

# FACT AND FICTION: THE CREATION OF THE “THIRD CHAN PATRIARCH” AND HIS LEGENDS


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During the seventh century the leadership of the meditation tradition was shifted from Sengchou's 僧稠 (480-560) group to another group which identified itself with Bodhidharma (fl. 5<sup>th</sup> c.) and Huike 慧可 (487?-593?). It was easy to connect Shenxiu 神秀 (606?-706), the chief claimant to the leadership of the Bodhidharma-Huike tradition, with Daoxin 道信 (580-651) through Hongren 弘忍 (600-674), who was Daoxin's chief disciple on the one hand and Shenxiu's main teacher on the other. Therefore, the credibility of the tie between Shenxiu and Bodhidharma rests, in the final analysis, on the nexus between Daoxin and Huike, Bodhidharma's chief disciple. Thus, how to connect Huike and Daoxin became crucial for constructing the meditation lineage beginning from Bodhidharma and Huike, and leading to Shenxiu through Daoxin and Hongren.

Who was then to act as the tie between Huike and Daoxin? The answer is a monk called Sengcan 僧璨 (or僧粲). This article explores why and how such an elusive figure like Sengcan was created to bridge the gap between Huike and Daoxin. Due to his alleged position in East Asian Chan/Zen/Seon Buddhism, countless records, legends and stories have been told about Sengcan through the ages. However, Sengcan is one of those figures about whom much has been told but very little is known for certain. Among the first six patriarchs of Chan Buddhism, Sengcan is the only one without a biography in any of the three major monastic

biographical anthologies in medieval China. Throughout *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Further Biographies of Eminent Monks), the monastic biographical collection that covers Sengcan’s time and in which one might expect a biography for him, only twice is anything relevant to Sengcan mentioned. One occurs when a certain Meditation Master Can 絜禪師 is introduced as a successor to Huike, while the other consists in a brief reference to a monk called Sengcan, who was known to have performed a miracle at a place close to the mountain at which Daoxin, the future fourth Chan patriarch, studied under two unspecified monks, one of whom later Chan histories identified as Sengcan.


 Scant and fragmentary though the information regarding Sengcan in *Xu gaoseng zhuan* may be, this monastic biographical anthology represents the earliest known source concerning this shadowy figure. The relevant records shall be examined whenever one attempts to uncover the stories behind the complicated process that eventually led to the formation of Sengcan’s status as the third Chan patriarch.


## 1. MEDITATION MASTER CAN: A *LANKĀVATĀRA* EXPERT AND A DISCIPLE OF HUIKE

The reference to a monk called Meditation Master Can as the first successor to Huike is in a biography that Daoxuan, approaching the end of his life in 667, wrote for the extraordinary scholar-monk Fachong 法冲 (586/7-664/665+) and added to his *Xu gaoseng zhuan*.<sup>①</sup>

Originally belonging to the prestigious Longxi Li 隴西李 clan, from which the ruling Li family of the Tang dynasty claimed to have descended, Fachong had been a successful military official before becoming a monk. His decision to

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① This biography was written in 664 or 665 given Daoxuan’s statement at the end of the biography that it was then under the Linde era (February 2, 664-February 9, 666) while he wrote the biography. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666c23. As for Fachong’s dates, his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography notes that in the Linde era, he was seventy-nine. As Linde era mostly fell within the two years of 664 and 665, Fachong was born either in 586 or 587. For Fachong’s life and his  importance, see Yanagida, *Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū*, pp. 118-119; Hu Shi, “Lengqiezong kao,” 楞伽宗考 187-191; McRae, *Northern School*, 24-25; Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*, 146-147; Broughton, *The Bodhidharma Anthology*, 64-65.



renounce household life was triggered by the loss of his mother, which happened some time after he turned twenty-four. He first studied with Huihao 慧暲 (546-633), a disciple of a Dharma Master Ming (Ming Fashi 明法師, ?-586+), who, better known as Maoshan Ming 茅山明, was the appointed successor to Sanlun 三論 master Falang 法朗 (507-581) based at the Qixiasi 栖霞寺 on Mount Qixia 栖霞山 (located about twenty-two kilometers to the northeast of Nanjing 南京).<sup>①</sup> After Huihao, Fachong learned the *Lankâvatâra Sûtra* from a monk in the line of Huike. Afterwards, one more monk who was believed to have received direct transmission  Huike instructed Fachong in the *Lankâvatâra* teaching on the basis of the “One-vehicle School [or Principle] of South India” (*Nan Tianzhu yicheng zong* 南天竺一乘宗).<sup>②</sup> After becoming an independent monk, Fachong also concentrated on the *Lankâvatâra Sûtra*. He is said to have lectured nearly two hundred times on this abstruse text.<sup>③</sup> At the invitation of his old friend Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579-648), who was a chief confidant to Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626-649), Fachong spent some years in Chang’an, where he associated with such prestigious monks as Lingrun 靈潤/潤 (?- 645+) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664).<sup>④</sup>

Daoxuan composed a separate biography for Fachong mainly as a response to the increasing influence of a group of monks associated with the *Lankâvatâra*

① The dramatic story of Falang’s nominating Maoshan Ming as his successor is recorded in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (T 50: 25.538b29-15) of Famin 法敏 (579-645), a disciple of Maoshan Ming.

② *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b5-6.

③ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b24-25: 冲公自從經術，專以楞伽命家。前後敷弘，將二百遍。

④ Interestingly, Lingrun also had Fang Xuanling as his admirer (see his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography at T 50: 15.546c7ff; for more about this monk, see Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 215n9). In Chang’an, Fachong became popular among the secular elite. In addition to Fang Xuanling, two important court officials Du Zhenglun 杜正倫 (575-658) and Yu Zhining 于志寧 (588-665) were among Fachong’s lay followers. Both Du Zhenglun and Yu Zhining maintained extensive connections with Buddhist monks. For Du Zhenglun’s association with the Buddhist world in his time, see Yamazaki’s exclusive study, “Shotō meishin To Shōrin to bukyō”. It is particularly  worthy that according to a Chan chronicle, Du Zhenglun wrote the funeral epitaph for Daoxin, the  fourth Chan patriarch”. See *Chuan fabao ji*, Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 380. Yamazaki’s article on Du Zhenglun does not note this connection.

*Sūtra*.<sup>①</sup> In this biography, he provides a list of these *Laṅkāvatāra* masters, including Fachong and Meditation Master Can.<sup>②</sup> Before introducing the list itself, Daoxuan explicitly states that the Chinese *Laṅkāvatāra* tradition was inaugurated by the Indian monk Bodhidharma and his disciples like Huike and Huiyu 惠育 (d.u.):

Now, let [me] narrate the lineage in order to show that the study passed on through the transmission had a clear and unmistakable basis. After Meditation Master [Bodhi]dharma were the two monks Huike 慧可 and Huiyu 惠育 (d.u.). Master Yu, who received the Way and practiced it in mind, did not lecture on it in mouth. After Meditation Master [Hui]ke were Meditation Master Can 粲禪師, Meditation Master Hui 惠禪師 (d.u., otherwise unknown), Meditation Master Sheng 盛禪師 (d.u., otherwise unknown), Meditation Master Na 那禪師,<sup>③</sup> Meditation Master Duan 端禪師 (d.u.),<sup>④</sup> Master Changzang 長藏師 (d.u., otherwise unknown),<sup>⑤</sup> Dharma

① In addition to the list of *Laṅkāvatāra* specialists in Fachong's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography, three passages in Huike's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (16.551c-552c) are also concerned with the *Laṅkāvatāra* tradition in the name of Bodhidharma and Huike. The first passage discusses the alleged transmission of the four-fascicle translation of that Buddhist scripture from Bodhidharma to Huike (552b20-22); the second, on Huike's prediction that the *Laṅkāvatāra* teachings were to be obscured four generations after him (552b29-c1); and the third, on the consistency and intensity which Huike asked two of his students to apply to the practice and spread of the *Laṅkāvatāra* teaching (552b21-22). Hu Shi, who noted that these three passages appear rather out of context, has raised the following hypothesis. They were written as some marginal notes in Huike's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography probably at the same time the Fachong biography was written; and then a certain disciple of Daoxuan, in editing his teacher's work, casually inserted these marginal notes into the text of Huike's biography. See Hu Shi, “Lengqiezong kao,” 185-187; English translations of these three passages found in McRae, *Northern School*, 27-28; see also Broughton, *The Bodhidharma Anthology*, 74.

② See the relevant discussion in Chen Jinhua, “Marginalia to Early Chan.”

③ Daoxuan added a biographical note on Na to the biography he wrote for Huike. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 16.552c1-7: 有那禪師者，俗姓馬氏。年二十一，居東海講《禮》，《法華》行學四百，南至相州，遇可說法，乃與學士十人，出家受道。諸門人于相州東，設齋辭別，哭聲動邑。出俗，手不執筆及俗書。惟服一衣一鉢，一坐一食。以可常行，兼奉頭陀，故其所往，不參邑落。

④ According to the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography of Tanlun 曇輪 (a.k.a. Tanlun 曇倫, ca. 546-626), a quick-witted meditation master, Tanlun began his noviciate under a monk called Meditation Master Duan (Duan Chanshi 端禪師, ?-559+), whose Buddhist understanding Tanlun criticized (20.598a27-b1). It is not clear whether this Duan was the *Laṅkāvatāra* expert by the same name Daoxuan records here.

⑤ Understanding *zangshi* 藏師 as a title (Tripiṭaka Master) like *chanshi* (Meditation Master) or *fashi* (Exegete), McRae (*Northern School*, 25) reads the three-character phrase *changzangshi* 長藏師 as *Chang zangshi* (Tripiṭaka Master Chang). As *zangshi* as a title was rare (actually unattested, to the best of my knowledge), I have read *Changzangshi* as *Changzang shi* (Master Changzang) instead.

Master Zhen 真法師 (d.u., otherwise unknown), and Dharma Master Yu 玉法師 (d.u., otherwise unknown).<sup>①</sup> (All the above-mentioned masters preached the mysterious principles, without producing any written records.)<sup>②</sup> 今叙師承以爲承嗣。所學歷然有據。達摩禪師後，有惠可，惠育二人。育師受道心行，口未曾說。可禪師後，粲禪師，惠禪師，盛禪師，那老師，端禪師，長藏師，真法師，玉法師(以上并口說玄理，不出文記)。<sup>③</sup>

After Master [Hui]ke were Master Shan 善師 (who produced a recension in four fascicles),<sup>④</sup> Meditation Master Feng 豐禪師 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a commentary in five fascicles), Meditation Master Ming 明禪師 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a commentary in five fascicles),<sup>⑤</sup> and Master Huming 胡明師 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a commentary in five fascicles). 可師後，善師<sup>⑥</sup>(出抄四卷)，豐禪師(出疏五卷)，明禪師(出疏五卷)，胡明師(出疏五卷)。<sup>⑦</sup>

Succeeding Master [Hui]ke from [ ] were Master Dacong 大聰 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a commentary in five fascicles), Master Daoyin 道蔭 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a recension in four fascicles), Dharma Master Chong 冲法師 (who produced a commentary in five fascicles),<sup>⑧</sup>

① Another edition reads “Wang Fashi” 王法師 (Dharma Master Wang).

② The parenthesized parts appear in the original text as interlinear notes.

③ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b12-17.

④ A *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (25.661a17) mentions a Meditation Master Shan (Shan Chanshi 善禪師) who was still alive in the early Tang. It is not clear if he was Master Shan on the list. Nor can we decide whether Master Shan was the famed meditation Master Sengshan 僧善 (?-605) (discussed in Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 29) or Daoshan 道善 (d. after 584), one of Xinxing’s 信行 (541-594) successors (see the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography [29.697a7-8] of Demei 德美 [575-637], a disciple of Sengyong 僧邕 [543-631], who successively studied with Sengchou 僧稠 [480-560] and Xinxing) (for Demei, see Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 195).

⑤ Uichon 義天 (1055-1101) records a five-fascicle commentary by a Meditation Master Ming 明禪師 on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. See *Sinp’yŏn Chong’ung Chong’ngnok*, T 55: 1.1169b11.

⑥ Another edition gives these two characters as a 師 (Prestigious Master Shan).

⑦ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b17-18.

⑧ There is little doubt that Chong fashi was Fachong, in whose biography this list is found. Several lines later, Daoxuan reports that Fachong, who at the outset refused to write down his comments on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, had to compose a five-fascicle commentary after being repeatedly requested by his followers. Daoxuan observes that Fachong’s commentary was still widely circulated when he wrote the biography (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b27-29).

