorating the dead.

Tomb stelae appeared as early as the Western Han and became a category of objects that was an integral part of tomb complexes.²³³ Most of the stelae from the Han Dynasty are funerary stelae. A small number of them were placed lining the spirit-path leading to a tomb tumulus. Many were placed in cemeteries to mark a tomb tumulus of humble size.²³⁴ Most of the funerary stelae were devoted to middle- and low-level officials and bureaucrats, and these literati considered themselves to be members of the educated upper class.²³⁵ Names and titles of the deceased were carved on stelae, which functioned to preserve the identity of the dead.²³⁶ Most of the tomb inscriptions expressed values associated with Confucian teachings, such as classical learning, filial piety, benevolence, and so on. Dorothy Wong argues that this cultural uniformity 'attests to the far-reaching consequences both of the Han government's adoption of Confucianism as the orthodox ideology and of the establishment of the classical canon'.²³⁷

In the Wei (220-265) and Jin (265-420) periods, the erection of funerary stelae dramatically decreased, a result of a large-scale ritual reform aiming to limit lavish

²³² Wu Hung, *Monumentality in early Chinese art and architecture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 122. Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, pp. 25-26.

²³³ One of the earliest tomb stelae is *Biao Xiaoyu bei*, from Sishui, Shandong, dated to 26CE during the Western Han period. See Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles*, pp. 30-31.

²³⁴ Dorothy Wong, pp.31.

²³⁵ Martin J. Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 357-358.

²³⁶ J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 3, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1892-1910, p. 1104.

²³⁷ Dorothy Wong, p. 32.

funerary rites and advocating a return to the Zhou sacrificial system centring on the ancestral temple.²³⁸ The main reason for these measures was that sumptuous funerary construction was too costly and drained the economy. However, a more possible reason was that grand funeral monuments demonstrated the status of regional dignitaries, which posed a threat to the power of the state.²³⁹

In addition to tomb stelae, there are stelae from the Han, Wei, and Jin periods made for other purposes, including the worship of natural deities, the cult of Confucius, stelae dedicating the *she* organisations, the cult of Heaven, temple stelae, and secular stelae as political, military, and territorial emblems.²⁴⁰ Among these categories, the largest project of stelae making is a set of stone texts engraved with the Confucian canon on sixty tablets. They were erected outside the Grand Academy at the Eastern Han capital of Luoyang. The primary aim of erecting the stone texts was ostensibly to issue a standard edition of the Confucian canon, but in reality, the stone tablets served as cultural and political emblems affirming the ultimate triumph of Confucianism.

Even though stone was believed to be one of the most durable materials, the stone texts were destroyed seven years after their completion due to political turbulence. However, the agency of the stone texts outlived even their material forms. Another set of stone texts was established by the Wei kingdom, one of the three kingdoms that rose after the fall of the Han. These texts were written in three scripts: ancient script, seal script, and clerical script. Succeeding nomadic states of the Northern Dynasties (386-581) contested the possession of these stone texts, which demonstrated their importance as symbols of the state. Inscribed with the Confucian canon, the stone

²³⁸ Dorothy Wong, p. 34. Wu Hung 巫鴻, "Han Ming, Wei Wen de lizhi gaige yu Handai huaxiang yishu zhi shengshuai 漢明、魏文的禮製改革與漢代畫像藝術之盛衰", *Jiuzhou xuekan* 九州學刊, 2, no. 2, 1989, pp. 31-44.

²³⁹ Dorothy Wong, p. 34.

²⁴⁰ Dorothy Wong, pp. 34-38.

texts embody the Confucian principles of rulership, which made them powerful tools for nomadic rulers to appropriate for their rule over Han Chinese. It has been noted that the tradition of engraving Buddhist sutras may have been inspired by this Confucian tradition of canonical stone texts.²⁴¹ From the second half of the sixth century onwards, Buddhist monks and laymen started to engrave Buddhist texts on stone surfaces or stone stelae, especially in Hebei, Shanxi, and Shandong.

