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OVERSEER IN DUNHUANG DURING
THE PERIOD OF GUIYIJUN RULE**

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ON THE OFFICE OF SAMGHA OVERSEER IN DUNHUANG
DURING THE PERIOD OF GUIYIJUN RULE*

HENRIK H. SØRENSEN

Abstract

This essay focuses on the succession of important monks who occupied the prestigious post of *samgha* overseer (Chin. *sengtong* 僧統) in Dunhuang after the establishment of the Guiyijun regime (851–1036, Return-to-Allegiance Army, 歸義軍) in the territory from the second half of the 9th century until well into the 11th century. I look at the functions that were formally part of the jurisdiction and duty of the *samgha* overseers and, after that, at the lives of each of these monks. These are being examined against the data yielded by the primary sources, that is, the Dunhuang manuscripts. The overall purpose is to develop a sense of the institution of *samgha* overseer in Dunhuang and to arrive at a deeper appreciation of these monks as primary agents in the religious and political context of this minor kingdom located in Eastern Central Asia on the western-most border of the Chinese cultural space.

1. Introduction

A sacred space or sacred area, as Dunhuang (敦煌) was during the medieval period in Eastern Central Asia, is created by a number of necessary factors, as I argue elsewhere.¹ Among these are the human agents who, in various ways, ensured that a certain site maintained its status as a sacred space. Previously, I looked at two examples of such human agents, the monk Daozhen (ca. 915–ca. 987, 道真)² and the lay-

* The author wishes to thank Imre Galambos for providing criticism and useful suggestions towards the improvement of the original draft of this study.

¹ See section “Dunhuang as Sacred Space,” in chapter three “Sacred Space and Pilgrimage” of the forthcoming book *The Buddhist Road: Major Themes in Central Asian Buddhism I*, co-authored by the members of the BuddhistRoad team (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming) to be published on the BuddhistRoad website: <https://buddhistroad.ceres.rub.de/en/publications/books/>.

² Daozhen is discussed in a number of articles in recent years, but usually in connection with his attempts to restore scriptures in the Sanjie Temple’s (三界寺) library. See, e.g., Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, trans. Imre Galambos (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 58–59. For an account of Daozhen’s overall activities as a local Buddhist



Buddhist official and literatus Zhai Fengda (881–961?, 翟奉達).³ In this essay, I look at a series of important Buddhist figures, namely those eminent monks who were chosen to occupy the prestigious position of *saṃgha* overseer (Chin. *sengtong* 僧統),⁴ in effect the local equivalent of a national (Chin. *guoshi* 國師) or imperial preceptor (Chin. *dishi* 帝師).⁵ In contrast to the standard clerical and lay Buddhist officials, the office of the *saṃgha* overseer was the highest official post that a Buddhist monk could occupy in Dunhuang during the 9th–10th centuries, and as such, it was as much a formal government position as it was a religious one. In a study on the Buddhist nuns in Dunhuang, I show that the majority of the nuns who hailed from the ruling clans or the important families tended to receive the highest clerical positions in the course of their religious careers, thus reflecting and expressing the typical social order of

leader, see Henrik H. Sørensen, “The Life and Times of Daozhen—a Saṃgha Leader and Monk Official in Dunhuang during the 10th Century,” *BuddhistRoad Papers* 5.3 (2020).

³ The actual dates of Zhai Fengda remain somewhat oblique, despite various attempts to establish them. The dates given here follow those proposed by Ji Xianlin 季羨林, ed., *Dunhuang da cidian* 敦煌大辭典 [The Great Dictionary on Dunhuang; hereafter DDCD] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1998), 363b. See also, Tao Qiuying 陶秋英 and Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫, comp., *Dunhuang sui jin* 敦煌碎金 [Golden Bits from Dunhuang] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), 92–93. Therein Zhai Fengda’s dates are given as 881–959. Other dates, i.e. fl. 902–966, are found in Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 102; conversely, Ning Qiang gives his dates as 883 to after 959. Cf. Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Cave of the Zhai Family* (Honolulu: Hawai’i University Press, 2004), 75–77.

⁴ The now-classic informative study of the *saṃgha* overseers in Dunhuang is part of Rong Xonjiang’s 榮新江, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu: Tang, Song shidai Dunhuang lishi kaosuo* 歸義軍史研究—唐宋時代敦煌歷史考索 [A Study of the History of the Guiyijun: An Exploration of the History of Dunhuang during the Tang to Song Periods] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015), 279–297. This is essentially a revised and expanded version of the author’s original study from 1995. For some reason, the information available in resources such as the *Dunhuang sui jin* and the *Dunhuang xue da cidian* is paltry in comparison and does not even come near to providing the rich amount of detail found in Rong’s work. For a general overview of this office in the history of Chinese Buddhism, see FDC, vol. 6, 5741b–5742a. Note that the information presented there tends to favour the pre-Tang period.

⁵ For comparison, a detailed discussion of these important monk functionaries under the Koryō State (918–1392, 高麗) is found in Sem Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas: The Politics of Buddhism During the Koryō Dynasty (918–1392)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 183–268.

Dunhuang's feudal society.⁶ The same also held true for the monks who were selected for the office of Saṃgha Overseer, but with the added caveat that many, or at least some, distinguished themselves spiritually as well.

Much of the information we have on the *saṃgha* overseers in Dunhuang derives from surviving official documents including decrees, correspondences with religious and secular authorities, legal matters, and so on. Other sources on the lives of these monk officials are funerary writings, such as eulogies for their funerary portraits, and the occasional stele inscription (Chin. *beiwēn* 碑文). In a few cases, we also have detailed information on *saṃgha* overseers who—in their capacity as Buddhist leaders—participated in the excavation of a new cave or the repair and redecoration of an old one. But only for very few of them do we have material that reveals more intimate details about the religious nature of their lives. It is also important to note that available information on the *saṃgha* overseers in Dunhuang varies greatly from person to person. In some cases, we have a relatively solid amount of information on a given monk, and in other cases, we have very little. The fact that little documentation survives on the lives and activities of some of the *saṃgha* overseers, especially those who did not occupy the position for very long, should not come as a surprise. This does not necessarily mean that the *saṃgha* overseers for whom we have little information were less important than those whose lives are better documented.

It goes without saying that the reconstruction of the lives and times of the *saṃgha* overseers attempted here is—to a large extent—conditioned by the available source materials, and, therefore, may not be entirely representative of how their lives actually played out. Nevertheless, I hope that this study will go some way toward our understanding of how these high-ranking and important clerical officials operated under successive Guiyijun rulers.⁷

While relying on information in Rong Xinjiang's (榮新江) work, the approach I choose to take here has a more religious studies angle on the topic of *saṃgha* overseers, which means that I focus on their roles as religious leaders, including their practice of Buddhism, and less on their

⁶ Henrik H. Sørensen, "Buddhist Nuns in Dunhuang during the Guiyijun Reign: With Focus on Their Family-Relations and the Activities of Important Female Clerics." *BuddhistRoad Paper 5.7* (2021, forthcoming).

⁷ For a short discussion of the functions of the *saṃgha* overseers and their staff of clerical officials, see Rong, *Eighteen Lectures*, 301–302.



administrative duties. Moreover, in contrast to Rong's rather terse historical account, this study provides more 'body' to the topic in question, that is, more context and contents, as well as new information not be found in his work.

2. *The Office of Samgha Overseer in Dunhuang under Tibetan Rule*

It is unclear to what extent a monastic bureaucracy existed in Dunhuang before the second half of the 8th century. Likewise, the relationship between the local government and the Buddhist *saṃgha* during the early Tang Dynasty (618–907, 唐) is relatively little understood because little documentation has been found. Monastic officials and religious leaders did not, of course, come into vogue in Dunhuang until after the middle of the 9th century but did exist in some form prior to that time. However, due to the fact that the entire Hexi (河西) region was under the Tang Empire prior to the Tibetan conquest in the latter part of the 8th century, it is certain that there were no *saṃgha* overseers appointed for Dunhuang as such, at that time. We do not have a more well-defined understanding of the situation until the Tibetan rule over Dunhuang, from the second half of the 8th to the mid-9th century. During that time, one of the government's most important tasks was the pacification and control of the Chinese population in newly conquered areas in the Hexi region. A major factor in achieving this goal was securing the cooperation of local religious leaders, most notably the local *saṃgha* overseers, the officially appointed Buddhist prelates who had been in office at the time of the Tibetan takeover.

As the largest and most important religion in the area, Buddhism enjoyed a high degree of popularity in Dunhuang during the middle of the Tang Dynasty. If the local population could be governed via Buddhism, a religion which the Tibetans themselves professed, everybody would benefit. Hence, it goes without saying that the cooperation of these Chinese Buddhist leaders would make the task of governing a potentially hostile population considerably easier, not to mention the obvious political

benefits the Tibetan government would reap from such a mutually conducive situation.⁸

As it happened, the Tibetan government went quite far in securing the close cooperation of the local Buddhist temples, many of which were turned into Buddhist schools, where Tibetan was taught alongside Chinese.⁹ Of course, the pro-Buddhist stance of the Tibetan military government was not just a sign of religious fervour, but also motivated by the voracious appetite for new Buddhist teachings at the time, especially the desire to have as many Chinese Buddhist texts translated as possible. These translations in turn were sent back to the Tibetan heartlands, where the Tibetan rulers were busy building their own Buddhism-based empire.

We have the names of a few monks who served as leaders of the local *samgha* during the Tibetan rule over Dunhuang. However, their authority was strictly limited to the conquered areas under Tibetan control, that is, areas that had formerly been under the Tang Empire.¹⁰ It is unclear to what extent the Tibetan government had a similar system of monk officials in Central Tibet. But it is evident that important Buddhist prelates, as well as monks invited from abroad, worked in close cooperation with the Tibetan court.

It appears that Dunhuang's clerical leadership under the Tibetan rule consisted mainly of Chinese rather than Tibetan monks. This is, at least, the image one gets concerning the state of events during the first half of the 9th century. There has been some discussion as to the actual status of

⁸ See Gertraud Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia: A Case Study according to the Dunhuang Manuscripts Referring to the Transition from Tibetan to Local Rule in Dunhuang, 8th–11th Centuries," in *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), 19–56.

⁹ The success of temple schools in Dunhuang was such that when the Chinese regained control over Shazhou and Guazhou during the mid-9th century, the new government did not close the schools but continued, and even expanded, them. The issue of temple schools and their proliferation in Dunhuang is also addressed in Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang: Mid 9th to Early 11th Centuries," *BuddhistRoad Paper 5.2* (2020). For a recent discussion of the management of Buddhist temples in Dunhuang under the Tibetan rule over Shazhou, see Lu Li 陆离, "Tubo siyuan anben kao 吐蕃寺院岸本考 [A Study of the Tibetan Temple *Mngan*]," *Shanxi shifan daxue xuebao 陕西师范大学学报 [Journal of Shanxi Normal University]* 3 (2019): 20–28.