Dharma Master An 岸法師 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a commentary in five fascicles), Dharma Master Chong 寵法師 (d.u., otherwise unknown) (who produced a commentary in eight fascicles), Master Daming 大明 (d.u.)<sup>①</sup> (who produced a commentary in ten fascicles). 遠子可師後，大聰師(出疏五卷)，道薩經抄(四卷)，沖法師(疏五卷)，岸法師(疏五卷)，寵法師(疏六卷)，大明師(疏十一卷)。<sup>③</sup>

Those who did not follow Master [Hui]ke but relied on the *She [dacheng] lun* 攝[大乘]論 (*Mahāyānasamgrāha śāstra*) [in interpreting the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*] included Meditation Master Qian 遷禪師 (who produced a commentary in four fascicles)<sup>④</sup> and Vinaya Master Shangde 尚德 (d.u.) (who produced a ten-fascicle commentary on the *Ru lengjia jing* 入楞伽經)<sup>⑤</sup>. 不承可師，自依攝論者，遷禪師(出抄四卷)，尚德律師(出《入楞伽疏》十卷)。<sup>⑥</sup>

After Meditation Master Na were Meditation Master Shi 實禪師 (?-658+; otherwise unknown), Meditation Master Hui 惠禪師 (?-658+; otherwise unknown),<sup>⑦</sup>

① Identifying this Daming with the Qixiasi Sanlun master known by the same name and his sobriquet Maoshan Ming 茅山明 (?-616+), some scholars have suggested the following as this line of *Laṅkāvatāra*-related transmission involved the Sanlun master Daming and Fachong: 1. Huike → 2. Huibu 慧布 (518-87) → 3. Falang 法朗 (507-81) → 4. Daming → 5. Huihao 慧暲 (546-633) → 6. Fachong (e.g. Hirai, *Chūgoku hannya shisōshi kenkyū*, 333-34; Yagi, “Ryōgashū kō,” 58; McRae, *Northern School*, 280), probably mainly on the basis of the record that Huibu once met Huike in the north and that Fachong was a disciple of Huigao. This identification seems questionable. In the *Laṅkāvatāra* list Fachong appears before Daming, suggesting that Daming is treated as of the same generation with, if not junior to, Fachong. It therefore seems difficult to identify the *Laṅkāvatāra* specialist Daming as the Sanlun master Daming, who had Fachong as one of his second-generation disciples.

② Another edition gives 十 as 十, which makes no sense.


③ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b18-20.


④ Qian chanshi must have been Tanqian, who, according to his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (18.574b1-5), wrote commentaries on, among other works, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Mahāyāna-samgrāha śāstra*. For Tanqian, see my exclusive study (*Monk and Monarchs*; see esp. p. 30) for his ties with these two texts.

⑤ The Japanese Buddhist bibliographer Eichō 永超 (1014-1095) reports a twelve-fascicle commentary on the *Ru Lengjia jing* by Shangde. See *Toiki dentō mokuroku*, T 55: 1153a11.

⑥ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b20-21.

⑦ To Huike's biography is also attached a biographical note for Na's disciple Huiman 慧滿 (?-642+). See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 16.552c7-24. Huiman was still alive in Zhenguan 16 (642), when he visited his friend Tankuang 曇曠 at Huishansi 會善寺, which was located at Mount Song 嵩山. Huiman's biographical note conveys that he was, not unlike his master Na, an intensive *dhūta* practitioner who was disdainful of empty doctrinal arguments. His biographical note contains a sentence to the effect that [Huike] asked Na and Huiman to take the four-fascicle *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* as the essentials of mind (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 16.552c21-22: (轉下頁)

 Dharma Master Kuang 曠法師 (?-658+),<sup>①</sup> Master Hongzhi 弘智師 (?-658+; otherwise unknown). (All affiliated with Ximing[si] 西明[寺] in the

 (接上頁) 故使那滿等師常齋四卷楞伽以爲心要). This suggests that Huiman studied with Huike too (thus, it seems that he turned to seek Na's instructions after Huike died). Huiman later died in Luoyang on an unspecified date, at the age of around seventy. Huiman's biographical note (552c12-16) mentions Tankuang as his dharma-friend (*fayou* 法友; co-disciple?) (and therefore Tankuang's status as a probable disciple of Na).

The relationships between Huike, Na, Huiman and Tankuang, in combination with the fact that in literary Chinese 慧 and 惠 were almost interchangeable, might suggest that Huiman 慧滿 and Tankuang 曇曠 were the *Laṅkāvatāra* experts referred to as Meditation Master Hui 惠禪師 and Dharma Master Kuang 曠法師 in the list included in Fachong's biography. However, it should be noted that when a Buddhist monk was referred to by a title (e.g. *chanshi* 禪師, *dashi* 大師, or *fashi* 法師, etc.), the title was usually attached to the last, rather than the first, character in his dharma-name (see Chen Yuan, "Da Tang 大 Tang 高僧傳 卷之四 律師 慧滿," 76). In accordance with this general rule, Meditation Master Hui 惠禪師 would have had 惠 as the second character in his two-character dharma master. Be that as it may, he could not have been Huiman 慧滿, who had 惠 as the first character of his name. There are, however, exceptions to this general rule. Daoxuan once (*Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄, T 52: 3.435a17-18), for instance, referred to his fellow disciple and collaborator Dao Shi 道世 (596?-668+) as Dao *lushi* 道律師 (Preceptor Dao), rather than Shi *lushi* 律師 (Preceptor Shi). It is Huiman's status as a direct disciple of Huike that significantly detracts from the plausibility of identifying him with Meditation Master Hui. If Huiman indeed studied with Huike, he must have been over twenty in 578, when Huike died, and thus over one hundred years old in 658, when the Ximingsi was built. In other words, it is unlikely that Huiman lived beyond 658; but on the other hand, Hui, a Ximingsi resident, was definitely still alive in 658. Huiman and Hui were then, very likely, two persons.

① If Tankuang mentioned in Huiman's biographical note was indeed the *Laṅkāvatāra* expert Dharma Master Kuang (see above), Tankuang must have left Huishansi and travelled to Chang'an sometime after 642, where he was affiliated with the Ximingsi after it was established in 658.

Yibao 義褒 (611-661), a colleague of Xuanzang and a critic of Daoism who debated with the Daoist scholar Li Rong 李榮 (fl. 650-683), mentions a Dharma Master Kuang (Kuang Fashi 曠法師), a Sanlun master who successively studied with Younger Dharma Master Ming (Xiaoming fashi 小明法師 [d.u.], a student of Falang) and four major disciples of Sengquan 僧詮 (?-557+), the leader of the Sheshan 攝山 Mādhyamika group. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 15.547b23-c3. Some scholars have identified this Dharma Master Kuang as the *Laṅkāvatāra* expert by the same name (see, e.g. Hirai, *Chūgoku hannya shisōshi kenkyū*, 292, 340; McRae, *Northern School*, 27). This identification has some difficulties. As Yibao's teacher, Dharma Master Kuang studied with Younger Ming before going to study with Falang himself. Thus, it seems that he was at least twenty when Falang died in 581. Had he been the homonymous *Laṅkāvatāra* master who was also a Ximingsi resident, he would have reached an exceptionally ripe age of one hundred when the Ximingsi was built in 658. This is not entirely impossible, but, again, unlikely.

Tankuang as a co-disciple of Huiman is not to be confused with a Tang namesake who lived beyond 774, over one century after Daoxuan prepared this *Laṅkāvatāra* list. A native of Jiankang 建康 (in present-day Nanjing) and (noticeably) formerly a Ximingsi monk (too), this monk was later active in the Dunhuang area where he wrote some commentaries (one dated to 774) which were found among the Dunhuang manuscripts discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some of Tankuang's works are now collected in the eighty-fifth volume of the *Taishō* canon.



Western Capital [i.e. Chang'an], their dharma ended with their death.)<sup>①</sup> 聖禪師後實禪師，惠禪師，曠法師，弘智師(名<sup>②</sup>住京師西門，身<sup>③</sup>亡法絕)。

After Meditation Master Ming were Dharma Master Qie 伽法師 (?-664+),<sup>⑤</sup> Master Baoyu 寶瑜 (?-664+; otherwise unknown), Master Baoying 寶迎 (?-664+; otherwise unknown), Master Daoying 瑩 (?-664+; otherwise unknown). (All succeeded in successively transmitting their lamps to the later

① The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* contains a biography for a monk called Hongzhi, who, formerly a Daoist priest, decided to become a Buddhist monk after an encounter at Jingfasi 靜法寺 with a monk referred to as Dharma Master Hui (Hui Fashi 惠法師), who instructed him in the “methods of pacifying the mind” (*anxin zhi dao* 安心之道; 24.642a24) (that is, meditation). Hongzhi later distinguished himself as a lecturer on the *Avataṃsaka sūtra* and *Mahāyāna-saṃgrāha śāstra*. However, he died in Yonghui 永徽 6 (655), three years before the Ximingsi was built in Xianqing 顯慶 3 (658) (the date of the foundation of the Ximingsi is recorded in Xuanzang’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography [4.457c26-27]). Obviously, this Hongzhi cannot be identified as the homonymous monk on the *Laṅkāvatāra* list, who dwelled at Ximingsi (McRae, *Northern School*, 281).

② Yanagida (1967: 22) suggests that “name” is a mistake for 各 (“each”). In my opinion, 名 also makes sense in the context (the phrase *mingzhu* 名住 means to “have one’s name registered somewhere”).

③ Another edition has 寺 instead of 身. As Ximingsi was still in existence at the time of Daoxuan, it is apparently not the correct character.

④ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b16-17.

⑤ At the end of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (T 50: 22.617c7-12) biography for the famous Vinaya Master Xuanwan 玄琬 (562-636) is mentioned a monk Sengqie 僧伽 who was his chief assistant. For all his expertise on *vinaya*, Sengqie was also an intensive practitioner of meditation (617c9: 以味靜為宗), following Xuanwan to study meditation with the charismatic meditation master Tanlun at Chandingzi 禪定寺. He seems to have ended up with a very close relationship with Tanlun, as is suggested by an episode reported in Tanlun’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography that Sengqie was in attendance when Tanlun was on his deathbed (20.598c22-29). Sengqie’s connection with Tanlun, in combination with the assumption that Daoxuan also includes Tanlun’s teacher Meditation Master Duan in the same *Laṅkāvatāra* list, might lead one to assume that Dharma Master Qie in the *Laṅkāvatāra* list was Xuanwan’s disciple Sengqie. See, for example, Aramaki, “Chūgoku bukkyō towa nanika?,” 31-32. This identification seems difficult.

According to Daoxuan, Dharma Master Qie was still active when he wrote Fachong’s biography in 664, while Sengqie had already been dead by the time Daoxuan wrote the brief biographical note for him, as Daoxuan regrets at the end of this biographical note that Sengqie had died young, and not been able to attain a far-reaching influence (617c11-12: 恨其早卒，清規未遠). Sengqie’s biographical note could have been written either before or after Fachong’s biography was written in 664 (or 665). In the former case, Sengqie died before 664/5, making it impossible to identify him with Dharma Master Qie, who was known to have been alive in the same year. As a matter of fact, if we assume that Sengqie’s biographical note was written before 664/5, it was likely already contained in the first version of *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, which was completed in 645. Be that as it may, Sengqie died at least twenty years before Dharma Master Qie was still known to have been active as a *Laṅkāvatāra* expert.



generations, and are still propagating the dharma (an) proselytizing.)<sup>①</sup> 明禪師  
後伽法師，寶瑜師，寶迎師，道瑩師(並次第傳燈，於今揚化)<sup>②</sup>

Read alongside Huike's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography, this description of a Bodhidharma-Huike *Lankavatāra* tradition strikes me, first of all, by the variety of religious background of these *Lankavatāra* experts listed. Except for the two masters who distanced themselves from Huike, all were supposed to have been Huike's successors of the first and second generations.<sup>③</sup> They were meditation masters (*chanshi* 禪師), exegetes (*fashi* 法師), *vinaya* masters (*lushi* 律師), or merely (*lao*)*shi* (老)師 (“[prestigious] masters”), who could have been any of the former three.



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If we suppose that Daoxuan wrote the biographical note for Sengqie after 664/5, we have to consider the possibility that Daoxuan did not draft Sengqie's biographical note and add it to Xuanwan's biography until sometime shortly before his death in 667; that is, sometime between 664/5 (when he finished Fachong's biography) and 667. According to this assumption, Sengqie (=Dharma Master Qie) died sometime between 664/5 and 667; then, the statement that Dharma Master Qie was still active in 664/5 would not contradict the fact that Sengqie had already been dead by the time Daoxuan wrote the biographical note for him. However, this assumption will bring up another difficulty, implying as it does that Sengqie (=Dharma Master Qie) lived a rather advanced age (fifty-eight or more), which squarely contradicts Daoxuan's statement that Sengqie died young (*zaozu* 早卒). This conclusion is reached by the following consideration. Tanlun's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (T 50: 20.598b22-29) informs us that he died at the end of the Wude 武德 era (618-626). As Sengqie attended upon Tanlun on his deathbed and before that he had studied with Xuanwan and Tanlun, he was probably no younger than twenty at the time, which would make him older than fifty-eight by 664/5 when Daoxuan reported that Dharma Master Qie was still active as a *Lankavatāra* master. Thus, supposing that Sengqie was Dharma Master Qie and he died between 664/5 and 667, he would have lived beyond fifty-eight.



In contrast, a monk called Sengqie 僧伽 who was affiliated with a temple at Mount Zhongnan 終南山 called Yunjusi 雲居寺 and who was among the thirty-nine monks participating in the precept-platform that Daoxuan, in the same year he died (i.e. 667), established at Zhongnan, seems to be a better candidate to be identified with Dharma Master Qie mentioned in the *Lankavatāra* list. See *Guanzhong chuangli jietan tujing*, T 45: 816b27.



① Given Daoxuan's report that these monks were still active when he wrote this biography (either in 664 and 665 [cf. note 1]), all of them must have lived beyond 664.

② *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 25.666b23-24. McRae's translation of this list (with a re-arrangement of several passages) is found in McRae, *Northern School*, 25-26.

③ First of all, we note that in the *Lankavatāra* list Daoxuan talks about Huike's relationship with the eight “non-commentators” on the one hand and the four “commentators” on the other exactly the same way he discusses Bodhidharma's relationship with two of his students, one being Huike himself (達摩禪師後.../可禪師後; 666b13-15). See Chen Jinhua, “Marginalia to Early Chan”. This proves that Daoxuan understands these twelve *Lankavatāra* masters as Huike's students.