The spread of Buddhism in China brought in a new tradition of making Buddhist images and sculptures. Rulers of the Northern Wei (386-534) were ardent believers in Buddhism and sponsored large-scale excavation of Buddhist cave temples such as Datong and Luoyang, each of which contains thousands of Buddhist sculptures of varying sizes. During the Northern Wei period, stone stelae were first appropriated for Buddhist use. The practice of placing Buddhist images in recessed niches in Buddhist cave temples inspired similar designs on Buddhist stelae. Different from traditional stone stelae, which were strictly regulated by sumptuary laws, Buddhist stelae come in diverse sizes and shapes. Dorothy Wong argues that the amorphous character of Indian Buddhist carvings in general contributed to the diversity of Chinese Buddhist stelae.²⁴² The majority of Buddhist stelae are flat slabs of varying thickness. The normal height is one to two meters, but some exceptionally large stelae can be more than three meters in height.²⁴³ Another major difference between conventional Chinese stelae and Buddhist stelae made during the Northern Dynasties is that the former tend to be dominated by written words, whereas the latter tend to be dominated by images.

After China was unified under the Sui and Tang, far fewer Buddhist stelae with images were made compared to the previous periods. There were stelae with Buddhist

²⁴¹ Dorothy Wong, p. 40.

²⁴² Dorothy Wong, p. 64.

²⁴³ Dorothy Wong, p. 63.

content made, but in formal terms they were produced in the pre-Buddhist mode, which emphasises the written word rather than imagery. Dorothy Wong notes that 'this transformation of the formal character of Buddhist stone slabs suggests that by this time the religion was fully assimilated into Chinese society and institutions'.²⁴⁴ Her observation of the dominance of word is proved by the stone stelae from Shandong made during the Tang and Song periods. The full text of the *PPK Sutra* is carved on the stelae, which occupies the main body of the stelae. However, the images on the stelae from Shandong are reminders of the Buddhist tradition of image making. Among the eight stelae discussed in Chapter Three, four of them have a niche of Buddhist images. Although the niches are of moderate sizes, they were carved on the very top of the stelae, which indicates the importance of their presence. The stela dated to the first year of the Qianyou era from the Later Han is a representative example. The inscription on the stela also mentions that a stone stela and a merit niche were both made. Although sculpted in simple fashion, the niche, which contains a triad of images, is believed to be an essential part of the stela and necessary to be mentioned in the inscription. Although Buddhism was 'Sinicised' and assimilated into Chinese society during the Tang and Song, it brought profound changes in people's practices and beliefs, such as the tradition of making Buddhist images. The stelae from Shandong show that people's belief in the efficacy of Buddhist sculptures representing the Buddha and bodhisattvas was deeply rooted and coexisted with their belief in the efficacy of Buddhist sutras.

5.1.2 Belief in the durability of stone

²⁴⁴ Dorothy Wong, p. 178.

The *PPK Sutra* is silent regarding the kind of material on which it should be written. Having the sutra carved on the surface of stone demands much more investment of time and effort than simply copying it by hand on paper. But the durability of the stone ensures that the inscriptions of the sutra will survive over long period of time and under tough conditions. The stela from Yucheng was produced due to its patron, Geng Shike, believing in the durability of stone. Toward the end of the inscription on the Yucheng stela, it states:

今与寫經俱口勝口事，刊石銘經，傳為不朽，讀者心明，聞天意。

Carve the stone and inscribe the sutra.

Pass it on as imperishable.

The reader's mind is enlightened and hears the will of heaven.

Of all forms of material media used for writing, stone endures much longer than others such as paper, cloth, or bamboo. Buddhists in China had realised this fact a few centuries earlier, and they had Buddhist sutras carved on stone for another end: to preserve the teaching of the Buddha when the religion was facing destruction and to pass on Buddhist sutras timelessly.

Buddhism in China had faced three brief attacks in history, all initiated by emperors who saw Buddhism as a threat to the stability and prosperity of the state. The attacks became a source of fear for Buddhists who also believed Śākyamuni's warning to his followers. He warned that his teachings would be transmitted faithfully in its true form for only five hundred years and would reach the total extinction of Buddhism in the age of *mofa*, or 'Final Dharma'. In the middle of the sixth century, what the Buddhists did was to have Buddhist sutras carved on the inner walls of caves in mountains so that the teachings of the Buddha would be preserved and transmitted.

Major sites of stone sutra caves are located at Xiaonanhai in Henan and Mount Xiangtang in Hebei.

Discovered in good condition, the sutra caves indeed allow one to transcribe the texts and read the sutras. Time has tested the durability of stone to a greater degree: for example, the stone inscriptions on the slope of Mt Tie in Zou County in Shandong have been exposed to open air for over a thousand and five hundred years. Located about two hundred miles to the south of Yucheng County, Zou County is famous for being the birthplace of the philosopher Mencius. In the northern part of Zou County lies Mt Tie, whose slope is carved with three texts.