¹⁰ See Xie Chongguan 谢重光, "Tubo zhanling qi yu Guiyijun shiqi de Dunhuang sengguan zhidu 吐蕃占领期与归义军时期的敦煌僧官制度 [On the Regulations Concerning the Monk Officials in Dunhuang during the Tibetan Rule and at the Time of the Guiyijun]," *Dunhuang yanjiu 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research]* 3 (1991): 52–61.



the important translator-monk Facheng (d. 864, 法成, Tib. Chos grub), who lived and was a leading cleric in Dunhuang during the first half of the 9th century, during the later period of the Tibetan rule.¹¹ Facheng's status as a monk of considerable knowledge and expertise in a wide range of Buddhist subjects is undisputed. However, whether he also served as a formal *saṃgha* leader in the administrative sense is still disputed.¹² Even so, his legacy is impressive, and his importance was sufficient in his own time that he had his own merit cave (Chin. *gongde ku* 功德窟) among the Mogao Caves (Chin. Mogao ku 莫高窟), which was otherwise only reserved for persons of the highest social ranks in Dunhuang.¹³

3. The Formal Establishment of the Office of the Saṃgha Overseer

As we see above, a government-appointed office as leader of all of Buddhism in Dunhuang already existed in some form under the Tibetan rule before the area reverted to Chinese control in 848, with the arrival of

¹¹ Cf. Ueyama Daishun 山上大峻, *Tonkō bukkō no kenkyū* 敦煌佛教の研究 [Studies in Dunhuang Buddhism] (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1990), 84–246. Also see Wu Qiyu 吳其昱, “Daihan koku daitoku sanzō hōsei denkō 大蕃国大德・三藏法師・法成伝考 [A Discussion of the Life of the Great Virtuous One from Tibet, the Tripiṭaka and Dharma Master, Facheng],” trans. Fukui Fumimasa 福井文雅 and Higuchi Masaro 樋口勝, ed. Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 and Fukui Fumimasa 福井文雅, *Kōza Tonkō: Tonkō to Chūgoku bukkō* 講座敦煌: 敦煌と中国仏教 [Dunhuang Lectures: Dunhuang and Chinese Buddhism] 7 (Tokyo: Daitō shūppansha, 1984), 383–414. It is also worth consulting the short piece by Takata Tokio, “Multilingualism in Tun-huang,” *Acta Asiatica* 78 (2000): 49–70. See also Channa Li, “Toward a Typology of Chödrup’s (fl. first half of 9th c., Tib. Chos grub, Chin. Facheng 法成) Cursive Handwriting: A Paleographical Perspective,” *BuddhistRoad Paper* 1.2 (forthcoming 2020); Channa Li, “Toward Reconstructing a History of Chödrup’s (fl. first half of 9th c., Tib. Chos grub, Chin. Facheng 法成) Monastic Career: A Review Study,” *BuddhistRoad Paper* 1.3 (forthcoming 2021).

¹² See Xu Jian 徐健, “Tubo gaoseng Wu Facheng shengping santi 吐蕃高僧吴法成生平三题 [Three Questions Relating to the Life of the Tibetan High Monk Wu Facheng],” *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌学辑刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 1 (2017): 37–44. In this article the author argues—with some reason—that Facheng served as *saṃgha* overseer between 813 and 842. However, in my view, it is questionable whether Facheng was a Tibetan monk, especially in light of his family background.

¹³ On merit caves, see, e.g., Xu Juanhui 許絹惠, “Lun Zhang Yichao gongde ku de taku zuhe 論張議潮功德窟的塔窟組合 [Discussing Zhang Yichao’s Merit Cave and its Combination with the *stūpa* Cave],” *Dunhuang xue* 敦煌學 [Dunhuang Studies] 34 (2018): 101–130. See also Liu Yongzeng 刘永增, “Mogao ku di 98 ku shi yi chanfa daochang 莫高窟第 98 窟是一杆法道场 [Mogao Cave 98 Is a Ritual Space for Repentance],” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 6 (2012): 29–40.

the Guiyijun under Zhang Yichao (899–872, 張義潮). As Guiyijun rule was consolidated, the office of a Chinese-style *samgha* overseer was formally established in 857 (S. 1947V^o).¹⁴ Looking at the institution of *samgha* overseer of Hexi (Chin. *Hexi du sengtong* 河西都僧統) over the long durée, this prestigious position appears to have rotated among the male clerical members of Shazhou's prominent clans. This meant that spiritual legitimacy for the Guiyijun regime was further secured through control of the Buddhist religion and its institutions, and as such, reflects the existence of a sort of 'democracy among equals' in the sense that the leading clerical officials were chosen from a number of candidates proposed by the Buddhist temples themselves.

In some cases, the *samgha* overseers of Dunhuang are referred to as district *samgha* overseer (Chin. *du sengtong* 度僧統) or *samgha* overseer of Hexi (Chin. *Hexi du sengtong* 河西度僧統). In some cases, this has led to the belief that there was more than one *samgha* overseer in Dunhuang at the same time. However, this is incorrect. There was only one formally appointed *samgha* overseer at any given time in Dunhuang during the period of Guiyijun rule, despite some minor differences in their titles.

The office of *samgha* overseer in Dunhuang combined religious and secular responsibilities. While this monk official was foremost a liaison between the Buddhist monastic communities and the government, most of the monks who occupied the position under the Guiyijun actually carried out functions similar to those of secular government officials.¹⁵ Thus we find the *samgha* overseers from Dunhuang involved in diplomatic activities as official emissaries of the Guiyijun and ambassadors. Likewise, they were often in charge of foreign dignitaries visiting or passing through Dunhuang. Even so, their most important function was to serve as a direct link between the Buddhist temples and the Guiyijun government, that is, to communicate through decrees the wishes and orders of the current ruler vis-à-vis Buddhism.

¹⁴ For a discussion of monastic officials in Tang China, including the office of *samgha* overseer, see Bai Wengu 白文固, "Tang dai sengji guanli zhidu 唐代僧籍管理制度 [The System of Buddhist Clerical Management during the Tang Dynasty]," *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 [Pumen Journal] 15 (2003): 1–20. See also the entry in the FDC, vol. 6, 5731a–5734c. A traditional account is found in the *Da Song seng shi lie* 大宋僧史略 [Abbreviated History of Buddhist Monks under the Great Song] (T. 2126.54, 243a–244a).

¹⁵ See Yang Weizhong 杨维中, "Tang dai sengguan zhidu kaoshu 唐代僧官制度考述 [A Study of the System of Monk Officials during the Tang Period]," *Foxue yanjiu* 佛学研究 [Research in Buddhist Studies] 1 (2014): 292–303.



As far as we can tell, the Longxing Temple (Chin. Longxing si 龍興寺), which was Dunhuang's largest Buddhist establishment located in the prefectural seat of Shazhou (沙洲) itself, served as the formal residence of the *samgha* overseers.¹⁶ From this temple, they conducted their affairs in close proximity to the palace of the Zhang (張) and Cao (曹) rulers.

The job of the *samgha* overseer was, of course, to control the Buddhist monks and nuns living in Dunhuang's temples, that is, to see that they followed the monastic regulations and to intervene in case these were violated. He was also in charge of issuing directives to the temples concerning their duties that served the government's interests, including participation in public celebrations and functions. His role as an intermediary between government and the religious establishments gave the *samgha* overseer considerable power, including the right to appoint monastic personnel, including abbots, abbesses, and other temple functionaries.

The *samgha* overseers were also in charge of issuing ordination certificates for monks and nuns, and certificates for lay people taking the so-called bodhisattva precepts (Chin. *pusa jie* 菩薩戒). One example of an ordination certificate from 987 does not include the signature of the current *samgha* overseer¹⁷ and only has the official seal imprinted upon it thrice (S. 3798). In addition to their bureaucratic powers, one can well imagine that in the cases where the *samgha* overseers were dynamic or otherwise possessed spiritual charisma, their influence also extended to more religious issues, such as the creation of new caves at Mogao or the repair of old ones.

The religious and administrative support staff under a *samgha* overseer included a district *samgha* recorder (Chin. *du senglu* 都僧錄),¹⁸ a district *samgha* regulator (Chin. *du sengzheng* 都僧政 / 僧正),¹⁹ a district

¹⁶ This does not mean that they did not reside in other temples as well, i.e. that they had dual residences. We know from surviving records that the *samgha* overseers were recruited from most of the important temples in Shazhou. See Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang."

¹⁷ As the date of this document is 987 (fourth year of Yongxi 雍熙), it follows that it was either issued under the *Samgha* Overseer Ganghui (see below), or more likely, his successor, whose name is unknown.

¹⁸ FDC, vol. 6, 5751a–5752b. See also O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 405a.

¹⁹ FDC, vol. 6, 5716c–5717b. Hucker's definition of this clerical officer is only partly correct. Cf. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*, 404b.

administrative assistant (Chin. *du panguan* 都判官),²⁰ an ordinary *saṃgha* regulator (Chin. *sengzheng* 僧政), an ordinary *saṃgha* recorder (Chin. *senglu* 僧錄), and an ordinary administrative assistant (Chin. *panguan* 判官). The latter three types of monk-functionaries were found in each of Dunhuang's temples, whereas the first four posts were placed in the government office.²¹ It was not uncommon for these secondary clerical officials to rise to the position of *saṃgha* overseer in the course of their careers. One case is that of the celebrated Wuzhen (ca. 811–895, 悟眞),²² the disciple of the equally important Hongbian (?–862, 洪鑿), who, in the course of his life, passed through a number of offices before eventually becoming *saṃgha* overseer.

4. *Saṃgha Overseers in Dunhuang during the Guiyijun Period*

4.1. *Saṃgha Overseer Hongbian*

The first nominally appointed Buddhist leader in Dunhuang after the Guiyijun was established was the monk Hongbian,²³ who was formally

²⁰ This was a civil officer and the manager of paperwork for a military governor. Cf. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*, 363b.

²¹ An interesting perspective on the diversity of monks' duties is found in Zhao Qingshan 赵青山, "Tang mo Song chu seng zhi panguan kao—Yi Dunhuang wenxian wei zhongxin 唐末宋初僧职判官考—以敦煌文献为中心 [A Discussion of Clerics in Charge of Judicial Matters during the Late Tang and Early Song—From the Perspective of the Dunhuang Manuscripts]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌学辑刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 1 (2013): 47–62.

²² My dates for Wuzhen differ from those given in the otherwise authoritative work on Wuzhen by Chen Tsu-lung, *La vie et les œuvres de Wou-tchen (816–895)* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1966). The reason is that I follow the information in the DXDC, which reflects a more thorough analysis of the relevant documents.