Moreover, the number of these *Laṅkāvatāra* masters is impressive: twenty-eight monks, all of whom, except for two, are listed as Huike’s successors. To be specific, in addition to two groups of immediate students (eight non-commentators and four commentators) and two groups of second-generation disciples,<sup>①</sup> there was a group of *Laṅkāvatāra* masters who, probably without direct connection to Huike, “followed Huike from afar,” which implies that they accepted Huike as a spiritual leader, basing themselves on him in their interpretation and practice of the *Laṅkāvatāra* teachings. These five groups can be regarded as loyal or at least friendly to Huike’s *Laṅkāvatāra* tradition.<sup>②</sup>

This presents a remarkable contrast to the fact that Huike’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography only reports a Meditation Master Na 那禪師 as his disciple, two monks as Na’s disciples (and therefore Huike’s second-generation disciples), in addition to four more monks, one of whom was Huike’s admirer and the other three his possible acquaintances.<sup>③</sup> By saying in the same biography that Huike died without leaving any distinguished successors,<sup>④</sup> Daoxuan suggests that none of Huike’s disciples and/or followers were significant monks at their time. Obviously, it was not until a couple of decades after the completion of the first version of his *Xu gaoseng*

① Huike’s second-generation disciples descended from two of his immediate disciples Na 那 and Ming 明 respectively. The line from Na did not survive, while that from Ming was still active, as noted above, in Daoxuan’s time.

② However, we should bear it in mind that of the five groups only that of Ming’s four successors (Qie 伽 [?-664+], Baoyu 寶瑜 [?-664+], Baoying 寶迎 [?-664+] and Daoyin 道蔭 [?-664+]) was still active at Daoxuan’s time while the other four had already been virtually extinct by that time. See Fachong’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography at 25.666b23-24; Chen Jinhua, “Marginalia to Early Chan”.

③ See above for Huiman’s relationship with Meditation Master Na and Tankuang. As for the other four monks reported in Huike’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography, Layman Xiang 向居士, Master Hua 化公, Master Yan 彦公 (var. Master Liao 廖公), and Meditation Master He 和, both Chan chroniclers and modern Chan scholars have taken them as Huike’s disciples like Na. This understanding is not supported by Daoxuan’s original text. Although it is true that Huike and Layman Xiang admired each other, the other three monks, as far as Daoxuan understood the situation, did not have such a close tie with Huike. In particular, Meditation Master He seems to have belonged to the Jinling 金陵 meditation tradition (with some close ties to the Sheshan-based Sanlun group). Although he was also active in Yexia, like Huike, and was also a popular meditation master at the time, Daoxuan does not seem to think that Master He had any special connections with Huike. See Chen Jinhua, “Marginalia to Early Chan”.

④ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 16.552a27: 卒無榮嗣.

*zhuan* that Daoxuan came to realize the importance of Huike's tradition, which he identified with the study of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, and it was only at this point that Daoxuan tried to work out the development of Huike's tradition by tracking down his disciples and/or followers' names and when possible, information about their work on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. However, most of these monks, except for Fachong, still appeared too obscure and/or insignificant to be given separate biographies.

The fact that Daoxuan took the trouble to include these *Laṅkāvatāra* specialists in his biographical anthology suggests that at the time Daoxuan had noticed that a remarkable number of monks were united, in one way or another, by their common interest in this scripture. This group was very likely the same one he mentions in Fachong's biography (actually only a few lines before he introduces the *Laṅkāvatāra* list) as the "One-vehicle School [or Principle] of South India." This designation might have derived from the image with which the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* begins: the Buddha sitting on the top of Mount Laṅka at the southern seashore in India.<sup>①</sup> It seems that those *Laṅkāvatāra* masters who succeeded in attracting Daoxuan's attention were a group of monks—mainly though not exclusively meditation practitioners—who claimed to be the followers of the *Laṅkāvatāra* teachings as propagated by Bodhidharma and Huike.

However, the actual ties between these meditation practitioners and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* remain a problem. We are by no means certain as to the extent to which these meditation practitioners read and used the *sūtra*. Given its unusual difficulty, it seems plausible to assume that except for a few highly educated monks, like those on Daoxuan's *Laṅkāvatāra* list, most of the "*Laṅkāvatāra* followers" had merely a nominal, rather than actual, connection to the *sūtra*.<sup>②</sup> Turning to the mainstream Buddhism of the time, we find that the impact of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

① *Nanhaibin Lengqieshan ding* 南海濱楞伽山頂 (T 670: 16.480a14). For the possible origin of the name of this "school" in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, see Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1, pp. 9-10; Du & Wei, *Zhongguo chanzong tongshi*, 49.

② Although McRae (*Northern School*, 26-29) does not exclude the possibility that both Bodhidharma and Huike used the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, he suspects that the importance of this *sūtra* to their tradition might have been misrepresented. A similar view can be found in Du & Wei, *Zhongguo chanzong tongshi*, p. 7.

was slight. *Xu gaoseng zhuan* contains very few references to the study of this text. The scarcity of this kind of references becomes more significant in comparison with the frequency with which other Buddhist texts are mentioned in the same collection as the foci of monastic interest at the time.<sup>①</sup> If most of the monks with biographies in Daoxuan's collection can be taken as the representatives of current mainstream Buddhism, this would imply the limited influence of the *sūtra* within the *saṃgha* at that period. In contrast, the *sūtra* seems to have gained a considerable following among a group of meditation practitioners identified with the Bodhidharma-Huiké tradition that formed an incipient force for the Buddhist movement to be known as Chan Buddhism.

With this general picture sketched out, let us see how we should understand the monk who was called Meditation Master Can in this *Lankāvatāra* list and who was eventually to be recognized as the third patriarch of Chan Buddhism. First and foremost, as Meditation Master Can is listed as the first non-commentator after Huiké, he should be regarded as Huiké's direct disciple.<sup>②</sup> Second, he was a promoter of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* and judging by the position in which he is mentioned in this *Lankāvatāra* list, he was accomplished in the study of the *sūtra*.

① In addition to Bodhiruci (Putiliuzhi 菩提流志, fl. 508-535; the translator of the 10-fascicle version of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*) and his assistant Yancong 彦琮 (557-610), Huiké, Fachong, Tanqian and his disciple Zhizheng 智正 (559-639, 536c2), only three monks are reported by Daoxuan to have lectured on the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*: Fashang 法上 (495-580; teacher of Jingying Huiyuan 淨影慧遠 [523-592]) (8.485a22), and two obscure dharma masters whose names are only partly given as Ju 炬 (590a15-16; for this obscure monk, see Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 43n90) and Jiong 罔 (?-551+), a monk of Guangguosi 廣國寺 (or Kuangguosi 曠國寺) in Yexia and a teacher of Huihai 慧海 (541-609) while he was still a Buddhist novice (12.515c7).

An incomplete survey made by Lan Jifu 藍吉富 of the Buddhist texts (including *sūtras*, *śāstras* and *vinaya* texts) lectured upon by the Sui monks lists the first six most popular texts as: *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (fifty-five exponents), *Mahāyāna-saṃgrāha śāstra* (twenty-four), *Daśabhūmikasūtra śāstra* (twenty-three), texts related to the *prajñā* (nineteen) and “Three Mādhyamika śāstra” (*sanlun* 三論) (eighteen). The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* is not mentioned at all in Lan's list. See Lan, “Suidai fojiao fengshang shulun”.

② Although Meditation Master Can's relationship with Huiké is relatively clear, his relationship with his fellow-monks (i.e., how senior he was among them) is less clear. The absence of his name in Huiké's own biography might suggest that Can was not actually his most important disciple. The fact that he is listed in Fachong's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography as the first successor to Huiké's *Lankāvatāra* tradition might have been merely due to the fact that among Huiké's disciples he was most advanced in the *Lankāvatāra* study. That the list gives priority to *Lankāvatāra* expertise, rather than seniority, is supported by the fact that Na, the only disciple of Huiké mentioned in Huiké's biography, ranks fourth among the eight “non-commentators” listed.

Third, he is here referred to as a “meditation master,” rather than “dharma master,” “vinaya master,” “prestigious master,” or merely “master.” This means that he was recognized by his contemporaries primarily as a specialist in meditation, although his reputation with such a complicated scripture as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* attests to his doctrinal knowledge as well. Fourth, he limited himself to propagating the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* in lectures, refraining from composing any commentary. Finally, no full name is given for him. He could have been, in principle, any meditation master and *Laṅkāvatāra* specialist in this period who had 璨 as the second character of his dharma-name, which is of, normally, two characters.<sup>①</sup>

## 2. IN SEARCH OF MEDITATION MASTER CAN: MEDITATION MASTER CAN AND THE TWO SENGCANS IN *XU GAOSEN ZHUAN*

In addition to 禪 Meditation Master Can, Daoxuan mentions two more monks both named Sengcan 僧璨, with one known as an exegete and the other as a meditation master (thus hereafter referred to as Sengcan the Exegete and Sengcan the Meditator, respectively). It is Sengcan the Meditator, as is generally believed, whom traditional Chan chroniclers identified with Meditation Master Can. Sengcan the Meditator is not accorded a separate entry in *Xu gaoseng 禪 an*, which contains, however, a biography for another monk that briefly mentions him as a miracle-worker.<sup>②</sup>

In the late spring of Renshou 4 (604), [Bianyi] was commissioned by the emperor to build a pagoda at the Liangjingsi on Mount Du in Luzhou. At the outset, a tour in search of the appropriate spot [for the pagoda] led Bianyi and some accompanying local officials to the mountain. All of a sudden, a big deer

① Chen Yuan, “Da Tang Xiyu ji zhuanren Bianji”. The two characters 璨 and 璨, both meaning “bright”, were almost interchangeable in literary Chinese.

② This biography is for the monk Bianyi 辯義 (541-606), a resident of Riyangsi 日嚴寺, which was a monastery built by the Prince of Jin 晉王 (i.e. Yang Guang 楊廣 [569-618], the future Sui Yangdi [r. 604-617]) in 599 to house eminent monks, mostly experts on the three Mādhyamika treatises and the *Tattvasiddhi śāstra*. See Yamazaki, *Zui Tō bukkyō-shi no kenkyū*, 85-114.

ran down from the mountain to greet Bianyi. The deer, jumping forwards and backwards, showed no sign of fear. The spot was high and wide. Unfortunately, there was no sufficient water around, making it difficult for the monastic order based there to draw water. Originally, there was a well, which became full of water as soon as Meditation Master Sengcan, with incense in hand, began to pray for water. No sooner did Sengcan die than the well became dry. However, as soon as Bianyi decided to build a pagoda there, the well, dried for years by that time, overnight became full of water again, to the delight of both monastic and lay people. 四年春末，又奉敕于廬州獨山梁靜寺起塔。初與官人案行置地，行至此山，忽有大鹿從山走下，來迎於義。騰踴往還，都無所畏。處既高敞，而恨水少，僧衆汲難。本有一泉，乃是僧粲禪師燒香求水，因即奔注。至璨亡後，泉涸積年。即將擬置，一夜之間，枯泉還涌，道俗欣慶。<sup>①</sup>

This story is noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, it implies that Sengcan the Meditator died “many years” (*jinian* 積年) before 604. Second, after gaining a reputation as a miracle-worker at a temple on Dushan in Luzhou, Sengcan the Meditator died at the same temple, which was not far from Mount Wangong 皖公山, the mountain on which the third Chan patriarch supposedly died according to later Chan sources.

Sengcan the Meditator has a homonymous contemporary who is much better known. Daoxuan wrote a detailed and highly laudatory biography for Sengcan the Exegete (529-613) in his *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*. An accomplished Buddhist scholar and a shrewd debater,<sup>②</sup> Sengcan the Exegete was from the Sun 孫 family in Chenliu 陳留 of Bianzhou 汴州 (in present-day Kaifeng). After renouncing household life, he travelled extensively in order to study Buddhism with various teachers. He distinguished himself as a Buddhist expounder in the three states of his day, two in the north (Northern Qi [550-577] and Northern Zhou [557-581]) and one in the south (Chen [557-589]). Proud of his own eloquence and his experiences in three different states, he called himself the “Expounder of Three States” (*sanguo lunshi* 三國論師). In

① T 50: 11.510c18-24.

② His *Xu gaosen zhuan* biography found at T 50: 9.500a-501a. *Lidai sanbao ji*, completed sixteen years before his death, contains a brief biographical note on him (T 49: 12.106a20-29), which is partly used in his *Xu gaosen zhuan* biography.

Kaihuang 10 (590), he was summoned to the Sui capital Chang'an and was lodged at the famous Daxingshansi 大興善寺, of which he became a leader. Under his capable leadership, monks at the temple lived in harmony, and his achievement as a Buddhist leader won him a great reputation.<sup>①</sup> In Kaihuang 17 (597), an imperial edict appointed him the "Premier Mahāyāna Master" (*diyi Moheyān jiang* 第一摩訶衍匠) of a Buddhist community formally known as "Ershiwu zhong" 二十五衆 (the Assembly of Twenty-five Monks?), which was, probably, based at Daxingshansi.<sup>②</sup> As reported by both Fei Zhangfang 費長房 (?-598+) and Daoxuan, Sengcan the Exegete composed a work titled "Shizhong dacheng lun" 十種大乘論 (Treatise on Mahāyāna in Ten Categories), which, no longer extant, seems to have been a compilation of Mahāyāna doctrines divided into ten categories.<sup>③</sup> In addition, Daoxuan reports a second work by Sengcan the Exegete, *Shidi lun* 十地論 (in two fascicles), which was probably a treatise explaining the theories related to the ten stages leading to bodhisattvahood as promulgated in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (or Vasubandhu's commentary on it), or simply a commentary on the *sūtra* or a sub-commentary on Vasubandhu's commentary.<sup>④</sup>

Daoxuan then reports two missions that Sengcan the Exegete undertook in 602

① *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 9.500b5-6: 敕住興善, 頻經寺任, 緝諸法衆, 治續著聲.