The texts occupy over 1,085 square meters and consist of three parts: a passage from the *Great Collection Sutra* (*Daji jing* 大集經), which counts to about one thousand words; a Stone Eulogy, which is carved to the west of the sutra passage; and an inscribed record, which is below the sutra passage. The inscribed record informs us about its donors and date. The site is dated to 579 in the Stone Eulogy and there are two groups of donors, who include members from lay Buddhist society and Buddhist monks.²⁴⁵ Although there is no mention of their concern about the decline of Buddhism, a passage from the Stone Eulogy does state the donors' intention to preserve the sutras over a long time, a concern shared by the Geng family. The concern is expressed in ornate prose style at Mt Tie:

Even if from today onward the carving should meet with disastrous fire, it will not be consumed. Should its divine [multiple graphs missing] encounter a destructive wind, it will endure. Thus, [painting with] reds and greens [two missing graphs] [it] is used to depict the flourishing of the Dharma. [missing graph] Metal and stone, for their durability, are used to carve it so that it will not decay. Were this cliff not inscribed, what would later generations be able to see? Silk and bamboo are easily ruined,

²⁴⁵ Robert Harrist, *Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 162-165.

but metal and stone are hard to destroy. Placed on a high mountain, [the writing] will be passed down without end.²⁴⁶

The Geng family and the donors of the *Great Collection Sutra* shared the same intentions. They wished first that the merit stela or the carved sutra would endure and be passed on, and second that later generations would be able to see and even read the text.

The first intention undoubtedly has been fulfilled; although there are missing graphs from the stela or the cliff inscriptions due to erosion, the texts are still legible enough to understand the content. The second intention, however, seems to demand more careful analysis by comparing two kinds of practices involving 'seeing': to see and view the texts and to read the texts from beginning to end.

It is much easier to see and view the texts than it is to read them. When anyone who goes to the site at Mt Tie or visits the Yucheng stela, they are inevitably attracted by the graphs and view them. However, the size and the presentation of the graphs mean that they demand much more effort for one to read. The *Great Collection Sutra* consists of over nine hundred characters carved in seventeen columns. The longest column measures over thirty meters from north to south. The characters range in size from forty to sixty centimetres in height. Therefore, reading the sutra demands one to climb up and down the slope many times. Whether the intaglio graphs were painted or not is not known. If they were painted, the paintings could have made them easier to read and more outstanding. However, it still requires much determination and physical strength to finish reading all of it. By comparison the *PPK Sutra* carved on the stela from Yucheng is of much smaller size, each character measuring about one to two centimetres. The small size and the shallowness of the characters, however, also pose great challenge for

²⁴⁶ Translation from Harrist, *Landscape of Words*, p. 180.

a viewer to complete reading it. One has to use torchlight from time to time in order to distinguish a character.

To conclude, the donors of the Yucheng stela and the donors of the texts carved on Mt Tie at Zou County hope to preserve the sutra and mark their religious merit by choosing the media of stone for their religious projects. About three hundred years earlier, the project at Mt Tie is of much grander scale, which shows the ambition of their donors. Nonetheless, the Geng family had the entire the *PPK Sutra* carved on the stela, which counts to over 1,700 words. The making of the stela lasted for fourteen years, spanning from the first year of the Changqing era (821) to the eighth year of the Dahe era (834). Its inscription is silent about why it took so long for the stela to be completed, but one possible reason is that the work of carving demands much time and money from the sponsors, which might have been disrupted. No matter how challenging a project of inscribing sutras is, the durable power of stone keeps attracting people to make patronage and fulfil their religious aspirations.

5.2 The manuscript culture of the *PPK Sutra*

In contrast to the durability of stone, the medium of paper is much more fragile. However, writing on paper costs less time and effort compared with inscribing the sutra on stone, which makes it possible to duplicate the sutra in larger quantities. Over fifty manuscripts were discovered from the Dunhuang Library Cave, and more may have been produced in history. In her book on Buddhist art in medieval China, Shen Hsueh-man argues that Buddhist material culture from the period is essentially a culture of replication.²⁴⁷ The repeatedly copied the *PPK Sutra* testifies to her argument. Although

²⁴⁷ Hsueh-man Shen, *Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2019, p. 2.

reproduced many times, the sutra was duplicated for various purposes and in different formats.