²³ Despite the seemingly great importance that Hongbian played in the history of Buddhism in Dunhuang during the 9th century, there are no lengthy studies about his life. The most detailed attempt is Peng Jianbing 彭建兵, "Guiyijun shouren Hexi du sengtong Wu Hongbian shengping shiji shuping 归义军首任河西都僧统吴洪辨生平事迹述评 [A Review of the Life Story of Wu Hongbian, the First Saṃgha Overseer of the Hexi Region under the Guiyijun]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 2 (2005): 157–163. See also Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 280–283. There are various other attempts to throw light on the master's life and times, including Han Chunping 韩春平, "Guanyu zangjing dong wei Hongbian yingtang (ying ku) de yidian renshi 关于藏经洞为洪辨影堂 (影窟) 的一点认识 [A Few Considerations Concerning the Scriptural Depository Cave as Hongbian's Portrait Hall (Portrait Cave)]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* [Journal of Dunhuang



referred to as the transmitter of the teachings (Chin. *jiaoshou heshang* 教授和尚) in the related documents (P. 3720a, S. 77). However, the actual office of district *saṃgha* overseer of Hexi was only formally established in 857, which means that Hongbian only served in this prestigious position for five years before his death (S. 1947V^o). As the first *saṃgha* overseer in Dunhuang under the Guiyijun, Hongbian is an interesting case. Since he was already a prominent clerical leader while Shazhou was under Tibetan dominion, his reputation apparently did not suffer after Dunhuang reverted to Chinese control under the Guiyijun. On the contrary, his popularity and the respect he commanded among the local Buddhists continued unabated after the change in power took place.

Hongbian was originally a student of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (T. 475.14) and probably other Mahāyāna scriptures as well. Given that *Yogācāra* Buddhism was in vogue in Dunhuang during the first half of the 9th century, he is sure to have also been familiar with the *Yogācāryabhūmiśāstra* (T. 1579.30). Hongbian's stele inscription mentions that he was a lecturer and participated in translation activities (possibly under the guidance of Facheng?). It also states that he worked ceaselessly to spread Buddhism and that he was involved in the creation of new caves throughout his life. Hongbian's pious activities while Dunhuang was under Tibetan rule are seen in a short prayer text that he ostensibly authored (S. 779V^o). It invokes a deity referred to as the Divine

Studies] 4 (2007): 266–274; and Sha Wutian 沙武田 and Liang Hong 梁红, “Dunhuang shiku Guiyijun shouren du sengtong Hongbian gongyang xiang kao—Jian lun zhonggu fojiao sengren shenghuo zhong de suishi xianxiang 敦煌石窟归义军首任都僧统洪辩供养像考—兼论中古佛教僧人生活中的随侍现象 [An Investigation of the Funerary Image of the Officially Appointed Leader, the District Saṃgha Overseer Hongbian: Including a Discussion of the Phenomena of Servants in the Lives of Medieval Buddhist Monks],” *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌学辑刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 2 (2016): 2–12. However, Sha Wutian and Liang Hong's paper has more to do with the interpretation of Hongbian's funerary portrait and the pair of attendants in it, than with Hongbian *per se*. It is still worth consulting, as it does deal with the socio-religious context in which he laboured. A truly bad attempt at dealing with Hongbian is found in Li Shangquan 李尚全, “Hongbian chanshi xingji kao 洪辩禅师行迹考 [Concerning the Activities of Chan Master Hongbian],” *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社会科学战线 [Front of Social Sciences] 3 (2010): 88–93. While this paper pretends to throw light on the life of Hongbian, it is both inept and superficial, and as such, betrays the author's general lack of understanding of Chinese religion, Buddhism in particular.

Mother (神母)²⁴ and Vaiśravaṇa, the Heavenly King of the North,²⁵ in accordance with the relevant chapter in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra* (T. 665.16), which is referred to in the prayer text as *Jinguangming jing lüe* 金光明經略 [Abbreviated Form of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*]. The prayer incorporates a lengthy excerpt from the *sūtra*. At the end of this prayer text, there is a short colophon that states, “*Da Fan Shazhou shimen jiaoshou heshang Hongbian xiu gongde* 大蕃沙州釋門教授和尚洪晉修功德 [Meritorious Work Undertaken by the Buddhist Transmitter of the Teachings, the Venerable Hongbian of Shazhou under the Great Tibetan Empire]” (T. 2862.85: 1323a, S. 779V^o).

As a learned monk, Hongbian composed other occasional pieces of writing, such as a eulogy for the funerary portrait of another important monk, the Ācārya Li (fl. first half of 9th c., 李闍梨). The piece in question is the *Dunhuang du jiaoshou, jianshe sanxue fazhu, Longxi Li jiaoshou sheli xiezhen zan* 燉煌都教授, 兼攝三學法主, 隴西李教授闍梨寫真讚 [Eulogy Written for the Funerary Portrait of the District Transmitter of the Buddhist Teaching, Concurrently Dharma Master of the Three Studies, the Ācārya Li, Transmitter of the Buddhist Teaching from Longxi] (P. 4660 (36). Given that the title district transmitter of the Buddhist teaching (Chin. *du jiaoshou* 都教授) was used during the Tibetan rule of Shazhou, the piece in question was written before the establishment of Guiyijun rule.

Hongbian was also an adept of meditation, as indicated in his funerary portrait in Cave 17, which was created as his mausoleum, replete with an effigy of the master and a stele with his memorial inscription.²⁶ Moreover, in his capacity as *saṃgha overseer*, Hongbian also participated in the creation of new caves and the repair of old ones. An additional image depicting Hongbian and one of his disciples, the celebrated literati-monk

²⁴ Could this possibly be a Tibetan tutelary deity such as dPal ldan lha mo?

²⁵ For a study of this important cult in Dunhuang, see Dang Yanni 党燕妮, “Pishamen tianwang xinyang zai Dunhuang de liuchuan 毗沙门天王信仰在敦煌的流传 [The Spread of the Cult of the Heavenly King Vaiśravaṇa in Dunhuang],” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 3 (2005): 99–104.

²⁶ See Sha and Liang, “Dunhuang shiku Guiyijun shouren du sengtong Hongbian gongyang xiangkao: Jianlun zhonggu fojiao sengren shenghuo zhong de sui shi xianxiang): 69–89. P. 4070 contains an image of an important monk seated in meditation with a similar backdrop to the one in the Hongbian painting. It appears to be a representation of the foreign monk Sengqie (628–710, 僧伽), whose cult became important during the Northern Song. For a detailed description of the coloured drawing, see *Catalogue des Manuscrits Chinois de Touen-Houang*, vol. 5, 60–61.



Wuzhen (see below), was recently identified among the donor portraits in Cave 156.²⁷ Cave 16 is also associated with Hongbian. His memorial stele records that he had the cave made as a Hall for the Seven Buddhas (Chin. Qifo tang 七佛堂), that is, the seven buddhas of the past (P. 4640 (5)). The cave also features an inscription of the *Pariṇāmacakrasūtra* (T. 998.19), centering on the transference of merit (Chin. *huixiang* 迴向). It is now only partly legible (DMGT: 141–143).

A glimpse of Hongbian's role as head of the Buddhist *saṃgha* prior to his formal appointment as *saṃgha overseer* is found in a manuscript from the period of Tibetan rule, which features a formal petition from the monks of the Jinguangming Temple (Chin. Jinguangming si 金光明寺),²⁸ titled the *Shazhou Hexi sengren shang du sengtong zhuang* 沙州河西僧人上都僧統狀 [Petition from Shazhou's Monks and Nuns to the District Saṃgha Overseer] (P. 3730 (5)). This document concerns Hongbian's administrative work and shows his approval of the elevation of the monk Huaiji (fl. first half of the 9th c., 淮濟) to the position of rector (Chin. *shangzuo* 上座) of the temple in question.

By the time Hongbian passed away in 862, he had become one of the most revered Buddhist clerics in Dunhuang and left behind scores of important disciples, including several monks of note. After his cremation, his ashes were gathered and placed inside a portrait effigy made of clay, which was in turn placed in a special chamber, the now-famous Cave 17, the 'Library Cave', set in the right-hand side of the corridor leading to Cave 16. Hongbian's mausoleum was also furnished with a stele with a somewhat ostentatious inscription commemorating his life, the *Wu sengtong bei* 吳僧統碑 [Stele for Saṃgha Overseer Wu] (P. 4660 (5)). The text was written by the local literati Dou Liangji (fl. 9th c., 竇良驥) in 869, seven years after Hongbian's demise.²⁹ In this inscription, he is referred to as great national and royal preceptor (Chin. *daguo wangshi* 大國王師), a title that underscores the great reverence that surrounded him. Later, Cave 16 became known as the merit cave of venerable Wu (Chin.

²⁷ Cf. the lengthy exposition in Sha and Liang, "Dunhuang shiku Guiyijun shouren du sengtong Hongbian gongyang xiang kao," 69–89. For a study of this cave and its special mode of construction, see Xu, "Lun Zhang Yichao gongde ku de ta ku zuhe," 101–130. It discusses the wall paintings and their placement in this important cave in considerable detail.

²⁸ For this temple, see Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang."

²⁹ See also the copy of the text in P. 2913 (2).

Wu heshang gongde ku 吳和尚功德窟), in recognition of Hongbian's role in its creation as a 'family cave'.

4.2. *Samgha Overseer Zhai Farong*

Hongbian's successor as *samgha* overseer of Hexi was the monk Farong (d. 869, 法榮).³⁰ He hailed from the Zhai (翟) clan, one of the important clans in Dunhuang, the members of which were all devout Buddhists, and many of whom played important roles in the local development of the religion. Farong resided in the Longxing Temple (龍興寺) from 831 onwards. He was a meditation monk, as indicated in the eulogy written for his funerary portrait, the *Qian Hexi du sengtong gu Zhai heshang zhenzan* 前河西都僧統故翟和尚真讚 [Eulogy for the Portrait of the Former District *Samgha* Overseer of Hexi, the Deceased Venerable Zhai] (P. 4660). This interesting eulogy gives evidence of Farong's career as a monastic official and mentions his various formal appointments, first as *samgha* rector, then as district transmitter of the Buddhist teaching, then district *samgha* recorder under Zhang Yichao, before eventually becoming *samgha* overseer in 862 (see Appendix II).

As a member of the Zhai clan, Farong was a leading force in repairing the family's cave (Cave 85), the events of which are recorded in Wuzhen's *Zhai jia bei* 翟家碑 [Inscription for the Zhai Family], which is the text of the stele that was placed inside the cave (P. 4640 (4), BD 冬 BD 2059).³¹

Apart from his role as the representative of local Buddhism as a whole, Farong was a practitioner of Chan Buddhism (Chin. *chanzong* 禪宗), not just of Chan meditation, but also actually adhering to its institutional expression. There are a number of indications of this in the eulogy mentioned above. First, it references Southern (Chin. Nanchan 南禪) and Northern Chan (Chin. Beichan 北禪), the Chan schools originating with Huineng (638–713, 慧能) and Shenxiu (ca. 606–706, 神秀), respectively.³² The text refers to them in poetic form as “Southern Neng

³⁰ See Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 283; *Dunhuang sui jin*, 15.