② For a discussion of this peculiar Buddhist institution only seen under the Sui and its connection to another better known monastic institution generally known as *wuzhong* 五衆 ("Five Assemblies"), see Yamazaki, *Shina chūsei bukkō no tenkai*, pp. 298-327; and Chen Jinhua, "liudade".

③ According to his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (T 50: 9.500b7-9), these ten categories are (1) *tong* 通 (penetrating), (2) *ping* 平 (evenness), (3) *ni* 逆 (reversing), (4) *shun* 順 (following), (5) *jie* 接 (encountering), (6) *cuo* 挫 (rejecting), (7) *mi* 迷 (illusion), (8) *meng* 夢 (dream), (9) *xiangji* 相即 (mutual identification), and (10) *zhongdao* 中道 (middle way). Daoxuan also tells us that Sengcan the Exegete lectured on this work at Zonghuasi 總化寺 (500b10-11), suggesting that during his stay in Chang'an he was also affiliated with a temple other than Daxingshansi. *Lidai sanbao ji* (T 49: 12.106a26) has the first and second categories as *wuzhang'ai* 無障礙 (no-hindrance) and *pingdeng* 平等 (equanimity). According to Fei Zhangfang, *Shizhong dacheng lun* was composed of quotations from Buddhist *sūtras* and *śāstras* and it organized supporting material in an orderly way, providing a convenient reference book for the beginners (*Lidai sanbao ji*, T 49: 12.106a28-29: 并引經論成文, 證據甚有軌轍, 亦初學者巧方便門也). Daoxuan's comments on *Shizhong dacheng lun*, similar to and probably based on Fei Zhangfang's, are found in *Xu gaoseng zhuan*; see *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 9.500b9-10: 并據量經論, 大開軌轍, 亦初學之巧便也.

④ Not recorded in the *Lidai sanbao ji*, this treatise was probably written after 597. According to Daoxuan, it thoroughly investigated the meanings and purports [of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra-śāstra*], and clearly resolved doubts [surrounding the text] which had long remained unresolved; see *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 9.500b11-12: 窮討幽致, 散決積疑.



and 604 to deliver relics to Fuguangsi 福廣寺 in his home-prefecture Bianzhou and Xiudesi 修德寺 in Huazhou 滑州 (in present-day Huatai 滑臺, Henan) respectively. A variety of miracles are reported to have occurred during these two trips. The remainder of his biography is mainly devoted to his two debates with a Daoist priest called Chu Rou 褚揉 (?-590+; otherwise unknown) and the great Mādhyamika master Jizang 吉藏 (549-623), the latter of whom was also known as a ferocious debater.<sup>①</sup>

Sengcan the Exegete was asked to reside at Chandingsi 禪定寺 right after it was built. He declined and stayed on at Daxingshansi. His refusal was allegedly out of the fear that the high status and special treatment he was to receive there might cause detriment to his cultivation.<sup>②</sup> It is interesting, however, to note that his student Sengfeng 僧鳳 (554?-630?) chose to be affiliated with the monastery nonetheless.<sup>③</sup> Sengcan the Exegete died at Daxingshansi in 613, leaving behind him two distinguished disciples, Senglun 僧鸞 (?-618+) and the above-mentioned

① His *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography describes his debate with Jizang in detail. Another version of this story can be found in Jizang's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (T 50: 11.514b6-12). I briefly discussed this debate as reported in Jizang's biography in Chen, *Making and Remaking History*, 72. It is interesting to note the subtle differences between the two versions of the same story. One (for Sengcan the Exegete) says that Sengcan and Jizang were equally matched rivals, but the other (for Jizang) gives one the impression that Jizang had the upper hand.

② *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 9.501a3-5: 及禪定鬱起, 名德待之。道行既隆, 最初救命。粲以高位厚味沉累者多, 苦辭不就。Although Daoxuan here fails to specify to which Chandingsi Sengcan was invited, the context suggests that it was the earlier one, i.e. Chandingsi, rather than the later one (i.e. Da Chandingsi 大禪定寺). There might have been more profound reasons underlying this decision. Given that Sengcan the Exegete was thirteen years senior to Tanqian and that he was also highly respected by Sui Wendi, he might have felt uncomfortable in subjecting himself to the leadership of Tanqian by becoming a member of Chandingsi.

③ Chen, *Monks and Monarchs*, 188. Sengfeng's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography is located at T 50: 13.526b-527a. He was a descendant of the Buddhist emperor Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (r. 502-549). His biography is ambiguous on the date of his death by saying that he died of illness on the twenty-third day of the last (twelfth) month of that year at the age of seventy. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 13.526c19-21: 以其年暮月二十三日, 因疾終於彼寺, 春秋七十有七. Judging by this statement, Daoxuan did know the specific year in which Sengfeng died and very likely he gives it before in the same biography. However, the last time-frame mentioned before this statement is “Zhenguan zhongnian” 貞觀中年 (the middle of the Zhenguan era), which does not refer to a specific year at all. I suspect that the character *zhong* 中 in the phrase *Zhenguan zhongnian* must be a mistake for a character indicating a number. Of the nine Chinese characters indicating the numbers from one to nine, *si* 四 (four) is most similar in form to the character 中. I suspect that the phrase *Zhenguan zhongnian* must be read as *Zhenguan sinian* 貞觀四年 (the fourth year of the Zhenguan era [i.e. 630]), hence Sengfeng's dates <554-630>. The *Taishō* edition of *Xu gaoseng zhuan* contains one example in which *Zhenguan zhongnian* turns out to be an error for *Zhenguan* (轉下頁)

Sengfeng.<sup>①</sup>

His biographical sources convey that Sengcan the Exegete was, first of all, a skillful expounder of Buddhism as is demonstrated by his self-chosen sobriquet “Sanguo lunshi.” Secondly, he was a Buddhist leader who first supervised the dynastic monastery Daxingshansi and then was in charge of an important monastic group at the capital, and eventually he was twice involved in the Renshou relic-distribution campaigns. Thirdly, he was an exegete who authored at least two texts, one on the Mahāyāna teachings in general and the second on the particular text *Daśabhūmika sūtra*. Finally, he was a keen debater who debated not only Daoists but also Buddhist priests.

In his study on the formation of Northern Chan Buddhism, John McRae makes an intriguing argument for taking Sengcan the Exegete as Meditation Master Can. By raising a rarely considered possibility, this proposal is worthwhile discussing here.<sup>②</sup> McRae advances this possibility in a footnote of his well read book on Northern Chan Buddhism published a quarter of century earlier:

Although the anecdotes contained in his biography surround this Sengcan with an almost occultish charisma that would have been more appropriate for a Meditation Master than an exegete, the only explicit similarity to the



(接上页) *sinian*. Daoxun’s 道遜 (556-630) biography describes his death this way:

In the winter of the mid-Zhenguan era, ..., he died at the mountain temple, at the age of seventy-five. That was on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month of that year. 貞觀中年冬 ... 卒于山所, 春秋七十有五, 即其年十二月二十五日也 (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 50: 14.533b8-16).

Obviously, the combination of *Zhenguan zhongnian* and *dong* 冬 (winter) makes little sense. A specific year must have been meant here. Daoxun’s biographies in *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (T 55: 10.340c) and *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong ji* (T 52: 3.428c17ff) date Daoxun’s death to Zhenguan 4, which establishes that the phrase *Zhenguan zhongnian dong* 貞觀中年冬 in the *Taishō* version of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* was an error for *Zhenguan sinian dong* 貞觀四年冬.

① Sengcan’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (T 50: 9.501a7-10) mentions that Senglun resumed secular life at the end of the Sui and became an official in the Tang court.

② As far as I know, Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 was the first to take Sengcan the Exegete as Meditation Master Can. See Makita, “Hōzan Reiyū den”, 241. However, he confined himself to a brief mention of this identification without any explanation. In addition, a Chinese scholar directly identifies Sengcan the Exegete as the third patriarch Sengcan. See Tong, “Sui Tang liangdai Chang’an, Luoyang foji yizhuan minglu”, 200.

biographies of the other figures listed here is his association with the Sanlun School. ... Both eighth-century Chan authors and modern scholars refrain even to consider the possibility that this Sengcan might be connected with the Chan School. However, it is still quite possible that he is the individual listed in Fachong's biography as a student of the *Laṅkāvatāra*.<sup>①</sup>

I am not quite sure what the expression “occultish charisma” means here. It seems that this refers to the miraculous signs reported on the two occasions when Sengcan the Exegete was distributing relics to two local temples during the Renshou era. If this is true, there is little point in emphasizing Sengcan's “occultish charisma,” given that Daoxuan in his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* routinely associates similar miraculous signs with over sixty-nine monks involved in the Renshou relic-distribution campaigns.<sup>②</sup>

After comparing the relatively ample biographical data on Sengcan the Exegete with the few facts we have about the obscure Meditation Master Can, I find it difficult to identify the two as one person. First and foremost, one was known as a Meditation Master (*chanshi* 禪師), while the other was explicitly called an exegete (*fashi* 法師). As a general rule, in his biographical collection Daoxuan refers to monks who were known for their expertise in expounding Buddhist texts by the title *fashi*, while reserving the title *chanshi* for those particularly proficient in meditation, just as he uses the title *lūshi* for those closely related to *vinaya*. Although some monks might have been accomplished in more than one discipline, Daoxuan seems consistent in applying one of these titles to a specific subject in his biographical collection. Rarely are his subjects referred to by two titles. In view of this, Meditation Master Can was, as far as Daoxuan understood, a different person from Sengcan the Exegete, who, in his own *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography and at the six other places where he is mentioned in the same biographical collection, is referred to, without any exception, by the title

① McRae, *Northern School*, 281. I have converted the romanization from Wade-Giles to *pinyin*. Aramaki Noritoshi 荒牧典俊 (“Chūgoku bukkyō towa nanika?”, 29-30), though unaware of McRae's view, has arrived at the same conclusion regarding the identity of Meditation Master Can.

② Some of these examples are discussed in my book, *Monks and Monarchs*.

*fashi*, but never by *chanshi*.<sup>①</sup>

The following two further considerations also support the assumption that Sengcan the Exegete and Meditation Master Can were two separate monks. Nowhere in the biography of Sengcan the Exegete is any mention made of Huike. Both Huike and Sengcan the Exegete were already recognized as significant monks in Daoxuan's time, as is evident from the length of the biographies Daoxuan wrote for them. Thus, had there been any tie between the two monks known to Daoxuan, he would not have omitted Huike's name entirely in the biography for the monk who was supposedly Huike's chief successor.<sup>②</sup>

Moreover, Meditation Master Can was known to have left no written works whatsoever, while Sengcan the Exegete was the author of at least two commentaries.

Next to Sengcan the Exegete, we have to consider the plausibility of identifying Meditation Master Can as Sengcan the Meditator, a problem that can be studied in connection with another one, "Why and how did a monk called Sengcan come to be recognized as the third Chan patriarch?"

We can rephrase this problem in the following way. Not only did later Chan chroniclers take Meditation Master Can as their third patriarch, but they also reconstructed his full name as Sengcan. Further, as no Chan chroniclers associated any biographical data of Sengcan the Exegete with Sengcan the third patriarch, they did not take their third patriarch Sengcan as Sengcan the Exegete, but as Sengcan the Meditator. Sharing a name close to Meditation

① In addition to Sengcan's own biography, in which Sui Wendi addresses him as *fashi* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 9.500b18), Daoxuan mentions Sengcan in six of his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biographies: for Jingsong 靖嵩 (537-614), Jizang 吉藏 (549-623), Sengfeng 僧鳳 (554?-630?), Daoyue 道岳 (568/578-636), Lingrun, and Tanlun 曇輪 (ca. 546-626), in all of which, except for that for Jizang, where Sengcan, with his sobriquet repeated, is merely called an "expounder" (*lunshi* 論師) (514b6: 時沙門僧粲自號三國論師), Sengcan is consistently referred to as a *fashi* (see 10.502b13, 13.526b17, 13.527b4, 15.546a13, 20.598b12). In his "Critical Discussion on the [Chinese Buddhist] Extraordinary Traditions" ("Yijie lun" 義解論; attached to the *yijie* 義解 section of his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* [15.548a19-549c27]), Daoxuan also mentions Sengcan as a monk who gained a reputation as an expounder (549a22-23: 僧粲以論士馳名).

② Even if we accept that when Daoxuan wrote the biography for Sengcan he was not aware that he was the chief transmitter of the *Laṅkāvatāra* teaching right after Huike, we still have reason to believe that Daoxuan must have known of the discipleship had this Sengcan been indeed a disciple of Huike.

Master Can, either of the two Sengcans in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* could be, in principle, identified with Meditation Master Can. It is true that the title of Sengcan the Meditator (*chanshi*) must have made him more compatible with Meditation Master Can. However, judging from Daoxuan's records, Sengcan the Exegete was obviously better known and more prestigious than Sengcan the Meditator. Sengcan the Exegete, in comparison to Sengcan the Meditator, would have brought more prestige to the Chan tradition had he been identified as Meditation Master Can (the third patriarch). Thus, the identification advanced by later Chan chroniclers is remarkable in that they apparently passed over a better choice for a less attractive one. Why?