This section treats the manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* in various formats not only as identical textual reproductions of the sutra, but as varying material representations of it. Each copy presents the sutra differently, as the varied contents were copied by different hands and in different formats. In written forms, the manuscripts represent the sutra, and each reproduction is associated with one or a particular set of practices.

Stuart Hall argues that representation is ‘one of the central practices which produce culture and a key “moment” in what has been called the “circuit of culture”’. According to Hall’s theory, there are five elements in the ‘cultural circuit’: representation, regulation, consumption, production, and identity. His diagram of the ‘cultural circuit’ shows that the elements are related to each other, which form a circuit that constitutes culture. Hall’s theory on culture assumes that culture is about ‘shared meanings’. And language is the prime medium for us to make sense of things by producing and exchanging meanings. Therefore, representation through language is central to the processes by which meaning is produced.²⁴⁸ I would argue that in the study of material culture, representation is not only a ‘moment’, but is also embodied by things in specific material forms. For archaeologists, it is crucial to place the ‘key moment’ into the dimension of time and place, and to regard representation as a practice formed in a specific place at a specific moment. It is also necessary to place the moment in the axes of time and place, to understand culture within its historical and social context.

²⁴⁸ Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction’, in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations of Signifying Practices*, London, Open University, 1997, p. 2.

As discussed in Chapter Four, most versions of the *PPK Sutra* examined in this thesis were written on handscrolls. There is also a booklet and a codex of the sutra, which are precious examples to show that different ‘culture circuits’ of the sutra had existed in the past. Since the manuscripts are not commodities, I modify the model of Hall’s ‘cultural circuit’ by replacing the element of ‘consumption’ with ‘ritual usage’ and apply the model to analyse the ‘cultural circuit’ of the manuscript culture of the *PPK Sutra*.

The production of the sutra on handscrolls involved people with different identities. Among these handscrolls studied in Chapter Four, three have colophons (P.2285, SB.56, and S.4476) that record the purposes of their production and names of the owners of the sutras. They all record that a person or a group of people ‘wrote the sutra’ for their deceased relatives. P.2285 was written by monk Zhizhao, who marks his identity in the colophon not only as a monk, but also an orphan, which was due to the loss of his mother. If the representation of the sutra means the action of writing it down on paper, monk Zhizhao must have needed more preparation for her production of the sutra, which included the purchase or acquisition of proper paper used for writing, a set of tools for writing, such as ink and brushes, and a copy the *PPK Sutra* for her transcription.

Different from monk Zhizhao, who held a religious identity, the owners of sutras SB.56 and S.4476 were lay Buddhists. What was the difference in the production of a sutra between a religious figure and a lay one? Did the lay Buddhists need to ask nuns or monks for help in the production of a sutra? I conjecture that since many lay Buddhists as ordinary people may have been fully or partially illiterate, especially females, it is possible that they would go to religious institutions or turn to professional scribes for help to produce their own copies of sutras. In fact, the practice of copying

sutras for money was so widespread in Tang society that in 714 the Xuanzong emperor (r.712-756) issued a decree that commanded people to stop copying sutras by themselves and stipulated people to go to a temple when they needed to read or recite scriptures. In addition, the decree ordered more copies should be made by monks when scriptures were in short supply.²⁴⁹ The decree aimed to regulate the production of sutra copies in society, an attempt by the court to control scriptural reproduction and the dissemination of knowledge.²⁵⁰

Some handscrolls of the *PPK Sutra* may have been produced for monastic libraries, such as S.149, S.1548, S.2084, and S.1323 discussed in Chapter Four. Compared to private production of the sutra, the production of handscrolls for library deposit was regulated by more rigid requirements relating to the size and format of the paper used for the handscrolls, how to space the characters, and the quality of the calligraphy. Belonging to local monastic libraries at Dunhuang, the *PPK Sutra* became part of the Buddhist canon, despite its authenticity having been doubted in a few Buddhist catalogues. In the capital city of Chang'an during the Tang, the Buddhist canon was reproduced in significant quantities, and its production went through more elaborate procedures to ensure accuracy. For example, a scroll of the *Lotus Sutra*, which is now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, contains detailed information about its production. From the colophon at the end of the scroll, it is known that the scroll was copied by a court scribe named Yuan Yuanzhe. The scroll was then proofread and examined by monks, and finally mounted. The copy of this scroll must have

²⁴⁹ Song Minqiu 宋敏求, *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集, juan 113, Shanghai, Shangwu yinshuguan, 1959, p. 588; Dong Gao 董誥, *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, juan 26, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 300.