³¹ For a useful attempt at accounting for Farong's spiritual side, see Chen Juxia 陈菊霞, “Shi xi Zhai Farong de fojiao xinyang 试析翟法荣的佛教信仰 [An Analysis of the Buddhist Faith of Zhai Farong],” *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌学辑刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 2 (2012): 102–110.

³² For a lengthy study on Huineng, see John Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch: Hagiography and Biography in Early Ch'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For Shenxiu, see John McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986), 44–56.



entered the [abbot's] room, while the Northern Wise One ascended the hall" (Chin. *Nan Neng ru shi, Bei Zhi sheng tang* 南能入室, 北知升堂). It further states that Farong cultivated discipline, meditation, and wisdom (Skt. *śīla, dhyāna, prajñā*), the tripod of Buddhist practice, and also the concept of the transmission of the lamp (Chin. *chuandeng* 傳燈), a direct reference to the historical formulation of lineages in the Chan tradition.³³ The fact that the eulogy appears to give equal respect to both of these Chan masters indicates that both of the Chan traditions they represent were practiced locally, perhaps even together.³⁴ At the time of Farong, this would have reflected the influence of the Chan monk Moheyan (fl. mid to late 8th c., 摩訶衍), who promoted Chan Buddhism in Dunhuang and Tibet during the 8th century and held transmissions from both Northern and Southern Chan.³⁵

³³ For a study of the concept of lineage and transmission in Chan Buddhism of the Northern Song, see Griffith T. Foulk, "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) 220–294. Despite all of the more or less good arguments against it, the concept of lineage and transmission were clearly already formulated quite early in the history of the Chan tradition, actually during the mid to second half of the Tang, which is also clear when dealing with the related epigraphical Korean sources from the period of the Unified Silla (新羅, 668–935). See, e.g., Henrik H. Sørensen, "Buddhist Pilgrimage and Spiritual Identity: Korean Sōn Monks Journeyming to Tang China in Search of the Dharma," in *Buddhist Encounters and Identities Across East Asia*, ed. Ann Heirman, Carmen Meinert, and Christoph Anderl (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 283–300.

³⁴ See Sørensen, "The Life and Times of Daozhen."

³⁵ McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, 71–72. For a more extended discussion of Moheyan's Chan in Tibet, see the comprehensive study by Luis O. Gómez, "The Direct and the Gradual Approaches of Zen Master Mahāyāna: Fragments of the Teachings of Mo-ho-yen," in *Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen*, ed. Robert M. Gimello and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), 59–168. On the type of Chan that found its way into Tibet, see Jeffrey Broughton, "Early Ch'an Schools in Tibet," in *Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen*, ed. Robert M. Gimello and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), 1–58; Carmen Meinert, "Legend of *Cig car ba* Criticism in Tibet: A List of Six *Cig car ba* Titles in the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* of Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer (12th century)," in *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis. Studies in its Formative Period 900–1400*, ed. Ronald Davidson and Christian Wedemeyer (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 31–54; Carmen Meinert, "The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought: Reflections on the Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts IOL Tib J 689-1 and PT 699," in *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Brandon Dotson (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), 239–301. See also Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen: Discovering a Lost Tradition* (Boston, London: Snow Lion, 2015). This is a popular account of Chan in Tibet and in Tibetan writings from Dunhuang.

4.3. *Samgha Overseer Wuzhen*

In addition to Hongbian, his disciple Wuzhen is, without doubt, one of the most famous and well-studied *samgha* overseers in Dunhuang.³⁶ There are many reasons for this, but most importantly, he had a long, active life. He was a prolific writer, especially of poetry and literary compositions, including texts for stele inscriptions. Moreover, he was a Buddhist celebrity beyond the Kingdom of Dunhuang itself.³⁷

In addition to his merits as a literati and intellectual, Wuzhen is perhaps best known for his role as special envoy. In 851, he was sent by Zhang Yichao to the imperial court in Chang'an to petition Emperor Xuanzong (r. 847–859, 宣宗) to recognise Zhang as the formal governor of Dunhuang.³⁸ In the course of his sojourn in Chang'an, Wuzhen became a Buddhist celebrity, not least for his literary accomplishments, in particular, for his poems. In the capacity of literati, Wuzhen authored numerous stele inscriptions, funerary epitaphs, and eulogies for funerary portraits.

Wuzhen became *samgha* overseer upon Farong's death in 869 or 870, and held the post until his own passing a quarter of a century later in 895, thus becoming the longest-serving monk in this position in the history of the Guiyijun. One collection of his Buddhist verses refers to him as the district *samgha* overseer of Hexi (Chin. *Hexi du sengtong* 河西都僧統) and states that he was more than seventy years old at the time the

³⁶ See Chen, *La vie et les œuvres de Wou-tchen (816–895)*. Although important and informative, this classic study tends to stress the master's literary side at the expense of his religious life. For a short biographical note, see also DXDC, 355a.

³⁷ For some reason, Rong Xinjiang completely neglects Wuzhen's role as *samgha* overseer and only includes him in the list of the monks serving in this office. Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 292. A more useful study in this regard is Qi Chenjun 齐陈骏 and Han Qin 寒沁, "Hexi du sengtong Tang Wuzhen zuopin he jian zai wenxian xi nian 河西都僧统唐悟真作品和见载文献系年 [[District] *Samgha* Overseer of Hexi, the Tang Monk Wuzhen's Oeuvre and a Chronological List of Relevant Manuscripts]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌学辑刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 2 (1993): 5–15.

³⁸ For an interesting and detailed essay on Wuzhen's experiences while visiting Chang'an (長安, modern Xi'an 西安) in 851, shortly after the Huichang suppression of Buddhism ended, see Yang Baoyu 杨宝玉 and Wu Liyu 吴丽嫫, "Dazhong wu nian Dunhuang gaoseng Wuzhen de fengshi ru zou ji qi dui Chang'an fosi de xunli 大中五年敦煌高僧悟真的奉使入奏及其对长安佛寺的巡礼 [In the 5th Year of Dazhong, the Important Monk and Emissary from Dunhuang, Wuzhen who Petitioned the Throne and Toured the Temples of Chang'an]," accessed October 14, 2019. <http://www.fjdh.cn/wumin/2009/11/08261593662.html>.



document was written, which would have been around 881 or 882 (S. 930 (3), P. 3821, P. 2847).

At the time of his death, Wuzhen was easily Dunhuang's most important Buddhist leader, which is borne out in the title of his funerary eulogy, the *Hexi du sengtong jingcheng neiwai lintan gong feng dade jian chanyang sanjiao da fashi cizi shamen Wuzhen miaozhen zan bing xu* 河西都僧統京城內外臨壇供奉大德兼闡揚三教，大法師，賜紫，沙門悟真邈真讚并序 [Eulogy for the Funerary Portrait of the District Samgha Overseer of Hexi, the Capital City's Inner and Outer Ordination Platforms, Great Worthy in Waiting, Conjointly Preacher of the Three-fold Teaching, Great Dharma Master, Wearer of the Purple Robe, the Monk Wuzhen, with Preface] (BD 6437V°).

Even though Wuzhen does not stand out as a particularly pious Buddhist, nor does he leave an impression of a person with special religious acumen, his importance as a Buddhist leader and literati should not be underestimated. He was the author of an unusually large amount of historical writings, which provide knowledge about his important, fellow Buddhists derives. Hence, without Wuzhen's writings, our understanding of Buddhist agents in Dunhuang during the 9th century, especially its later half, would be much poorer.³⁹

4.4. Samgha Overseer Kang Xianzhao

Xianzhao (d. 904, 賢照)⁴⁰ of the Kang (康) clan succeeded Wuzhen as district *samgha* overseer upon the latter's death in 895 (P. 3556). He was ordained in the local Dayun Temple (大雲寺) (S. 2614) and quickly rose in the ranks of monastic officials. Xianzhao served in this post under the last Zhang clan ruler of the Guiyijun, Zhang Chengfeng (r. 894–910, 張承奉). Upon the collapse of the Tang Dynasty in 907, Zhang Chengfeng proclaimed himself King of Dunhuang, which in turn was renamed Kingdom of Jinshan of the Western Han (910–914, 西漢金山國).⁴¹

³⁹ DXDC, 355a. See also Li Fuhua 李富华 and Jiang Deshi 姜德治, *Dunhuang renwu zhi* 敦煌人物志 [A Record of Historical Figures in Dunhuang], (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 2009).

⁴⁰ According to Rong Xinjiang and those who follow his work, Xianzhao passed away in 902. Cf. Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 292. The same date is given in the DXDC, 355b. However, that is clearly incorrect, as Shandong Museum 6944V° bears Xianzhao's signature and dates from 904. More will be said about this in what follows.

⁴¹ See Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 91–95.

In one important decree from his period as *saṃgha* overseer, the temples in Dunhuang are instructed to uphold the regulations and maintain their duties during the period of the summer retreat (S. 1604). The decree reads:

Respectfully, the secretariat [(Chin. *shangshu* 尚書)] takes disciplinary action [(Chin. *chufen* 處分)]: Hence, it is ordered that all temples are to make prostrations and repentance without stopping, and every night, they must recite one roll of the *Buddhanāmassūtra*.⁴² During the summer [retreat], monks and nuns are, moreover, ordered to show extra diligence in going about their affairs [(Chin. *shiyè* 事業)], such as being remiss, and cease sloppiness, [since these] have gradually deteriorated. It is, therefore, ordered by the commissioner that those on duty be rebuked and that monks and [other] disciples who deplete [the common things] should all be shamed. All of the great family [(Chin. *dajia* 大家)]⁴³ know this in their hearts. [Hence], from now on and after, it is forbidden to do this again. If there are those who disobey, they must first be given a penalty in order to make them obey the rules. [If they infringe on them] again, I will discipline them in person [(Chin. *benshen* 本身)], one by one. Every night they must burn one lamp [only] in accordance with the regulations. [Furthermore], every night monks and nuns are not allowed to exceed this [injunction] with as much as one person.

Decree issued on the 28th day of the fourth month in the second year of the Tianfu [(天復)] [reign period (902)] by the District Saṃgha Overseer Xianzhao.⁴⁴

Again, in this case we see how the role of a *saṃgha* overseer was to make certain that the members of the local Buddhist community adhere to a life of spiritual pursuits. We are not privy to the exact reason for Xianzhao's decree, but it appears that monastic regulations had become lax during this period, and that the situation required a serious shake-up. It is also clear that one of the *saṃgha* overseer's functions was to harness the temples, as in the above case, and have their clerics perform religious services on

⁴² This scripture for reciting the names of many buddhas enjoyed considerable popularity in Dunhuang during the 10th century, as a way of creating religious merit. Illuminated copies of this *sūtra* also exist (OA 1919,0101,0.74). Roderick Whitfield and Ann Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route* (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), 95, pl. 75.

⁴³ I.e. the Buddhist *saṃgha*.