The third Chan patriarch must be, by definition, a successor to the second patriarch Huike on the one hand and the teacher of the fourth patriarch Daoxin on the other. Who, then, was Daoxin's teacher? According to Daoxuan, after studying with an unknown monk of dubious personality and qualifications, Daoxin went to study with two more unknown meditation practitioners, this time at Mount Wangong, located in northwest of present-day Huaining 懷寧, Anhui Province:

When [Daoxin] was seven years old, he began to study with a teacher, who was not pure in his practice of the precepts. Daoxin often remonstrated with him. As his remonstrations were ignored, he secretly practiced fasting and followed the precepts himself. He continued to do this for five years without his teacher's awareness. When he heard that two monks of unknown origin had entered Mount Wangong in Shuzhou to practice meditation peacefully, Daoxin went there and received instructions from them. He followed and studied under them for ten years, but was not allowed to accompany them when they went to Mount Luofu 羅浮 (in present-day Huizhou 惠州, Guangdong Province) [since they knew that] if he remained behind he would doubtlessly be able to benefit a great [number of people]. 初七歲時，經事一師，戒行不純，信每陳諫。以不見從，密懷齋檢。經于五載，而師不知。又有二僧，莫知何來，入舒州皖公山，靜修禪業。聞而往赴，便蒙授法。隨逐依學，遂經十年。師往羅浮，不許

相逐，但于後住，必大弘益。<sup>①</sup>

According to this story, Daoxin had two teachers at Mount Wangong. Both were of unidentifiable background, appearing and then disappearing without ever revealing much about themselves.

As these two Wangong monks are the only known persons who can be taken as Daoxin's teachers (his first teacher was obviously unqualified due to his defects in personality), the third Chan patriarch must be someone who can be identified with not only Meditation Master Can (a successor to Huike) but also one of these two Wangong monks. I suggest that it was for his possible connection to Daoxin that Sengcan the Meditator caught the attention of later Chan chroniclers in search of a possible candidate to bridge the gap between Huike and their fourth patriarch. Not only did Sengcan the Meditator bear a name close to Meditation Master Can, but his status as a meditation master also


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① *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 21.606b4-7 (translation partly based on McRae, *Northern School*, p. 31). In all of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* versions that I have consulted, including the *Taishō* one, this story about "Two unnamed monks" appears at the beginning of Daoxin's biography. But Luo Xianglin 羅香林 seems to have found a *Xu gaoseng zhuan* version in which this story is appended to the end of Daoxin's biography. See Luo, "Jiu Tangshu seng Shenxiu zhuan shuzheng," 276. This different location of the story in the biography leads Luo Xianglin to the conclusion that these two unnamed monks are not to be understood as Daoxin's teachers, but as two followers he gained after becoming a renowned meditation master. This understanding accords with the general practice of Chinese monastic biographical literature, which, probably following its secular counterpart, appended to the biography of a more famous subject biographies of a second or even third person who, of lesser importance, was related to the main subject (his disciple, son, colleague or a mere acquaintance). If this story about the two unnamed monks did appear at the end of the Daoxin biography as Luo claims, the story is to be understood in the following way. On learning the name of Daoxin, two unnamed monks practicing meditation at Wangong, went to receive instructions from him in meditation. This new reading would exclude the possibility that either of these two Wangong monks, themselves students of Daoxin, could have been Daoxin's teacher. However, I have not so far found the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* version described by Luo. On the contrary, a close reading of the text shows that the placement of the passage in the way Luo reports is not likely. Had the part about the two monks been indeed at the end of the biography, then, without it, the whole passage we quoted here would have read like this:

初七歲時，經事一師，戒行不純，信每陳諫。以不見從，密懷齋檢。經于五載，而師不知。隨逐依學，遂經十年。師往羅浮，不許相逐，但於後住，必大弘益。

The phrase <隨逐依學，遂經十年> would obviously repeat what was said in the previous sentences. For this reason, I believe that the portion would not have appeared elsewhere in the biography. Very likely, Luo here erred, and his failure to give the source for making that claim makes it difficult to pursue the matter.


matches that of Meditation Master Can. What is more important is that he was known to have performed miracles, and probably also died, at a mountain not too far from Mount Wangong, which would make it possible to identify Sengcan the Meditator with one of Daoxin’s two Wangong teachers. All these considerations may account for why and how Chan chroniclers chose to identify Meditation Master Can (i.e. the future “third Chan patriarch”) as Sengcan the Meditator, rather than Sengcan the Exegete.

In view of his potential connection to Daoxin, most modern scholars, no matter how critical of the early Chan lineages built by Chan chroniclers, seem willing to believe  it makes sense to identify Sengcan the Meditator with Meditation Master Can. However, it must be noted that by specifying one of the two Wangong monks as Sengcan the Meditator, who was thereby established as the third Chan patriarch, Chan followers obviously had to ignore the inconsistency—if not contradiction—between (1) the story in Daoxin’s biography that the two Wangong monks eventually left Wangong for Luofu and (2) the story about Sengcan the Meditator, which suggests that Sengcan died at Mount Du. Furthermore, Daoxin’s biography implies a chronology which will frustrate any effort to link Sengcan the Meditator with either of the two Wangong monks.

The above-quoted section in Daoxin’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography reports Daoxin’s early monastic career in terms of the following two periods:

First, beginning from the age of seven, he spent five years under his first teacher who was lax in practice. Given that Daoxin was born in 580, this five-year period lasted from 586 to 591;

Subsequently, he spent a whole decade (592-602, when he grew from thirteen to twenty-three years old) with the two Wangong monks until they left for Luofu.

Thus,  the two monks left Wangong for Luofu in 602. On the other hand, we noted that Sengcan the Meditator died at Mount Du “many years” before 604, when Bianyi’s relic-distribution team arrived at that mountain. In other words,

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① The identification of Sengcan the Meditator with Meditation Master Can is widely held by Chan scholars. See, to name only a few examples, Ui, *Zenshū-shi kenkyū*, 63; Du & Wei, *Zhongguo chanzong tongshi*, 45; Ge, *Zhongguo chan sixiang shi*, 60-61; Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*, 224.



Sengcan the Meditator died at Mount Du definitely before the two Wangong monks left for Luofu, rendering it implausible to identify Sengcan the Meditator with either of them.

In addition to all these considerations which might discourage one from identifying Meditation Master Can with Sengcan the Meditator, the plausibility of this identification is undermined by the absence of any *Lankâvatâra* tie on the part of Sengcan the Meditator, as in the case of Sengcan the Exegete.


To summarize the foregoing discussions of the relationships between Meditation Master Can, one of the two Wangong monks who were Daoxin's teachers and Sengcan the Meditator, we can say that while there is no unsurpassable difficulty in identifying Meditation Master Can with Sengcan the Meditator *or* either of the two Wangong monks, it is impossible to identify Meditation Master Can with Sengcan the Meditator *and* either of the two Wangong monks, given that Sengcan the Meditator could not have been either of the two Wangong monks albeit their geographical proximity. However, on the other hand, as will become more evident below, a core of traditional Chan lineage theory exactly consists in such an attempt to identify Huike's disciple Meditation Master Can as *both* Sengcan the Meditator and *either* of the two Wangong monks!

### 3. THE EVOLUTION OF LEGENDS ON THE “THIRD CHAN PATRIARCH”

As was shown above, although Daoxuan mentions Meditation Master Can as a disciple of Huike, he refrains from stating explicitly that Can was the chief disciple of and only successor to Huike. The first Chan source which unambiguously made such a claim was the funeral epitaph for Faru 法如 (638-689), a disciple of the Chan master Hongren 弘忍 (600-674). Entitled “Tang Zhongyue shamen Shi Faru Chanshi xingzhuang” 唐中岳沙門釋法如禪師行狀 (An Account of the Conduct of Monk Faru, the Śramaṇa of the Central Mountain [i.e. Mount Song 嵩山], under the Great Tang), this epitaph, though undated, was obviously written shortly after Faru

s death in 689. It records such a lineage of dharma transmission within the Chan Buddhist tradition: 1. Bodhidharma → 2. [Hui]ke → 3. [Seng]can → 4. [Dao]xin → 5. [Hong]ren → 6. [Fa]ru.<sup>①</sup>

It is not clear as to when Meditation Master Can was accepted as the third patriarch. However, given that Daoxuan's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* shows no trace of such a notion, which is, on the other hand, unequivocally expressed in Faru's epitaph, one can assume that Can's status as the third patriarch was established sometime in the two decades separating Daoxuan's death (in 667) and Faru's (689). Scholars generally regard the Chan lineage in Faru's epitaph as the first clear indication of any link between the Bodhidharma tradition and the “East Mountain Teachings” (*Dongshan famen* 東山法門) initiated by Daoxin.

However, Faru's epitaph is interesting not only for what it does say but also for what it doesn't. Although the listing of six generations of lineal predecessors might be a novelty in Chinese religious literature, this epitaph does not number or specifically identify the figures listed as “patriarchs.” We have to turn to later Chan sources for more explicit and coherent versions of the Chan patriarchate including Sengcan, which also display the evolution of the legends and ideologies related to Sengcan. In the following we will discuss thirteen of these sources, both textual and igraphic, dating from the eighth to the eleventh century. 3.1. Four Major Chan Historical Texts of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century We begin with four major Chan historic-biographical texts in the eighth century: *Chuan fabao ji* (710s), *Lengqie shizi ji* (written sometime between 712 and 716), *Shenhui yulu* (before 758) and *Lidai fabao ji* (775).

### 3.1.1. *Chuan fabao ji* 傳法寶紀

*Chuan fabao ji* 傳法寶紀 (Account of the Transmission of the Dharma-

① The identification of Meditation Master Can as Sengcan probably did not happen until the beginning of the eighth century. The earliest identifiable source for a Chan patriarch called Sengcan is Zhang Yue's 張說 (667-730) funeral epitaph for Shenxiu, composed in or shortly after the year Shenxiu died (706). See “Tang Yuquansi Datong chanshi beiming bing xu” 唐玉泉寺大通禪師碑銘并序, *QTW* 231.1b4-6: 自菩提達磨天竺東來, 以法傳惠可, 惠可傳僧璨, 僧璨傳道信, 道信傳弘忍。繼明重迹, 相承五光。Thus, the author of Faru's epitaph probably did not consider Can to be Sengcan when he wrote towards the end of the seventh century.

jewel; one fascicle) was compiled in the 710s by Du Fei 杜朏 (?-710+), very likely a teacher of Yifu 義福 (661-736), who was a chief disciple of Shenxiu.<sup>①</sup> It represents the first known Chan chronicle to accord Sengcan the status of the third patriarch. Its separate biography of Sengcan can be summarized as follows. While none knew his native place, Sengcan was a leading disciple of Huike, who, according to Huike's *Chuan fabao ji* biography, transmitted the dharma to Sengcan right before his death. He spent over a decade in the mountains and valleys, partly because of the Northern Zhou suppression of Buddhism, which lasted from 574 to 578. In the early Kaihuang era (581-600), Sengcan hid at Mount Wangong along with his fellow disciple (*tongxue* 同學) Meditation Master Ding 定. At Wangong, he befriended another meditation master, Baoyue 寶月 (?-617+), who had long lived there as a "divine monk" (*shenseng* 神僧) and who was the teacher of Meditation Master [Zhi]yan [智]嚴.<sup>②</sup> It was also at the same mountain and during the Kaihuang era (sometime after Daoxin turned thirteen [i.e. in 592]) that Sengcan accepted Daoxin as his disciple. Daoxin studied with Sengcan for eight to nine years, until Sengcan left for Mount Luofu with Ding, when he ordered Daoxin to stay behind.<sup>③</sup> After Sengcan moved to Luofu, nobody knows what happened to him.<sup>④</sup>

① For *Chuan fabao ji* and its date, see Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra*, 5; Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 329-351; McRae, *Northern School*, 86-87. This text is included as *T* no. 2838 in vol. 85. References here are made to Yanagida's critical edition in *Shoki no zenshi* 1. In addition to providing a separate biography for Sengcan (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 371-72), *Chuan fabao ji* also mentions Sengcan in the biographies of Huike and Daoxin (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 365, 376).

② An interlinear note in *Chuan fabao ji* (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 372) observes that Mount Wangong, located in Shuzhou, was also known as Mount Sikong. This is untrue given that Mount Sikong and Mount Wangong, according to *Dushi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要 (quoted in Hu Shi, "Lengqiezong kao," 200-201), indicated two separate, albeit neighboring, mountains.

As the Northern Zhou enforced its anti-Buddhist policies from 574 to 578, Sengcan, according to this *Chuan fabao ji* story, arrived at Wangong sometime after 584 (Kaihuang 4).

③ In *Chuan fabao ji*, Daoxin's discipleship under Sengcan, though mentioned in Sengcan's biography, is described in more detail in Daoxin's biography (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 376).

④ Sengcan's *Chuan fabao ji* biography only tells us that he left Wangong for the south (*nanyin* 南隱) (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 372). It is Daoxin's *Chuan fabao ji* biography that informs us that Sengcan went to Luofu (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1, p. 376).