²⁵⁰ Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, p. 18.

belonged to a project, which was supervised by Yan Xuande, whose name was also recorded in the colophon.²⁵¹

In contrast to the handscrolls, which were produced for monastic libraries under strict regulations, S.5433 shows how personal traits were presented through writing on the codex. The repetitive characters on the cover page seem to be scribbles. On the last page of the codex, two similar bird-shaped figures were drawn, which seem to bear no religious meanings, but rather were signs of playfulness of the drawer. The incomplete copy of the *PPK Sutra*, which was copied more and more impatiently, also shows the scribe's relatively less serious engagement with the codex as a personal religious production. The *Shangsheng li* copied in the codex, which contains mantras and numbers dictating how many times they should be repeated, records in detail about the ritual to worship Maitreya. Therefore, the codex, whose size is small enough to be carried around, may have been used during religious rituals. To conclude, the codex was produced with little regulation from authorities. Instead, personal wills played a major role in its making, which shows how sutra copying was carried out at a personal level.

5.3 Conclusion

The *PPK Sutra* is a group of Buddhist scriptures composed in China no later than the Tang dynasty. They share the common theme of the profoundness of parents' kindness and teach how one should repay it in a Buddhist way. The apocryphal status of the sutra was pointed out in the Buddhist catalogues that recorded it, which, however, did not prevent it from being spread widely in medieval society.

²⁵¹ Shen, *Authentic Replicas*, p. 19.

The scriptures have a complex textual history, which have been the focus of past scholarship. According to their contents, they can be categorised into three main editions. Recently discovered stelae carved with the scriptures show that within one of their editions, there were at least four variants of the texts. A completely new composition under the same title was carved on a stela dated to the early Northern Song from Jinxiang, Shandong. It used Buddhist terms throughout its text, but its aim was considerably more in line with Confucian teachings, persuading people to stay at home and take care of their parents. The historical inscriptions on the stelae also give us their geographical provenance, which shows that the *PPK Sutra* was popular in rural Shandong during the Tang and Song. Part of the sutra was cited by the great monk scholar Zongmi in his *Commentary on the Yulanpen Sutra*, which testified to its importance among Buddhist intellectuals.

Seven stone stelae from Shandong carved with the sutra have historical inscriptions, which provide valuable sources for us to understand some basic questions about the stelae, such as who produced them, how they were used, and what the sutra's role was in the making of the stela. Chapter Three showed that the seven stelae were made for different purposes. The earliest stela from the group is dated to 834, during the late Tang Dynasty. Its historical inscription shows that the stela was made to commemorate the ancestors of the Geng family from Boyi Village in Yucheng County, Shandong. The stela incorporates the Chinese manner of commemorating ancestors by adopting a writing style also found in Chinese tomb epitaphs. It also quotes excerpts from the *PPK Sutra*, which confirms the identity of the Geng family as faithful Buddhists. Another group of four stelae from the Five Dynasties and Northern Song Dynasty were made for commemorating the deceased. It was mentioned specifically that they were placed in front of tombs, which shows that stelae could play a major role in funerary

rituals in rural Shandong. The stela dated to 1070 of the Northern Song was an exception compared to the stelae discussed previously, because it had nothing to do with ancestor commemoration or mourning the dead. Instead, it was made to commemorate the successful recognition of a local legalised temple from the Northern Song court. Its historical inscription did not explain why the *PPK Sutra* was chosen to be the appropriate one to be carved, but the stela surely confirms the popularity of the sutra in rural Shandong among not only lay Buddhists, but also Buddhist societies, nuns, and monks.

The manuscripts of the *PPK Sutra* from Dunhuang are another set of precious sources to understand how the sutra was used in medieval society in north-western China. Produced on paper rather than stone, a larger quantity of the manuscripts survive today compared to the number of stone stelae from the Tang and Song periods. They also come in various formats, including handscrolls, booklets and codex. Chapter Four showed that the motivation for the production of the manuscripts can be categorised into two kinds. Some may have been produced for monastic libraries, and some were commissioned for personal uses, such as chanting and fulfilling religious aspirations.

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