⁴⁴ S. 1604: 都僧統帖諸僧尼寺綱管徒眾等。奉尚書處分，令諸寺禮懺不絕，每夜禮大佛名經壹卷，僧尼夏中則令勤加事業。懈怠慢爛，故令使主嗔責，僧徒盡皆受恥。大家總有心識，從今已後不得取次。若有故違，先罰所由綱管，後科本身，一一點檢，每夜燃燈壹盞，準式，僧尼每夜巡檢，判官若有怠慢公事，亦招科罰。其帖仰諸寺畫時分付，不得違時者。天復二年四月廿八日帖。都僧統賢照。



behalf of the current ruler. At the time of this decree, the ruler of Dunhuang, Zhang Chengfeng was in an uneasy political situation, threatened from both internal detractors and outside enemies, the Ganzhou Uyghurs, who at that time were increasingly hostile.

An official document dating from 904 (Shandong Museum 6944V^o) was forwarded to Zhang Chengfeng by Xianzhao and the District Saṃgha Recorder Tanguang (fl. late 9th–early 10th c., 談廣)⁴⁵ of the Jingtū Temple (淨土寺).⁴⁶ The date of this document is the *jiazi* (甲子) year in the Tianfu reign period of the Tang, corresponding to 904. This reign ended in the middle of the year and was followed by the first year of the succeeding Tianyou reign period (天佑, 904–906), with which the Tang came to a final close. This document shows that Xianzhao was still alive at that time and had certainly not passed away in 902, as Rong Xinjiang argues.

4.5. Saṃgha Overseer Fan Fugao

The next *saṃgha* overseer in Hexi was Fugao (d. 917, 福高), a monk who hailed from the Fan (汜) clan⁴⁷ (S. 1604, P. 3556 (1)). The bulk of information on Fugao's life derives from the funerary eulogy accompanying his funerary portrait, the *Du sengtong Fan Fugao heshang miaozen zan bing xu* 都僧統汜福高和尚邈真贊并序 [Eulogy for the Funerary Portrait, with Preface, of the District Saṃgha Overseer, the Venerable Fan Fugao] (P. 3556).⁴⁸ According to this text, the master was a child prodigy (in Buddhist terms). At an early age, he was evidently already engaged in the study of Buddhism, and at ten, he chanted *vidyas* or *dhāraṇīs* (Chin. *song ming* 誦明). He joined the *saṃgha* at the Dayun Temple, one of Dunhuang's larger Buddhist institutions.⁴⁹ After his full ordination, he engaged in the study of Buddhist philosophy and read works of both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra Buddhism. The eulogy also states that he studied the *Avatamsakasūtra* (T. 279.10) and that he was an adept of meditation. The text says that 'he remained in *samādhi* with a pure mind' (Chin. *chengxin zai ding* 澄心在定), and refers to him as having 'refined

⁴⁵ He also wrote commentaries on Buddhist works, in particular the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*. Several manuscripts with his commentaries still survive. See P. 2191V^o, P. 2595V^o (1), P. 2222A–E.

⁴⁶ For this temple, see Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang."

⁴⁷ For this monk, see Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 283–285. A short biographical note is in DXDC, 357a.

⁴⁸ The eulogy is discussed at some length in Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 284–285.

⁴⁹ For this temple, see Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang."

his thoughts through the cultivation of contemplation' (Chin. *lianyi xiu chan* 練意修禪).⁵⁰ Like many of the important clerics in Dunhuang during the late medieval period, Fugao was an eclectic, well-rounded practitioner of Buddhism.

In the 3rd year of the Qianning (乾寧三年) reign period of the Tang (896), Fugao was appointed to the position of district *samgha* recorder, an important rank in the Buddhist bureaucracy of Dunhuang. At the time when Zhang Chengfeng established the Jinshan State of the Western Han, Fugao proved a loyal subject, although he sought to distance himself from worldly affairs, that is, to avoid meddling in power politics. Even so, he was placed in the elevated role of state preceptor (Chin. *guoshi* 國師), the first time this title was used in Dunhuang, although it eventually disappeared after the Cao clan came into power. In fact, Fugao and his disciple and successor Fayan (d. 926 法嚴) received their formal titles from the rulers of the Later Liang Dynasty (907–922, 後梁) and the Later Tang Dynasty (923–935, 後唐) respectively (P. 3556 (1b) and P. 3556 (2)).⁵¹ The eulogy states that the master served as *samgha* overseer for 15 years, which means that he was appointed to the post in 902, the year his predecessor Xianzhao died, and occupied the post until he himself passed away in 917.

When Fugao passed away, he was cremated in the Buddhist fashion, and his eulogy mentions—in rather typical fashion for literature of this kind—that when his bones were sifted through for body relics (Skt. *śarīra*) after the cremation (Chin. *fengu chabi* 分骨荼毘), heavenly flowers rained on the city, among other miracles. The fact that Fugao continued to serve as *samgha* overseer after the fall of Zhang Chengfeng's short-lived state and continued to do so under the new Guiyijun rule of the Cao clan, indicates that he was an astute and powerful person, whose integrity allowed him to survive significant political changes.

⁵⁰ This should not be taken to mean that Fugao was a follower of Chan Buddhism in any sectarian sense, but simply that he cultivated meditation as part of his engagement with Buddhism. As stated above, Hongbian, the first *samgha* overseer under the Guiyijun, was also a meditator, even though his interests apparently lay with the *Yogācāryabhūmiśāstra*. See also the discussion in Henrik H. Sørensen, "On Meditation Caves and Cave-dwelling Ascetics in Dunhuang, 9th to 13th Centuries," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.1 (2020).

⁵¹ These events are sure to have lent further prestige to the Guiyijun regime. For more on these monks, see Li Fuhua and Jiang Deshi, *Dunhuang renwu zhi*, 115–241.



4.6. *Samgha Overseer Fayan*

The successor of Fugao was the monk Fayan⁵² of the Chen (陳) clan. His name appears in two documents (P. 3556 (a), S. 474V^o), the latter of these is a decree from 918, which concerns his formal appointment as *samgha* overseer. His merits and career are outlined in the *Du sengtong Chen Fayan heshang miaozhen zan bing xu* 都僧統陳法嚴和尚邈真贊并序 [Eulogy for the Funerary Portrait, with Preface, for the District *samgha* Overseer, the Venerable Fayan of the Chen Clan] (P. 3556 (a)). His family originally came from Luoyang (洛陽), the eastern Tang capital. Fayan became a monk at the Lingtu Temple (靈圖寺),⁵³ another of Dunhuang's important temples, which was situated at the Mogao Caves. Under the Jinshan Kingdom, he was appointed *samgha* recorder, and in that capacity, he wrote a record of merit, the *Dunhuang xiang xinshi xianzhe Chang'an san fuzi jingzao fo tang gongde ji* 敦煌鄉信士賢者張安三父子敬造佛堂功德記 [Record of Virtue of the Devoted and Worthy Zhang Ansan, Father and Son from Dunhuang District, who Made a Buddha Hall] in 909 (S. 4474R^o). Fayan's name also appears on a bill for the consignment of wheat.

After the collapse of the Jinshan Kingdom and the rise of Cao Yijin (r. 914–935, 曹議金), Fayan was made *samgha* overseer in 917. He held the position until his death in 926. His funerary eulogy, the *Guiyijun yingguan neiwai du sengtong chong fofa zhu Chen heshang Fayan miaozhen zan bing xu* 歸義軍應管內外都僧統充佛法主陳和尚法嚴邈真贊并序 [Eulogy for the Funerary Portrait of the District *samgha* Overseer in Charge of Regulating the Inner and Outer Offices under the Guiyijun, Authorised Leader of the Buddha's Teaching, Venerable Chen Fayan, with Preface] was compiled by Du Taichu (fl. late 9th to first quarter of 10th c., 杜太初),⁵⁴ a local literati, who served under Cao Yijin (P. 3556).

By way of distilling the hyperbole of this eulogy we may learn that Fayan studied the Chinese Classics in his youth, but at a certain age he grew weary of the world, realising that it was quite illusory. The eulogy uses the famous metaphor of bubbles on water in the final verse from the *Vajracchedikā* (T. 235.8, 752b) to underscore the master's disillusionment with *samsara*. Later on in his career, Fayan got involved with Yogācāra Buddhism, a tradition which was especially strong during the early period

⁵² For more on this monk, see Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 284–285.

⁵³ For this temple, see Sørensen, “The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang.”

⁵⁴ For additional biographical information, see DXDC, 357b.

of the Guiyijun reign. As such, he followed in the footsteps of his famous Buddhist predecessors, Facheng and Hongbian. We also learn that he was a devotee of Maitreya through a reference in the eulogy to the Nāgapuṣpa under which the Future Buddha is supposed to preach the *dharma* in the future. Fayan became *saṃgha* overseer under the self-titled White Emperor of the Jinshan Kingdom (Chin. *Jinshan baidi* 金山白帝), Zhang Chengfeng (r. 894–910, 張承奉), and is referred to in the eulogy—somewhat preposterously—as the kingdom’s national preceptor (Chin. *guoshi* 國師). Furthermore we learn that Fayan’s prestige was such that he had free access to the royal palace in Dunhuang.

4.7. *Saṃgha Overseer Haiyan*

Yin Haiyan (d. 933, 陰海晏), the next *saṃgha* overseer, received his appointment at a critical time in the Guiyijun regime’s history. This was a period of transition following the collapse of formal Tang authority in the Hexi Corridor (Chin. Hexi zoulang 河西走廊) and the arrival and encroachment of the Ganzhou Uyghurs, who had settled to the east of Dunhuang at the close of the 9th century. Most importantly, this period saw the change in Guiyijun leadership from the Zhang clan to that of the Cao.

Haiyan entered the Buddhist *saṃgha* in the Qianyuan Temple (乾元寺), one of the smaller institutions among Dunhuang’s temples.⁵⁵ We do not have much information on his early life and Buddhist training. Given that his predecessor Fayan passed away in 926, it is likely that Haiyan became *saṃgha* overseer later in that year or possibly in 927. The following year in 928, he organised a large-scale ritual event involving several of Dunhuang’s important temples. This event is recorded in the *Tiancheng san nian du sengtong Haiyan zhengqiu zhuangyan daochang shi wu tie* 天成三年都僧統海晏徵求莊嚴道場什物帖 [Document from the 3rd year of Tiancheng [of the Later Tang] by the District Saṃgha Overseer Haiyan Petitioning to Have Various Things for Setting Up a Ritual Space], in which Haiyan enumerates the materials he needs for the ritual to be performed (S. 2575).

A formal letter dating to the following year (929) is addressed to Haiyan from the monastic officer (Chin. *daochang si* 道場司),⁵⁶ the Rector

⁵⁵ For a discussion of this temple, see Sørensen, “The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang.”

⁵⁶ This title is not commonly seen in the Dunhuang manuscripts. It is also not a type of designation that appears in Chinese Buddhist sources.