A comparison of this *Chuan fabao ji* account with *Xu gaoseng zhuan* reveals the extent to which the author of *Chuan fabao ji* relies on the latter in telling the stories about Sengcan, especially about his relationship with Daoxin. First, *Chuan fabao ji* identifies the two unnamed Wangong monks mentioned in Daoxin’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography as Sengcan and Meditation Master Ding. In particular, its description of Daoxin’s discipleship under Sengcan is obviously a modification of the relevant record in Daoxin’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography: after studying with his first teacher for five—or six, according to *Chuan fabao ji*—years, Daoxin went to study with two unnamed Wangong monks—one of whom *Chuan fabao ji* identifies as Sengcan—for ten—*Chuan fabao ji* has nine—years.<sup>①</sup> The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* story of the two unnamed Wangong monks’ going to Luofu leads the *Chuan fabao ji* author to present Sengcan as dying under unknown circumstances. *Chuan fabao ji* also embellishes this account of Sengcan by a legend apparently modeled on Daoxin’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography: all the ferocious beasts which had filled the mountain suddenly vanished shortly after Sengcan’s advent.<sup>②</sup> Finally, *Chuan fabao ji* associates Sengcan with Baoyue, who must have been the teacher of Zhiyan 智巖 (577-654), a renowned meditation master to be recognized as the sixth patriarch of the Ox-head (Niutou 牛頭) branch of Chan Buddhism.<sup>③</sup>

### 3.1.2. *Lengqie Shizi Ji* 楞伽師資記

*Lengqie shizi ji* (Account of the Masters and Disciples of the *Laṅkāvatāra* Tradition), another Chan chronicle which was composed almost contemporaneously

① See above for the details of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* account of Daoxin’s relationship with the two unnamed Wangong monks.

② Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 371-372. Daoxin’s *Xu gaoseng zhuan* entry contains a similar story. While residing at Mount Shuangfeng 雙峰 (in present-day Shuangfeng City, Hunan Province) for mountain practice, Daoxin was one night surrounded by a great number of ferocious beasts. Instead of being frightened, he appeased them by administering precepts on them. After that, the beasts peacefully left the mountain of their own accord. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 21.606b16-18; discussed in McRae, *Northern School*, 31.

③ According to his *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (T 50: 20.602a-c), Zhiyan, a former general, renounced householder life sometime after he was forty (in 617) in order to enter Wangong to study with Baoyue. Zhiyan stayed at Wangong till Zhenguan 17 (643) when he left for Jianye 建業 (Nanjing), where he attracted over one hundred disciples. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Shitoucheng 石頭城 (in Jiangning 江寧 of Jiangsu) to engage in some philanthropic projects. See Yanagida, *Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū*, 36.

with *Chuan fabao ji*, contains a biography of Meditation Master Can.<sup>①</sup> In comparing *Lengqie shizi ji* and *Chuan fabao ji*, one may find that except for acknowledging Sengcan's discipleship under Huike and his obscure background in the secular world,<sup>②</sup> they present Sengcan's life quite differently. First and foremost, it might strike the readers that while *Chuan fabao ji* numbers the Chan patriarch between Huike and Daoxin as "the third patriarch" (*disanzu* 第三祖, after Bodhidharma and Huike) and names him Sengcan, the same patriarch is numbered "the fourth patriarch" (*disizu* 第四祖, after Guṇabhadra, Bodhidharma and Huike) and named "Meditation Master Can" in *Lengqie shizi ji*.

The other remarkable difference between *Chuan fabao ji* and *Lengqie shizi ji* accounts of Sengcan/Can consists in their descriptions of Daoxin's discipleship under Sengcan/Can. Unlike *Chuan fabao ji*, *Lengqie shizi ji* does not date (no matter how roughly) the commencement of this discipleship; instead, it provides some details about Can's instructions to Daoxin, especially referring to the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>③</sup> Moreover, regarding the length of this discipleship, *Chuan fabao ji* tells us that it lasted for eight to nine years, while *Lengqie shizi ji* lengthens it by three to four years (i.e. twelve years). The two Chan chronicles also vary as to the end of Sengcan/Can's life. While *Chuan fabao ji* mystifies it by a no-return

① Compiled by Jingjue 淨覺 (683-750?) sometime between 712 and 716. For evidence supporting this dating, see Barrett, "The Date of the *Leng-chia shih-tzu chih*". The fact that *Lengqie shizi ji* does not identify Meditation Master Can as Sengcan, as is done by *Chuan fabao ji*, might suggest the relative earliness of *Lengqie shizi ji*. However, this is not absolutely certain given the possibility that Jingjue, despite his awareness of the identification of Meditation Master Can as Sengcan, still chose not to accept it. References to the *Lengqie shizi ji* biography of Meditation Master Can are made to Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 167-168.

② *Chuan fabao ji* only observes that Sengcan had an unknown native place, while *Chuan fabao ji* adds that nobody knows Can's patronym and social status.

③ *Lengqie shizi ji* presents Daoxin's study under Can and the latter's emphasis on the *Lotus Sūtra* in the following fashion. Can kept his own dharma secret, refusing to transmit it to anybody except for Daoxin, who studied under him for twelve years. Daoxin received instructions from Can as a vase receives water, and the dharma, like a lamp, was transmitted between them. One by one, Daoxin mastered every dharma of the Buddha. Can approved Daoxin when he understood Buddha-nature clearly, referring him to a line in the *Lotus Sūtra*: "Only one thing exists, not the second nor the third thing" (唯此一事，實無二，亦無三). See Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 167. This refers to the following passage in the second chapter "Fangbian pin" 方便品 of *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經:

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trip to Luofu, Can in the *Lengqie shizi ji* is not known to have made such a trip before dying at Wangongsi 皖公寺, which presumably indicates a temple at Mount Wangong,<sup>①</sup> in a manner strongly reminiscent of Saṃghanandi (Senghianati 僧迦那提 or Sengqiananti 僧佉難提, d.u.) as recorded in *Fu fazang yinyuan zhuan* 付法藏因緣傳 (An Account of the Causes and Conditions of Transmitting the Dharma-storehouse).<sup>②</sup>

Moreover, whereas *Chuan fabao ji* confines itself to relating Sengcan to one single mountain (Wanshan 皖山; i.e. Mount Wangong), according to *Lengqie shizi ji*, Can had lived on Mount Sikong as a recluse before he later died on Wangong heroically.

Finally, the *Chuan fabao ji* story of “ferocious beasts” is not found in *Lengqie shizi ji*, which instead ascribes to Can a piece of highly metaphysical composition titled “Xiangxuan zhuan” 詳玄傳, apparently a commentary on *Xiangxuan fu* 詳玄賦 (Ode on Elucidating the Mysterious) by Xiancheng Huiming 仙城慧命

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佛告舍利弗,“諸佛如來但教化菩薩,諸有所作,常爲一事。唯以佛之知見,示悟衆生。舍利弗,如來但以一佛乘故,爲衆生說法。無有餘乘,若二若三。”(T 9: 1.7a29-b3) The Buddha said to Shariputra, “The Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the bodhisattvas. All the things they do are at all times done for this one purpose. They simply wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings and enlighten them to it. Shariputra, the Thus Come Ones have only a single Buddha vehicle which they employ in order to preach the Law to living beings. They do not have any other vehicle, a second one or a third one. Shariputra, the Law preached by all the Buddhas of the ten directions is the same as this.... (translated by Watson, *The Lotus Sūtra*, 31)

It might have simply referred to the following two lines in a *gāthā* included in the same chapter: 唯有一乘法, 無二亦無三 (T 9: 1.8a2917-18), which Watson translates as: “There is only the Law of the one vehicle./there are not two, there are not three.” (Watson, *The Lotus Sūtra*, 35)

In this statement, Can made a comment to the effect that the Saintly Way, mysteriously penetrating, is ineffable, while the Dharma-body, empty and tranquil, defies the human seeing and hearing faculties and that written words are provisional and empty (聖道幽通, 言詮之所不逮。法身空寂, 見聞之所不及。即文字語言, 徒勞施設也) (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 167).

① It is also possible to understand the expression *wangongsi* 皖公寺 as indicating a temple on Mount Wangong.

② *Fu fazang yinyuan zhuan*, T 50: 6.320a16ff. See Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 172. The *Lengqie shizi ji* biography of Meditation Master Can ends with the observation that a pagoda and images [of Can] could be seen inside the [Wangong] temple where he died (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 1: 168: 寺中見有廟影), suggesting the existence of a pagoda for Sengcan at the time when *Lengqie shizi ji* was composed.

(531-568), a disciple of Huisi.<sup>①</sup>

### 3.1.3. *Shenhui Yulu* 神會語錄

In *Shenhui yulu* (A Record of the Sayings by Shenhui 神會 [684-758]), we find a biography of Meditation Master Can, which, though undated, must have been recorded sometime before 758 when Shenhui died if one assumes that it was really out of Shenhui.<sup>②</sup> Like *Lengqie shizi ji* and *Chuan fabao ji*, *Shenhui yulu* admits the obscurity of Can's background but affirms his status as a chief disciple of Huike, adding that Can received from Huike a prophecy (*shouji* 授記), presumably about his status as a Chan patriarch.

*Shenhui yulu* tries to reconcile the conflicts between the two lines of account regarding the end of Sengcan/Can's life as presented in *Chuan fabao ji* and *Lengqie shizi ji*. It does so by a new theory: he did go to Luofu, as *Chuan fabao ji* claims, although he only stayed there for three years before returning to Mount Wan[gong], where he died the way described in *Lengqie shizi ji*.<sup>③</sup> Such a compromising nature is also shown by its portrayal of Daoxin's relationship with Can. While *Shenhui yulu* obviously follows *Chuan fabao ji* in stating that Can trained Daoxin for nine years, beginning from the time when Daoxin was thirteen, its account of Daoxin's training under Can seems to have echoed the relevant account in *Lengqie shizi ji*.<sup>④</sup> Probably also based on *Lengqie shizi ji*, *Shenhui yulu* states that Can lived a reclusive life at

① *Xiangxuan fu* is mentioned in Huiming's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography at T 50: 17.561b21. The whole text is preserved in *Guang Hongming ji*, T 52: 29.340a-c.

② References to the *Shenhui yulu* biography of Meditation Master Can are made to Yang (annotated), *Shenhui heshang chanhua lu*, 106-07. One should also note that in *Shenhui yulu* the third patriarch is referred to as Meditation Master Can, rather than Sengcan. This might suggest that Shenhui propagated this version of Can's life shortly after *Chuan fabao ji* and *Lengqie shizi ji* were composed, when Chan followers had not yet reached a consensus as to a fixed name for the patriarch between Huike and Daoxin (as a matter of fact, they even varied in identifying him as the third or fourth patriarch).

③ *Shenhui yulu* also mentions that Can was buried behind Shangusi 山谷寺.

④ In contrast to *Lengqie shizi ji*, which emphasizes the importance of the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Shenhui yulu* has the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Jin'gang jing* 金剛經; Skt. *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) as the foundation for Can's instructions to Daoxin. Daoxin was said to have been immediately enlightened to the meaning of (轉下頁)



Sikong although he died on Wangong.<sup>①</sup>

The *Shenhui yulu* biography of Can is more remarkable for its implicit claim that he died in 604. Daoxin was born in 580, Daoxin’s discipleship under Can, according to *Shenhui yulu*, lasted from 592, when Daoxin was thirteen, to 601, when Can left for Luofu. Further, according to the same *Shenhui yulu*, Can returned to Wangong and died there after spending three years at Luofu. The combination of these two accounts suggests that *Shenhui yulu* actually dates Can’s death to 604.

### 3.1.4. *Lidai Fabao Ji* 歷代法寶記

Like *Shenhui yulu*, *Lidai fabao ji* (Account of the Dharma-jewel throughout the Ages)<sup>②</sup> demonstrates a similar effort to combine the *Chuan fabao ji* and *Lengqie shizi ji* narratives on the end of Sengcan/Can’s life. In *Lidai fabao ji*, Sengcan, with his obscure background, returned to Wangong and died a heroic death there as depicted in *Lengqie shizi ji*.<sup>③</sup> The peculiarity of the *Lidai fabao ji* narrative consists in its describing the encounter between Huike and Sengcan in a way highly analogous to the story recorded in *Tanjing* 壇經 (*Platform Sūtra*) of Huineng’s first

(接上頁) the line in the *Sūtra*: “There was actually no sentient being who has ever been saved.” (T 8: 1.749a9-10: 實無衆生得滅度者). After transmitting some “secret words” (*dhāraṇī*) to Daoxin as the sign of dharma, Sengcan entrusted—*Shenhui yulu* continues—to him a *kaṣāya* as the proof of dharma-transmission. This presents a noteworthy parallel to the story in the *Platform Sūtra* that it was also a line in the *Diamond Sūtra* that triggered Huineng’s enlightenment. See Yampolsky (trans.), *Platform Sūtra*, 127.

① *Shenhui yulu* here introduces such a story. Before retiring to Mount Sikong as a recluse, Sengcan first lived in the cities, where he pretended to be a lunatic in order to escape persecution (i.e. the Northern Zhou Suppression of Buddhism); and then he lived in mountains and forests, where he struggled with some unspecified diseases.

② References to the *Lidai fabao ji* biography of Sengcan are made to Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 2: 82-83. While Yampolsky (*Platform Sūtra*, 40) believes that this text was composed in the 780s, Yanagida (*Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū*, 279) dates it before 781. For the latest contribution to the study of *Lidai fabao ji*, see Wendi Leigh Adamek, *Issues in Chinese Buddhist Transmission Seen through the Lidai Fabao Ji*, which has recently been published as *The Mystique of Transmission*.