Huiyun (fl. first half of 10th c., 惠雲), who represented the low-ranking nuns of the Puguang Temple (普光寺). This shows that Haiyan still occupied the post of *saṃgha* overseer at that time (S. 2575V° (5)).

Haiyan also participated in pious work at the Mogao Caves, as did several of his predecessors. One surviving manuscript features his commemorative text about such an occasion. It states that “on the 24th day in the first year of the Changxing reign period [of the Later Tang,] [(930)] a *guisi* year,⁵⁷ the district *saṃgha* overseer of Hexi proceeded to Dangquan [(宕泉)],⁵⁸ a place of numinous renown, for the making of a niche,⁵⁹ and [on this occasion,] prepared a text for the upper beam⁶⁰.⁷⁶¹ The text of the inscription reads:

The time of the present root cause is an auspicious day,
[and] the upper beam gracefully matches it in every way;
The fine grandees of the five districts [of Dunhuang],
as well as all the prefecture’s gentlemen and women, crowd together,
[...]⁶² rice cakes on a thousand dishes [brought by] ten thousand porters,
at once gather like clouds at Dangquan,⁶³
[which] once exhausted revert to empty space [and so] will the disorder
disperse, and next, there will be the golden cymbals and silver cash.
We pray to all our buddhas of the ten directions,
that our relatives in the future will [be reborn] sitting erect [on]⁶⁴ golden
lotuses;
We pray that our venerable master will be greatly blessed,
and that his blessings will extend as far as the ocean.
May this assist our cultivation in this generation,
so that we may behold the world as a field of blessings;
[whereby] all six relations of the inner and outer [lineages],
will forever be like the immortals in their jade pavilions,
that the ten thousand people of Dunhuang will enjoy great prosperity,
and that the five grains will be in abundance and ripen along the Dragon
Stream.

⁵⁷ The first year of the Changxing reign period is not a *guisi* year, but a *gengyin* year (庚寅歲). We must, therefore, conclude that the copyist made a mistake.

⁵⁸ This is an old name that was used for a section of the Mogao Caves. DXDC, 321a.

⁵⁹ The text reads *kan* (龕), however, this may actually indicate a cave.

⁶⁰ I suppose the ‘upper beam’ refers to the lintel above the entrance to the building that was in front of the cave in question.

⁶¹ This manuscript is written in a decidedly bad hand and is clearly the work of a copyist without calligraphic skills (P. 3302V° (2)). See Appendix III.

⁶² One character is missing.

⁶³ This is a section of the cliff at the Mogao Caves.

⁶⁴ One character is missing.

May there not be decline and much talk about ill luck,
but instead we long for the orioles' seasonal migration.
I personally hope that this lofty beam may stay lofty and noble for a
thousand, and yet ten thousand years after.⁶⁵

There is relatively little in this commemorative text that concerns Buddhism directly. There is not even any mention of the niche in question. However, what the text leaves out in terms of Buddhist references, it makes up for in its surprisingly vivid reference to the commotion and pious display by the participants in the event. Although it is not a report on the event *per se*, it provides enough information to understand that the inaugurations of new caves or the repair of old ones were occasions for the population of Dunhuang, high and low, to participate in the associated making of offerings, and thereby also partake in the creation of merit. Moreover, while we do not know whether the *saṃgha* overseers were always present at these events, it is certain that when they did, their presence lent an extra air of sanctity and spirituality to these celebrations.

In 931, Haiyan prepared a text of vows in connection with a ritual for the bestowal of the Buddhist precepts (S. 6417 (18)). During the same year, the nuns of the Puguang Temple forwarded a petition to Haiyan, who answered it later in the year (S. 6463 (2a)).

Haiyan passed away two years later in 933, but in contrast to many monks in Dunhuang at that time, after his death, he was buried in a tomb in accordance with secular practices. His tomb was furnished with a formal stele inscription, the *Hexi du sengtong Yin Haiyan muzhi ming bing xu* 河西都僧統陰海晏墓誌銘并序 [The Tomb Inscription, with Preface, of the District Saṃgha Overseer of Hexi, Yin Haiyan], the text of which still survives among the Dunhuang manuscripts (P. 3720 (5)). According to this eulogy the master was a child prodigy, who showed great promise from early on. The text states that, “[...] his virtues piled up to form mountain, he mastered the three teachings,⁶⁶ exhausting them fully, he cultivated the four contemplations,⁶⁷ and [obtained] fixed quiescence [(i.e. one-pointed meditative absorption (Skt. *samādhi*)). His upholding of the

⁶⁵ Cf. *Changxing yuan nian Hexi dusengtong yi Dangquan jiankan yi suo shang liang wen* 長興元年河西都僧統依宕泉建龕一所上樑文 [In the First Year of Changxing the District Saṃgha Overseer of Hexi Went to Dangquan to Create a Niche and Wrote the Text [of Dedication] for the Upper Beam] (P. 3302V^o (2)). See Appendix III below.

⁶⁶ The three teachings are precepts, meditation and wisdom (Skt. *śīla, dhyāna and prajñā*).

⁶⁷ This refers to the four *dhyānas* (Chin. *sichan* 四禪).



precepts was like a wall [...].⁶⁸ This passage clearly reveals that Haiyan was a dedicated meditator, although we do not learn the specifics of the practices he engaged in. Finally, we are informed that his remains were buried, not in a tomb, but in a funerary *stūpa*, something which underscores the esteem in which he was held.⁶⁹

Thus, Haiyun was, evidently, a rather important and influential *saṃgha* overseer, who—in addition to his administrative duties—accomplished quite a bit for Dunhuang’s Buddhism during his years in office. His achievements include both the creation of a personal niche at the Mogao Caves and participation in at least one larger, collective enterprise.

4.8. *Saṃgha Overseer Wang*

Another of the less remarkable *saṃgha* overseers in Dunhuang was *Saṃgha Overseer Wang* (d. 935, 王僧統),⁷⁰ whose ordination name is not known. He only served in this post for two years, from 933 to his death in 935. One of the main reasons his name survives is because he had Cave 143 excavated as a family shrine and furnished it with a wooden entrance building (DMGT, 64).⁷¹ On that occasion, he was memorialised by one of his disciples, who authored the inscription, which was written on the beam of the ante building (P. 3302).⁷² He is briefly mentioned in a document dating from 936 that involves another monk official Fuji (d.u., 福集) (P. 2638).⁷³

⁶⁸ P. 3720: [...] 德重華山。證三教而窮通，修四禪而凝寂。戒同卞壁 [...].

⁶⁹ P. 3720 (5): 和尚不期修短，頓虧訓示之儀；躡躅苦庭，攀號迨及。

⁷⁰ For further information, see Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 287.

⁷¹ See Ma De 马德, “Du sengtong zhi jiaku ji qi yingjian 都僧统之家窟及其营建 [The District *Saṃgha Overseers’ Family Caves and Their Construction*],” *Dunhuang yanjiu 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research]* 4 (1989): 54–58.

⁷² See Ji Xuejuan 纪雪娟, “Ru shi rongshe shiye xia de Song seng Shangliang wen shuxie 儒释融摄 视野下的宋僧 上梁文书写 [The Fusion of Confucianism and Buddhism from the Perspective of Song Monks’ Writings of Texts for Beams],” *Shoudu shifan daxue xuebao 首都师范大学学报 [Journal of the Capital Normal University]* 3 (2016): 31–38. While both useful and informative, Ji considers the use of Confucian literati style in Buddhist writings to be a sign of the secularisation of the latter. This is a hopeless misunderstanding that has hampered Chinese Dunhuang Studies for several decades. It is simply a sign of cultural integration and maturity, nothing more. Moreover, such formal types of writing were, in the vast majority of cases, composed and brushed by persons with high-level literary skills, just as was the case with stele inscriptions.

⁷³ There was no third year of Qingtai, only a second year, the year the Later Tang Dynasty ceased to exist.

4.9. *Samgha Overseer Kong Longbian*

Based on contextual evidence and dated documents, Samgha Overseer Wang's successor was a monk by the name of Longbian (d. 944, 龍晉).⁷⁴ We do not know when he received his post or if he had a relationship with his predecessor. Given that Longbian occupied the post of *samgha* overseer under Cao Yuande (r. 935–939, 曹元德), and that Samgha Overseer Wang passed away in 935, he was likely installed that same year or in the year after, in 935 or 936. Longbian hailed from the Kong (孔) clan, one of the lesser among Dunhuang's important clans.

Most of the data on Longbian derives from official documents like decrees, memoranda, petitions, and letters. One document from 929, the *Hou Tang Tiancheng si nian er yue liu ri Yingguan neiwai sengtong Longbian bang* 後唐天成肆年二月六日應管內外僧統龍晉榜 [Announcement issued on the 6th Day of the Second Month in the Tiancheng Year of the Later Tang by the Samgha Overseer Longbian Ordering the Inner and Outer Clerical Officials of the Inner and Outer], concerns setting up a large communal rite organised by Samgha Overseer Haiyan and his successor Longbian (S. 2575). A similar decree by Longbian from 937 refers to a similar communal Buddhist gathering (Chin. *dahui* 大會) held in the Bao'en Temple (Chin. Bao'en si 報恩寺)⁷⁵ with the participation of all the important monk officials and senior practitioners from Dunhuang's temples (S. 520, S. 8583). Another one from 943 is the *Tianfu ba nian er yue shijiu ri Hexi du sengtong Longbian bang* 天福八年二月十九日河西都僧統龍辯榜 [Announcement by the District Samgha Overseer of Hexi Longbian [written] on the 19th Day of the 2nd Month in the 8th Year of the Tianfu Reign Period] (S.8583). See also the *Bao'en si fangdeng daochang bang* 報恩寺方等道場榜 [Announcement to the Bao'en Temple and Other Buddhist Institutions]⁷⁶ (S.520). Moreover, he was a co-signer on a petition together with the monks Huiyun (fl. first half of 10th c., 惠雲), Shaozong (fl. first half of 10th c., 紹宗), and others (P. 4638).⁷⁷ There is also a letter in Tibetan

⁷⁴ See Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 287–289.

⁷⁵ For additional information on this temple, see Sørensen, “The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang.”

⁷⁶ *Daochang* (道場) is not used here in the precise meaning of ritual space or ritual site, but as a general reference to Buddhist temples. Such usage is fairly common in official 10th-century documents from Dunhuang.

⁷⁷ I wonder whether this letter could not have been replicated in Tibetan as well, as Takeuchi refers to it as a formal letter?



addressed to Longbian and other clerics.⁷⁸ This document constitutes a prime example of local civilian use of Tibetan writing in formal communication during the 10th century.⁷⁹

In one document, the *Tianfu ba nian er yue shijiu tian Hexi du sengtong Longbian bang* 天福八年二月十九日河西都僧統龍晉榜 [Announcement issued on the 19th Day of the 2nd Month in the 9th Year of Tianfu by the District Samgha Overseer of Hexi Longbian] from 943, Longbian formally notifies the monastic officials of Dunhuang (listed by their names and titles) of an invitation to leading Buddhist practitioners to participate in a ritual (S. 8583). While the involvement of the *samgha* overseer in this case is obviously in an official capacity as overall Buddhist leader, when it came to organising special Buddhist events, such as the case under discussion here, he was entitled to call upon leading religious practitioners and specialists, such as masters of various disciplines like meditation and *vinaya*, to assist in carrying out certain common functions.⁸⁰

As with many of the other monks in this study, we do not have solid information on Longbian's personal life as a Buddhist cleric, that is, on aspects of his training, area of religious specialisation, etc. Most of what we know derives from official documents, which do not reveal much about the individual *samgha* overseers' lives.

⁷⁸ For a brief discussion of this document, see Takeuchi Tsuguhito, "Sociolinguistic Implications of the Use of Tibetan in East Turkestan from the End of Tibetan Domination through the Tangut Period (9th–12th c.)," in *Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, ed. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst et al. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2004), 341a–348b (esp. 242b–243a). See also Takeuchi Tsuguhito, "Old Tibetan Buddhist Texts from the Post-Tibetan Imperial Period (mid-9th c. to late 10th c.)," in *Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS*, 2003, ed. Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 205–214.

⁷⁹ Takeuchi mentions that the sender of this letter, a certain A-cong, "is likely to have been a Chinese woman." See Takeuchi, "Sociolinguistic Implications of the Use of Tibetan in East Turkestan," 343a. Somehow, I find this doubtful. Is it not more likely that she was a Tibetan or perhaps Murong, who communicated to the *samgha* overseer by using her own language (whether she actually wrote the letter herself or, more likely, had someone else writing it)?

⁸⁰ See Xu Xiaohui 徐晓卉, "Dunhuang Guiyijun shiqi de daochang si tanxi 敦煌归义军时期的道场司探析 [An Investigation of the Monastic Office in Dunhuang during the Guiyijun Period]," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究院 [Dunhuang Research] 2 (2002): 26–33. This article offers several examples of this aspect of the *samgha* overseers' role in managing the local *samgha*. S. 8583 is mentioned in passing there.

4.10. *Samgha Overseer Jinguanghui*

Following Longbian, the monk Jinguanghui (d. after 951, 金光慧)⁸¹ of the Fan clan became *samgha* overseer in 944 or 945, immediately after the demise of his predecessor (P.2040).⁸² In his case, there is not much information on his life as a monk, his training, or his scholarly interests. We have a few sources that primarily shed light on his official career. That available material shows that during the mid-10th century, even the highest Buddhist cleric in Dunhuang had to occupy himself with rather tedious things, such as monastic accounting, authorising the official lists of temple provisions, approval of the bestowal of ordinations, postings of monastic personal, etc.

One noteworthy document in Guanghai's hand is a formal notification to the monastic officials in Dunhuang concerning an assembly to be held in the Bao'en Temple. This notification was issued on the fourth day of the fourth month in the fourth year of the Qianyou reign (乾佑四四月四日) in 951, the very same year Guanghai is thought to have passed away (S.3879R(2)).⁸³ Since this document sheds light on various issues relating to the organisation of Buddhist clerics and their activities in connection with large-scale religious gatherings, I present the text in full:

Qianyou si nian si yue si ri Hexi du sengtong Jinguang (=Guanghai) zhi zhushi ganguan suo youtie 乾祐四年四月四日河西都僧統金光 (= 光慧) 知諸寺綱管所由帖 [Notification to the Regulating Officials of the Monks' and Nuns' Temples Dated 4th day of the 4th Month in the 4th Year of Qianyou (951) by the District Samgha Overseer of Hexi Jinguang]:

⁸¹ See Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 289. DXDC, 362b.

⁸² Jinguanghui is also referred to as Samgha Overseer Fan (汜僧統).

⁸³ Samgha Overseer Fan is briefly discussed in connection with the accounting and listing of temple property in Wang Xiangwei 王祥伟, "Guiyijun shiqi Dunhuang Jintu si de caichan guanli—Dunhuang siyuan caichan guanli de ge'an yanjiu 归义军时期敦煌净土寺的财产管理—敦煌寺院财产管理的个案研究 [Property Management of Dunhuang Pure Land Temple during the Guiyijun Period: A Case Study of Property Management in Dunhuang Temples]," *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu* 中国社会经济史研究 [Studies in Chinese Economic History] 1 (2010): 90–97. Takeuchi refers to a Tibetan document in which he renders the *samgha* overseer's family name as 'Han,' while at the same time stating that no such monk can be found during the time in question, i.e. the second half of the 10th century. See Takeuchi, "Sociolinguistic Implications of the Use of Tibetan in East Turkestan," 347b, n33. However, I wonder if he has not got this *samgha* overseer's family name wrong. Could it not actually be a reference to our Samgha Overseer Fan? It would make sense.



We hereby order that at the great assembly [to be held] in the fourth month, the guidelines are to be followed, meaning that you should meet for three days, wherefore the great host of monks and nuns, with the exception of those lying sick in bed, are all required to attend. First, the virtue should be complete that all may share in recompensing the Buddha's benign kindness. Secondly, then to recommend our kingdom's gods [(Chin. *jun* 君)] [...] ⁸⁴ rivers mountain ranges [(Chin. *long* 隴)]. ⁸⁵ So that together we may give rise to the victorious mind and not disregard offering up prayers for the duration of five days, early in the morning. At the Bao'en Temple, the clouds must gather [the Buddhist clerics] in orderly fashion, [so that all] are urged to arrive together, thereby causing one's own family a share in the merit. This document of command is to the granary official [(Chin. *cangsi* 倉司)] of the temple [i.e. the Bao'en Temple], who must report [concerned] individuals in case there are violations, such as the causing of infringements as mentioned above, or not assembling together. This is a duty that carries with it a penalty [should it not been adhered to]. This should not be taken lightly. Carpets and beddings are permitted to be placed outside [lit. sunned]. And fragrant flowers and [...] ⁸⁶ leaves [as well?]. One must not allow all kinds of debris (lit. 'all kinds of small things') [to lie around]. All the various temples and their buildings must be adequately swept, so as not to allow foulness [...]. ⁸⁷ This command is hereby humbly issued. Disobeying this constitutes a violation.

[Issued] on the fourth day of the fourth month in the fourth year of the Qianyou [reign period (951)] [seal of the Saṃgha Overseer].

The District Saṃgha Overseer Jinguang[hui] in charge of inner and outer affairs. ⁸⁸

It is clear that the Buddhist clerics were required to attend, or face punishment. Violations were to be reported and were the responsibility of special monastic officials. Likewise, it was mandatory for the temples to keep their grounds clean and orderly. All of these concerns were part of the duties of a *saṃgha* overseer, who, of course, had to order his underlings through decrees of this kind. As we can see from this and the other examples discussed in this study, many of the activities of the *saṃgha* overseers were not only mundane, but also trivial. Jinguanghui's

⁸⁴ One character is illegible.

⁸⁵ This undoubtedly refers to the tutelary deities of Hexi.

⁸⁶ One character is illegible.

⁸⁷ Some characters are illegible.

⁸⁸ For the Chinese text of S.3879R(2) see Appendix IV below.

name also appears in a document dealing with the food provisions of the Jingu Temple⁸⁹ (P.2040V^o), underscoring this point.

4.11. *Samgha Overseer Fasong*

After Jinguanghui, the monk Fasong (fl. mid- to second half of 10th c., 法嵩)⁹⁰ became the next *samgha* overseer in Dunhuang. He served as *samgha* rector under Jinguanghui, according to a document dated 951. Since Daozhen, the important monk from Sanjie Temple, served as *samgha* recorder in the same year, there must have been some sort of connection between the two men. There is also a note on a document from 954 that mentions Fasong's name (S. 4654V^o). Otherwise, there is not much data available on him, probably because he only occupied the position of *samgha* overseer for a few years.⁹¹

4.12. *Samgha Overseer Ganghui*

Ganghui (d. after 981, 綱慧)⁹² was the last of Dunhuang's *samgha* overseers for whom solid documentation exists. It is not known when he received his appointment, but a document from 954 refers to him as the 'Samgha Overseer of Hexi, Ganghui' and also mentions the Samgha Recorder Haizang (fl. second half of 10th c., 海藏). Both of these monks hailed from the Longxing Temple, which indicates their proximity to the seat of power in Dunhuang (S. 4654, P. 2879, S. 6189, S. 4915).

One of the most important events in Ganghui's life was his participation in 966 in the large-scale repair work on the so-called great northern image, the Beida statue (Chin. *beida xiang* 北大像), of Maitreya at the Mogao Caves, at the head of a congregation of many other Buddhist clerics under the auspices of Cao Yuanzhong (r. 939–974, 曹元忠)⁹³ (Dunhuang 207).

⁸⁹ For additional information on this temple, see Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang."

⁹⁰ DXDC, 362b. For some reason, Rong Xinjiang provides no information on him in his *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*.

⁹¹ Fasong's predecessor was still alive in 951, and as his successor, Ganghui was appointed in 954. This leaves a mere three years for Fasong to occupy the post.

⁹² See Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 289–291. DXDC, 365a.

⁹³ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, "Dunhuang lishi shang de Cao Yuanzhong shidai 敦煌历史上的曹元忠时代 [The Period of Cao Yuanzhong's Rule in the History of Dunhuang]," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 6 (2006): 92–96. See also Henrik H. Sørensen, "Guiyijun and Buddhism at Dunhuang: A Year by Year Chronicle," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 4.2 (2019).



This record does not provide any other details regarding the nature of Ganghui's involvement.

Ganghui served as *saṃgha* overseer for a very long time, since his name appears on a memorial congratulating Yuanzhong's successor Cao Yanlu (r. 976–1002, 曹延祿) on his formal appointment as the next ruler of Dunhuang. In this document, dated the fourth month of 978 (Taiping Xingguo 太平興國 third year), the District Saṃgha Overseer Ganghui and other important monastic officers are listed in descending order, according to their respective positions in the Buddhist hierarchy, as follows: "The right inner and outer [monastic] officers: the District Saṃgha Overseer, great master Bianzheng, the Wearer of the Purple Robe (Chin. *cizi shamen* 賜紫沙門) Ganghui, the District Saṃgha Regulator and Wearer of the Purple Robe Fasong, and the District Saṃgha Recorder and Wearer of the Purple Robe Daobao."⁹⁴ This shows that the three highest monastic officers in Dunhuang were all awarded the purple robe as a sign of their positions. Ganghui's subordinate colleagues, Fasong⁹⁵ and one Daobao. Fasong was later to become *saṃgha* overseer.

The last document to mention Ganghui dates to 981. It is a petition regarding temple matters sent to Ganghui by the senior nun Xiushan (fl. second half of 10th c., 修善) of the Shengguang Temple (聖光寺),⁹⁶ together with other petitioners. The document also includes the *saṃgha* overseer's response (S. 4760).