③ The *Lidai fabao ji* record of the four meditation masters Wan 皖, Yue 月, Ding 定 and Yan 巖, who came to visit him and proclaimed him to be the Divine Can (Shencan 神粲) after Bodhidharma and who later accompanied Sengcan to Luofu was also obviously developed from the *Chuan fabao ji* record about Ding and Baoyue (who had Zhiyan as his disciple). The creation of the fourth meditation master, Wan, was very likely inspired by the name of Mount Wangong. *Lidai fabao ji* also embellishes its account of Sengcan with the same legend as used by *Chuan fabao ji*.

meeting with Hongren.<sup>①</sup> In addition, *Lidai fabao ji* also mentions an epitaph for Sengcan attributed to a renowned Sui author, to which we are now turning.<sup>②</sup>

### 3.2. Five Epitaphs Devoted to Sengcan in the Eighth Century

Now we move up to the eighth century, which witnessed the production of the following five epigraphs of particular interest. All devoted to Sengcan, two of them were attributed—wrongly—to Xue Daoheng and Daoxin, while the other three were composed, respectively, by three major Tang scholar-officials in the decade between 762 and 772: Fang Guan (762), Guo Shaoyu (767) and Dugu Ji (772).

① Compare these two accounts in *Chuan fabao ji* and the *Platform Sūtra*:

*Chuanfa baoji* (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 2: 82-83): During his first meeting with Great Master Huike, Sengcan demonstrated an appearance of leprosy in the great assembly [surrounding Huike]. When asked by the great master, “Where are you coming from and what are you doing here?” Sengcan answered, “I came here in order to seek protection from you, O Master!” Great Master Ke told him, “You are a victim of leprosy. What is the good of seeing me?” Sengcan answered, “Although I am afflicted by illness in body, there is no difference between the mind of an ill person and that of you, O Master!” Knowing that Sengcan was an extraordinary person, Great Master Huike entrusted to him the dharma and the *kaśāya* as a proof. 初遇可大師，璨示見大風疾於衆中見。大師問，“汝何處來，今有何事？”僧璨對曰：“故投和尚。”可大師語曰：“汝大風患人，見我何益？”璨對曰：“身雖有患，患人心與和上心無別。”可大師知璨是非常人，便付囑法及信袈裟。

*Platform Sūtra* (Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra*, p. 2/pp. 127-128): The priest Hung-jen (*pinyin*: Hongren) asked me (i.e. Huineng): “Where are you from that you come to this mountain to make obeisance to me? Just what is it that you are looking for from me?” I replied: “I am from Ling-nan (*pinyin*: Lingnan), a commoner from Hsin-chou (*pinyin*: Xinzhou). I have come this long distance only to make obeisance to you. I am seeking no particular thing, but only the Buddha dharma.” The Master then reproved me, saying: “If you’re from Ling-nan (*pinyin*: Lingnan) then you’re a barbarian. How can you become a Buddha?” I replied: “Although people from the south and people from the north differ, there is no north and south in Buddha nature. Although my barbarian’s body and your body are not the same, what difference is there in our Buddha nature?” 弘忍和尚問慧能曰：“汝何方人，來此山，禮拜吾？汝今向吾邊，復求何物？”慧能答曰：“弟子是嶺[嶺]南人，新州百姓，今故遠來，禮拜和尚，不求餘物，唯求作佛法。”大師責慧能曰：“汝是嶺[嶺]南人，又是獼猴，若爲堪作佛。”慧能答曰：“人即有南北，佛姓[性]即無南北。獼猴身與和尚不同，佛姓[性]有何差別？”

The similarities between them are such that one must have been modeled on the other. While the *Platform Sūtra* story, if it appeared sometime after Huineng’s death in 713, might have been the source, the possibility cannot be excluded that the *Lidai fabao ji* story was actually the source for the *Platform Sūtra* story, whose earliest known version (that excavated in Dunhuang) was not completed, according to Yampolsky (*Platform Sūtra*, 90), until sometime between 830 and 860.

② Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi* 2: 83.

### 3.2.1. The So-called “Xue Daoheng Epitaph”

Let us first turn to the so-called “Xue Daoheng’s epitaph”. Xue Daoheng 薛道衡 (537?-606?), one of the greatest literary talents during the Northern Zhou and Sui dynasties, was said to have composed a memorial epitaph for Sengcan. The existence of such an epitaph is reported by the mid-Tang statesman and author Dugu Ji 獨孤及 (725-777) in the epitaph he wrote in 772 to celebrate the imperial conferment in 771 of two titles, “Jingzhi dashi” 鏡智大師 (Great Master with Mirror-like Wisdom) and “Jueji” 覺寂 (“Stillness with Enlightenment”), respectively on Sengcan and his pagoda erected in 762 on Wangong.<sup>①</sup>

An inscription included as an appendix (*fulu* 附錄) in the collection of Dugu Ji’s works not only mentions but also quotes from “Xue Daoheng’s epitaph”:

The epitaph written by Xue [Daoheng] says, “Along with his fellow-disciple Master Ding, the Great Master (i.e. Sengcan) went to the south to live a reclusive life on Mount Luofu. From then on, no one knows what happened to him.” The epitaph says, “Leaving behind him the dharma-robe which will exist forever, he entered Mount Luofu, whence he never returned.” 薛碑曰: “大師與同學定公南隱羅浮山, 自後, 競不知所終。” 其銘曰: “留法服兮長在, 入羅浮兮不復還。”<sup>②</sup>

This conforms with *Chuan fabao ji*, according to which Sengcan went to Luofu with Ding, but contradicts the *Lengqie shizi ji* statement that Sengcan died at Wangong while lecturing to a great assembly he convened there. The author of this inscription tried to explain away this contradiction by the assumption that Xue Daoheng wrote this epitaph after Sengcan left Wangong for Luofu but before he returned to Wangong, where he died after entrusting the dharma to Daoxin.<sup>③</sup> Given its effort to foster the theory that Sengcan

① QTW 390.22b1-2. Dugu Ji’s epitaph is to be discussed below.

② The collection of Dugu Ji’s works is titled “Piling ji” 毗陵集 (The Collection of Piling 毗陵) (SKQS 1127), named after his hometown Piling (in present-day Changzhou 常州, Jiangsu). The inscription is found in SKQS 1127: 9.13-15; see 14a5 and 14a8-b2 for the mention of and quote from “Xue Daoheng’s epitaph.” Apparently, this composition was not written by Dugu Ji himself. Judging by its title, “Shangusi Juejita chanmen Disanzu Jingzhi Chanshi tabei yinwen” 山谷寺覺寂塔禪門第三祖鏡智禪師塔碑陰文, it was inscribed on the reverse side of the stele, the front side of which bore Dugu Ji’s inscription for Sengcan. See Chen Jinhua, “One Name, Three Monks”, 16n49. The highly laudatory terms in which the author of this inscription talks about Dugu Ji also confirm that it was written by Dugu Ji’s admirer.

③ “Shangusi Juejita chanmen Disanzu Jingzhi Chanshi tabei yinwen,” *Piling ji*, SKQS 1127: 9.14b2.

went to Luofu, without mentioning the belief that Sengcan died on Wangong, which was, as we will see later, to replace the Luofu theory as a cornerstone for later Chan ideologies and stories related to Sengcan, “Xue Daoheng’s epitaph” probably belonged to the same tradition of *Chuan fabao ji* and was close to it in time.

### 3.2.2. The Inscription Attributed to Daoxin

In April, 1982, an earthenware tile (15.5 x 11.4 x 3.6 cm) was excavated from an unspecified location in Hangzhou 杭州. Currently preserved in the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (Zhejiang shengli bowuguan 浙江省立博物館), this tile stele bears two inscriptions. On its left side are inscribed eight characters indicating the date of its inscription (“Da Sui Kaihuang shier nian zuo” 大隋開皇十二年作 [Made in the twelfth year of the Kaihuang Era [592] of the Great Sui Dynasty]).

On the face of this stele is a short inscription of thirty characters (arranged in five lines of six characters each):

In the seventh month of the twelfth year of the Kaihuang Era of the Great Sui Dynasty (592), Mahāsattva Sengcan disappeared and was transformed (i.e. died) on a peak of Mount Wangong in Shu[zhou]. This pagoda is built for his memory. Recorded by Daoxin. 大隋開皇十二年七月，僧璨大士隱化于舒之皖公山岫，結塔供養，道信爲記。

This discovery captured the attention of the art historian Jan Fontein, who published his studies of the significances of the inscription eleven years later (1993). Fontein is inclined to believe its authenticity.<sup>②</sup>

This inscription is particularly noteworthy for clearly establishing Daoxin’s status as Sengcan’s successor and more strikingly for stating that Sengcan died in the seventh month of Kaihuang 12 (August 14-September 11, 592), almost one and

① Chen Hao, “Sui Chanzong sanzuo Sengcan taming zhuan”.


② Fontein, “The Epitaphs of Two Chan Patriarchs”, 100. Although this tile stele has been treated as a newly excavated cultural relic, a similar, if not identical, stele has been repeatedly reported in a number of epigraphic collections, including 1. *Taozhai cangshi ji* (*Shike shiliao xinbian*, I: 11: 8121-22); 2. *Jinshi guwu kaogao* (*Shike shiliao xinbian*, III: 11: 501); and 3. *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huiyuan*, numbered *shan* 善 522-9 (see vol. 9, p. 78). Chen Yuan and Suzuki Tetsuo 鈴木哲雄, in 1964 and (轉下頁)

half decades earlier than most of the later Chan chronicles were—as is to be shown below—to date the death of the “Third Chan Patriarch.” Given that this inscription fosters the theory that Sengcan died at Wangong on the one hand, yet on the other, displays no knowledge of the date of Sengcan’s death (606) which became influential since the middle of eighth century, it was probably manufactured in the early eighth century.<sup>①</sup>


### 3.2.3. Fang Guan’s Epitaph


*Baolin zhuan* (Account of the ‘[Temple] of Jewel-Forest’ [*Baolinsi* 寶林寺]), compiled in 801 by an otherwise unknown monk called Zhiju 智炬 (a.k.a. Huiju 慧炬, d. after 801),<sup>②</sup> records an epitaph allegedly written by the well known bureaucrat Fang Guan 房琯 (697-763) in 762 for a memorial pagoda erected at Wangong in the memory of Sengcan.<sup>③</sup> Like the previous sources, Fang Guan’s epitaph also admits the obscurity of Sengcan’s origin, a fact it interprets in a way similar to that the Southern Chan followers tried to explain the obscurity surrounding the background



(接上页) 1985, discussed the inscription as is recorded in *Taozhai cangshi ji* and *Jinshi guwu kaogao* respectively. See Chen Yuan, *Shishi yinian lu*, 56; Suzuki, *Tō Gōdai zenshū shi*, 253-254. I wrote an article on the rubbing included in *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* shortly after I noticed it in a library at McMaster University in the winter of 1993. See Chen Jinhua, “-epitaph Allegedly Dedicated by Daoxin 道信 (580-651) to the ‘Third Chan Patriarch’ Sengcan 僧璨.”

① For more about this inscription attributed to Daoxin, see my abovementioned forthcoming article.

② For the history of this text, see Tokiwa, *Hōrin den no ke*  Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra*, 47n166.

③ Fang Guan became a  confidant of Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (r. 712-756) and then Tang Suzong 唐肅宗 (r. 756-762) during their exile in Sichuan caused by the rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 (?-757). See Fang Guan’s official biographies in *Jiu Tang shu* 111.3320-25, *Xin Tang shu* 139.4625-28. About his family background, it is noteworthy that his father, Fang Rong 房融 (?-705?), was a Buddhist believer with a possible role in the forgery of the important apocryphon, *Da Foding Rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanxing shoulengyan jing* 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經 (better known as “Lengyan jing” 楞嚴經; T no. 945, vol. 19), which was attributed to Banlamidi 般刺蜜帝 (Pramiti/or Paramiti?). See He, “Fang Rong bishou Lengyan jing zhiyi”; Luo, *Tangdai Guangzhou Guangxiaosi yu Zhong Yin jiaotong zhi guanxi*, 93-114; Deméville, *Le concile de Lhasa*, 42-52; Mochizuki, *Bukkyō kyōden seiritsu-shi ron*, 493-509. For the circumstances leading to Sengcan’s memorial pagoda at Wangong, the authenticity and date of this epitaph attributed to Fang Guan and some other relevant issues, see Chen Jinhua, “One Name, Three Monks,” 4-11.

of their sixth patriarch—Huineng 慧能 (638-713).<sup>①</sup>

While containing the *Chuan fabao ji* legend about “ferocious beasts,” this epitaph bases itself on *Lengqie shizi ji* in describing Sengcan’s death at a dharma-assembly at Wangong, merely embellishing it with the report that Sengcan’s death elicited from the sky a number of unusual signs, which did not disappear until seven days later. No mention is made of his alleged Luofu trip.

However, in describing Sengcan’s ties with Huike and Daoxin, Fang Guan’s epitaph provides some details not found in any previous sources known to us. As for Sengcan’s relationship with Huike, first of all, it depicts their first encounter in a “Channish” way.<sup>②</sup> Second, the epitaph tells us that during the Northern Zhou persecution of Buddhism, Huike brought Sengcan to Wangong, where they stayed at Shangusi 山谷寺, located on the southern side of the mountain. After staying there for five years, Sengcan healed after suffering from leprosy for years. This miraculous experience won him the sobriquet of “Can the Bald” (Chitou Can 赤頭璨).<sup>③</sup> On the eve of returning to Yexia 鄴下, Huike entrusted to Sengcan a set of

① *Baolin zhuan* 8.25-26: “To merge into the flow of life is a mere illusion. What is the necessity [to acknowledge] one’s family? All the dharmas keep changing and disappear like clouds. Of whom one can claim to be a son? He therefore concealed his native place and gave up his patronym and given name, leaving them unheard generation after generation.” (以沒生猶幻，何有于家？變滅如雲，其誰之子？故蒙厥宅里，黜其姓氏，代莫得而聞焉。) For Southern Chan understanding of Huineng’s humble family background, see the epitaph Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) wrote ca. 740 for Huineng at the request of Shenhui. See Yanagida, *Shoki zenshō shiso no kenkyū*, 186-187; the relevant passage found in p. 540 (禪師俗姓盧氏，某郡某縣人也。名是虛假，不生族姓之家；法無中邊，不居華夏之地。) and discussed in Chen Jinhua, “One Name, Three Monks,” 61-62.