From the surviving records, it is clear that Ganghui was a relatively important figure in Dunhuang, not just because of his high official position, but also because he served under two of the Guiyijun rulers, Cao Yuanzhong and Cao Yanlu, both of whom were exceptionally devoted to Buddhism. Moreover, in the course of his life, he participated in the restoration of the large Maitreya image at the Mogao Caves, a major national project. Apart from these rather terse pieces of information, we do not know much about Ganghui and his life. Virtually nothing is known about his personal religious interests or his cultivation of Buddhism, what kind of practices he engaged in or his sectarian affiliation, if indeed he had one.

⁹⁴ P. 3553: 應管內外都僧統辯正大師賜紫綱惠, 都僧正賜紫法松, 都僧錄賜紫道寶等.

⁹⁵ He hailed from the Zhai clan and figures second among the clerical donors in Cave 33 (DMGT: 10).

⁹⁶ For information on this temple, see Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang."

5. Conclusion

For a monk to be selected to serve as *samgha* overseer required both considerable seniority and an important family background. It is noteworthy that no nuns were appointed to serve in the monastic administration directly under the government, despite the fact that there were many nuns who hailed from the important clans in Dunhuang and the fact that many of them enjoyed positions of considerable religious authority.

Although the primary sources on the lives of a number of Dunhuang's *samgha* overseers are rather meagre, for some of them, there is enough documentation for at least an outline of their lives and careers. However, to the extent that enough concrete history can be read into these terse biographical sketches, it appears that some of these important Buddhist monk officials, especially in the early part of Guiyijun rule, were more charismatic and spiritually active than others, especially the later ones. This is not necessarily indicative of how things actually were, but is an assessment given on the basis of the available data.

Aside from their administrative duties, several of the *samgha* overseers actively participated in the creation of new caves and the upkeep of older caves at Mogao. While this participation undoubtedly had official and formal aspects, these activities also appear to have had a deep religious meaning to all of those involved. After all, the inauguration of a sanctum made in the form of an offering, such as most cave productions were, required religious professionals of note to perform the accompanying rituals. Hence, the presence of the current *samgha* overseer at these events was not only required for formal reasons, but his attendance was also necessary for the process of sanctification and empowerment. Moreover, the presence of the highest representative of local Buddhism was something that lent an air of importance and majesty to the event.

There seems to have been a certain logic to the career ladder leading up to the position of *samgha* overseer, which may or may not have applied in all cases. However, at least during the second half of the 10th century, it was normal for a monk official to have been *samgha* recorder and then *samgha* regulator before qualifying for the post of *samgha* overseer. This means that the post was based on merits accrued from both an official and a spiritual background. That being said, the data presented here does give the impression that the majority of the *samgha* overseers in Dunhuang—at least during the second half of the Guiyijun period—were selected for



their administrative skills rather than their spiritual qualities. Of course, monks such as Hongbian, Fugao, and Haiyan—due to their documented religious activities—certainly appear to have been devoted Buddhists and paragons of the religion. However, most of the other ones are really defined by their services to the maintenance of Dunhuang’s governmental bureaucracy, including its management of Buddhism. This is, of course, the image we get from the data yielded by the extant records, which may or may not provide a sufficiently clear picture of the *samgha* overseers to draw any watertight conclusions regarding their spiritual lives. Nevertheless, it does seem that the position of *samgha* overseer—prestigious as it was—came with a relatively heavy administrative responsibility, one that may not always have been conducive to spiritual practice.

6. Appendices

Appendix I

List of the *samgha* overseers in Dunhuang during Guiyijun Rule
(according to Rong Xinjiang, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 279–297)

- Wu Hongbian (851/853–d. 862, 吳洪誓)
- Zhai Farong (862/863–d. 869, 翟法榮)
- Wuzhen (869–902, 悟真)
- Xianzhao (895–902, 賢照)
- Fan Fugao (902–907, 汜福高)
- Chen Fayan (fl. 907–918, d. 926, 陳法嚴)
- Yin Haiyan (926–933, 陰海晏)
- Wang Sengtong (933–935, 王僧統)
- Kong Longbian (fl. 935–943, d. 944, 孔龍晉)
- Fan Guanghui/Jinguanhui (fl. 944/945–951–?, 汜光慧/金光慧)
- Fasong (?–954–?, 法嵩)
- Ganghui (?–966–978–?, 鋼慧)

Appendix II

Chinese Text of *Qian Hexi du sengtong gu Zhai heshang zhenzan* 前
河西都僧統故翟和尚真讚 [Eulogy for the Portrait of the Former
District Samgha Overseer of Hexi, the Deceased Venerable Zhai] (P.
4660)

俗姓翟氏，生年不詳。吐蕃統治晚期至歸義軍初期沙州敦煌僧人。祖籍江州潯陽郡。出身豪門大族。父翟涓以品行端正，道德高尚著稱，有“一郡擔綱，三端領袖”之稱，晚年剃度為僧。弟承慶，曾任沙州敦煌縣尉，弟懷光，懷恩均為當地知名人士。法榮從小崇信佛教，入道後洞曉五篇七聚，兼修四禪，有“德秉安遠，踪蹈羅什”的美稱。精通醫學，醫術精湛，時人稱“五涼師訓，一道醫王。”唐文宗大和五年（公元831年）左右移居敦煌龍興寺，不久住沙州釋門法律，旋又提升為釋門僧政，釋門都教授。經張議潮舉薦，唐廷敕法榮為釋門都僧錄，大中八年（854）升任河西都僧統京城內外臨壇大德三學教授兼毘尼藏主，並獲敕賜紫衣。咸通三年（862）在莫高窟開龕造像，八年完工，並立碑刻石，唐悟真撰寫碑文以記述其功德，後人稱此窟為“翟僧統窟”或



‘翟家窟，’即現存莫高窟第 85 窟。咸通十年 (869)，因病卒，唐悟真為其撰，恆安書其邈真贊，其辭為：

茲繪像者，何處賢良？翟城貴族，上蔡豪強。
璧去珠移，柯葉分張。一支從官，徙居敦煌。
子孫因家，棣萼連行。間生斯息，桂馥蘭芳。
幼挺英靈，跣步殊常。風威卓犖，壯志昂藏。
出家入道，雅範夙彰。遊樂進具，止作俱防。
五篇洞曉，七聚芬香。南能入室，北知升堂。
戒定慧學，鼎足無傷。俗之裸袖，釋侶提綱。
傳燈暗室，誨諭浮囊。五涼師訓，一道醫王。
名馳帝闕，恩被遐荒。遷加僧統，位處當陽。
符告紫綬，晶日爭光。機變絕倫，韻合宮商。
靈山鑄窟，純以金莊。龍興塔廟，再緝行廊。
罄舍房資，供設無疆。聿修懇懇，景福襉襉。
翼侄謀孫，保期永昌。成基豎業，富與千箱。
天命從心，寢疾於床。世藥無效，色力轉尙。
美角先折，今也則亡。門人聚哭，哀慟穹蒼。
林間水噫，殿上摧梁。一如茶毘，涕淚無快。
邈生前兮影像，筆記固兮嘉祥。
使瞻攀兮盼盼，想法水兮汪汪。

Appendix III

Text of *Changxing yuan nian Hexi dusengtong yi Dangquan jiankan yi suo shang liang wen* 長興元年河西都僧統依宕泉建龕一所上樑文 [In the First Year of Changxing the District Samgha Overseer of Hexi Went to Dangquan to Create a Niche and Wrote the Text [of Dedication] for the Upper Beam] (P. 3302V° (2))

今因良時吉日，上樑雅合周旋；
五郡英豪並在，一州士女駢闐。
□餅千盤萬擔，一時雲集宕泉；
盡向空中亂撒，次有金鈔銀錢。
願我十方諸佛，親來瑞□金蓮；
薦我和尚景佑，福祚而海長延。
應是助修之輩，見世總獲福田；
諸族六親內外，永如瑤閣神仙。
敦煌萬人休泰，五稼豐稔龍川；
莫在辭多蹇訥，歲時猶望鶯遷。

自此上樑之後, 高貴千年萬年.

Appendix IV

Chinese Text of Jinguanghui's Decree *Qianyou si nian si yue si ri Hexi du sengtong Quanzhao zhi zhushi gangguan suo youtie* 乾祐四年四月四日河西都僧統金光 [= 光慧] 知諸寺綱管所由帖 [Notification to the Regulating Officials of the Monks' and Nuns' Temples Dated 4th day of the 4th Month in the 4th Year of Qianyou (951) by the District Samgha Overseer of Hexi Jinguang] (S. 3879R° (2))

- (1) 應管內外都僧統 帖
- (2) 諸僧尼寺綱管所由等.
- (3) 右奉 處分, 今者四月大會,
- (4) 准常例轉念三日, 應有僧尼
- (5) 大會, 除枕疾在床, 餘者總須
- (6) 齊來. 一則功德圓滿共報
- (7) 佛恩; 二乃□□國資君, 廓
- (8) □河隴. 同發勝心, 莫違上願.
- (9) 限五日早晨, 並於報恩寺雲
- (10) 集, 不得一前一後. (再?) 勸齊來,
- (11) 更是自家福分. 其帖仰倉司
- (12) [就?] 寺丁寧告報. 如有故犯, 前
- (13) 或不齊同者, 責罰取此不輕. 毡褥
- (14) 准陽, 香花□葉, 不令闕少一色.
- (15) 諸寺寺宇掃略, 不令惡 (違犯者?).
- (16) 右仰准此指搆, 不得違犯者.
- (17) 乾祐四年四月四日 (Seal of the Samgha Overseer).
- (18) 應管內外都僧統金光[惠].



Abbreviations

DMGT	<i>Dunhuang Mogao ku gongyangren tiji</i> 敦煌莫高窟供养人题记 [Donor Inscriptions from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang], comp. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986, 1–5.
Dunhuang DXDC	Manuscripts in the Collection of the Dunhuang Academy <i>Dunhuang xue da cidian</i> . 敦煌学大辞典 [Comprehensive Dictionary of Dunhuang Studies], edited by Ji Xianlin 季羨林 et al. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1998.
FDC	<i>Foguang da cidian</i> 佛光大辭典 [Great Dictionary of Foguang], 8 vols, edited by Ciyi 慈怡 et al. Gaoxiong: Foguangshan chubanshe, 1988.
O	Oldenburg Collection in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg
P.	Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque National in Paris
S.	Stein Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London
Shandong Museum	Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts in the Shandong Museum
T.	Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 et al., edites by <i>Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經 [Taishō <i>tripiṭaka</i>]. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935.

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- Ordination Platforms, Great Worthy in Waiting, Conjointly Preacher of the Three-fold Teaching, Great Dharma Master, Wearer of the Purple Robe, the Monk Wuzhen, with Preface]. BD 6437V°.
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