② Fang Guan’s epitaph depicts the first encounter between Daoxin and Sengcan in this way. When he met Huike, he asked Huike to repent his sins on his behalf. Asked to show his sins, Sengcan realized his inability to find them. Upon this, Huike triumphantly claimed that he had succeeded in repenting the sin for Daoxin. Sengcan then told Huike, “It was at this moment that I realized that the nature of sin is not inside, outside, nor in between. The mind is like this. So is the dirt of sin.” Huike highly appreciated Sengcan’s understanding and transmitted the dharma to him (*Baolin zhuan* 8.37-38: 後見先師可公，請為懺悔。可公曰：“將汝罪來，與汝懺悔。”大師曰：“覓罪不得。”可公曰：“與汝懺悔矣。”大師白先師曰：“今日乃知罪性不在內，不在外，不在中間。如其心然，罪垢亦然。”先師曰：“如是一言，以發廓然昭矣。”) This story was used as a *koan* in later Chan literature.

③ This reminds one of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* story of Sengding, Baogong’s teacher at Mount Zhong 鐘山. See *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T 50: 19.579b-c, summarized and discussed in Chen Jinhua, *Monks and Monarchs*, 191.

*kaṣāya* (*jiasha* 袈裟), which he says was transmitted from his teacher (presumably Bodhidharma). Thus, in contrast to the *Chuan fabao ji*'s effort to identify the two unnamed Wangong monks as Sengcan and Ding, Fang Guan specifies them as Sengcan and Huike.

As for Sengcan's relationship with Daoxin, Fang Guan's epitaph tells us that Sengcan passed on the dharma to Daoxin and sent him away, ordering him not to reveal their relationship when he was asked for the provenance of his dharma. The epitaph ends with the following rather dramatic scene. It was not until sometime after Sengcan's death that Daoxin, accompanied by several hundreds of his disciples, rushed back from Mount Shuangfeng 雙峰 to entomb Sengcan's body in his former residence, and thus revealing to the public his status as Sengcan's appointed heir.<sup>①</sup>

Fang Guan's epitaph is particularly noteworthy for casting Sengcan as a Chinese Vimalakīrti, who sometime acted as a butcher, drinker or even a buyer of prostitution.<sup>②</sup> It is also interesting to note that in the epitaph Sengcan predicts that the Renshou relic-distribution campaigns would reach Shangusi, which is supported by no historical sources.<sup>③</sup>

### 3.2.4. Guo Shanzu's Epitaph

*Huangshan sanzhu taming bing xu* 黃山三祖塔銘並序 (An Epitaph, with Preface, for the Pagoda of the Third Patriarch on Mount Huang 黃山 [in Anhui])

① This statement does not sound plausible as the Sui was still at its height in the time. It took ten more years to see its downfall.

② Fang Guan's epitaph claims that in spite of all these misdeeds, Sengcan's mind remained “unbefuddled” thanks to his superior understanding that all the dharmas are mere illusionary forms without substance and all thoughts are without basis.

③ This legend was apparently based on the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography of Tankai 曇首 (536?-618?) (*T* 50: 26.670a28ff), according to which at the end of the Renshou era (604) Tankai accompanied a relic to a temple called Shangusi 山谷寺 on Mount Huang 環谷山 in Xi 熙州 (in present-day Huaining 懷寧, Anhui). Another *Xu gaoseng zhuan* edition reads 環谷山 for 環公山 (see editorial note 9 in p. 670), very close to 琬公山. However, as this Shangusi was on a mountain in Xizhou, it cannot be identified with the temple with the same name in Shuzhou, at which Sengcan was said to have lived and died, although Xizhou and Shuzhou, both belonging to Anqing-fu 安慶府, were not too far from each other.



by Guo Shaoyu 郭少聿 (?-767+) narrates the story of how a memorial pagoda was built on Mount Huang for Sengcan.<sup>①</sup> After hearing that Sengcan's tomb was on the eastern side of Mount Huang and then finding there a dilapidated stele dedicated to him, a monk called Zhizang 智藏 (?-765?) was determined to build a pagoda there for Sengcan's memory in Guangde 廣德 2 (764). He died, unfortunately, without completing the project. It was picked up and brought to completion by his disciple Zhikong 智空 (?-767+) in Dali 大歷 2 (767). Guo Shaoyu therefore honored this pagoda with an epitaph. Although it contains no new legends or story about Sengcan, Guo's epitaph reveals that in addition to Mount Wangong, Mount Huang, which, like Wangong, is located in Anhui too, was then also regarded as the place where Sengcan died.

### 3.2.5. Dugu Ji's Epitaph

In recounting Sengcan's life, Dugu Ji's epitaph was mainly based, not surprisingly, on Fang Guan's epitaph.<sup>②</sup> From an unknown native place, Sengcan—Dugu Ji's epitaph tells us—lived under the [Northern] Zhou and Sui, receiving dharma-transmission from Huike. He was ordained in Yezhong 鄴中 (i.e. Yexia 鄴下) and received the Way at Mount Sikong. Dugu Ji seems to have followed the reconciling approach assumed by *Shenhui yulu* concerning the end of Sengcan's life: although Sengcan went to Luofu, after entrusting the dharma and *kaśāya* to “the enlightened” (presumably Daoxin), he died at “this mountain,” which must have referred to Wangong given that the epitaph was, like Fang Guan's, dedicated to Sengcan's memorial pagoda at Shangusi, which was located, according to Fang Guan's epitaph, on the southern side of Wangong.

Dugu Ji's epitaph is most significant for ascribing to Sengcan some strongly

① QTW 440: 6-7.

② In his epitaph Dugu Ji mentions Xue Daoheng and Fang Guan as his predecessors in glorifying Sengcan (QTW 390.22b1-2).

*prajñā*-colored teachings.<sup>①</sup>

The outline of his teachings is as follows. With tranquil contemplation and wondrous function, he covered all the flowing phenomena, appearing and disappearing. Watching all the existences in the four directions, above and below, [he found that] no dharma is seen, no body is seen, no mind is seen; until the mind becomes free from the name and words, the body becomes identical with the empty field; the dharma is like dream and illusion, which can neither be attained nor experienced. Only by attaining this understanding can one be said to attain liberation. 其教大略:以寂照妙用,攝[群品]<sup>②</sup>流注生滅。觀四維上下,不見法,不見身,不見心,乃至心離名字,身等空界,法同夢幻,亦無得無證。然後謂之解脫。<sup>③</sup>

**3.3. Four Sources in the 9-11<sup>th</sup> Century** This section covers four more sources, belonging to the ninth, tenth and eleventh century respectively. We begin with *Baolin zhuan*, the only known major Chan chronicle that was compiled in the whole of the ninth century.

### 3.3.1. *Baolin Zhuan* 寶林傳

After commenting on Sengcan's obscure background in the secular world, *Baolin zhuan* describes his discipleship under Huike, which it dates to Tianping 天

① The stele bearing Dugu Ji's epitaph, along with Sengcan's pagoda at Wangong, was destroyed during the Suppression of Buddhism in the Huichang era (843-844). The pagoda was rebuilt in the early Dazhong 大中 era (847-859), while the stele was not re-erected until the eighth month of Xiangtong 咸通 2 (861), when the art historian Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (?-887) wrote a memorial inscription on the reverse side of the re-erected stele. See *Sanzu dashi beiyin ji*, QTW 790.22-23. Zhang Yanyuan was the author of *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters and Calligraphers through the Ages) and remarkably, a great grandson of Zhang Yanshang 張延賞 (727-787), who cooperated with Dugu Ji in persuading the Tang government to confer an honorific title on Sengcan and his Wangong pagoda respectively. See Chen Jinhua, "One Name, Three Monks", 18.

② The *Piling ji* (SKQS 1127: 9.8b6) and *Wenyuan yinghua* editions (864.9a5) does not have 群品. But the *Tang wencui* 唐文粹 edition (SKQS 1344: 62.2a3) agrees with the QTW edition in having these two characters.

③ QTW 390.22a2-4.

平 2 (535),<sup>①</sup> presenting their encounter roughly in the same way as it is recorded in Fang Guan's epitaph.<sup>②</sup> After his ordination at the Guangfusi 光福寺 on the eighteenth day of the third month of the same year (May 5, 535), Sengcan returned to Huike, continuing to be his attendant. Two years later (537), Huike transmitted the dharma to him and told him the old stories and predictions, presumably those related to the Chan patriarchs in India and China as well.

When Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou dynasty (r. 561-578) began to suppress Buddhism in the former territory of Northern Qi in 577, Sengcan hid at Wangong for over a decade. Later, he began to promote Buddhism, and sometime around Kaihuang 12 (592), after an exchange of words similar to that allegedly occurring between Sengcan and Huike in their first encounter, Sengcan accepted the fourteen-year old novice Daoxin as his disciple.<sup>③</sup> After serving as Sengcan's attendant for eight to nine years, Daoxin went to Jizhou 吉州 for full ordination.<sup>④</sup> Then, he came back to Sengcan, who did not allow Daoxin to stay on with him on the grounds that Daoxin was already enlightened to the Way with the reception of the *śīla* (precepts). Subsequently, Sengcan sent Daoxin away after transmitting the dharma to him with a *kaṣāya* as proof. A *gāthā* was also transmitted on this occasion.<sup>⑤</sup>

As for the end of Sengcan's life, *Baolin zhuan* agrees with *Shenhui yulu*, *Lidai fabao ji* and Dugu Ji's epitaph: he died on Wangong after spending three years

① Here the *Baolin zhuan* author has Tianping as an era name adopted by the second emperor of Later Zhou (Hou Zhou 後周; i.e. Northern Zhou). This is an obvious oversight, given that Tianping was an era under the reign of Emperor Xiaojing (r. 534-550) of the Eastern Wei.

② Obviously, the *Baolin zhuan* author here was based on Fang Guan's epitaph, which is included in *Baolin zhuan*.

③ *Baolin zhuan* presents the dialogue in the following way: When Daoxin asked for the dharma-gate of liberation, Sengcan asked him, "Who put you under bondage?" Daoxin answered, "Nobody." "Now that nobody put you under bondage, you are already liberated. Why are you still seeking for liberation?" Right upon this, Daoxin became enlightened.

④ This time-frame of Daoxin's discipleship was obviously based on *Chuan fabao ji*. According to Daoxin's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography (*T* 50: 21.606b7-8), it was after his Wangong teachers went to Luofu that he was ordained and affiliated himself with a temple in Jizhou.

⑤ A varied version of this *gāthā* is found in the *Platform Sūtra* (Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra*, 26/177).

at Luofu, although it dates his death to Daye 2 (606), in contrast to both *Shenhui yulu*, which implies that Can died two years earlier, and other earlier sources which remain silent on the date of his death.

### 3.3.2. *Chodang Chip* 祖堂集

Another important Chan chronicle, *Chodang chip* (Ch. *Zutang Ji*; Collection of the Patriarch-hall; twenty fascicles, was compiled by two monks known as Jing 靜 (?-952+) and Yun 筠 (?-952+) one and a half centuries after *Baolin zhuan*—that is, in 952 under the Southern Tang dynasty [937-975], but wasn’t published until almost three hundred years later (in 1245) and interestingly, in Goryeo.<sup>①</sup> *Chodang chip* also presents an important source for the legends about Sengcan, although it appears to have relied on *Baolin zhuan* in depicting Sengcan’s life. In this Chan collection, Sengcan’s legends are mainly collected in Huike’s biography as well as Sengcan’s. In the former, what concerns Sengcan includes the story about the first encounter between Huike and Sengcan, as is dominated by the discussion about repentance, and the dharma-transmission from Huike to Sengcan, culminating in a *gāthā* which, like the *gāthā* Sengcan transmits to Daoxin in *Baolin zhuan*, is also found in the *Platform Sūtra*.<sup>②</sup> Except for a discussion about the Buddha-mind (*foxin* 佛心), which is not found in *Baolin zhuan* and other Chan historic-biographical sources, all the material in Sengcan’s *Chodang chip* biography are borrowed from *Baolin zhuan*.<sup>③</sup> Finally, it is noteworthy that Sengcan’s *Chodang chip* biography

① References made to Yoshizawa (et al., collated).

② Yoshikawa, *Sōdō shū*, 78. The *gāthā* reads as follows, “Originally, there was some ground,/ on the ground was planted some flowers./ Originally, there was no seed,/ neither any flower to grow” (本來緣有地，因地種花生。本來無有種，花亦不曾生。). For the appearance of the same *gāthā* (with some slight differences) in the *Platform Sūtra*, see Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra*, 176-77.

③ The motifs shared by *Baolin zhuan* and *Chodang chip* include, 1. the discussion of “emancipation” (*jietuo* 解脫) that was carried out between Sengcan and Daoxin, 2. Daoxin’s eight to nine years of discipleship under Sengcan, 3. the *gāthā* bestowed on Daoxin at the occasion of the dharma-transmission from Sengcan to Daoxin, and finally, 4. the dating of Sengcan’s death in 606.

In the story of the “Buddha-mind,” asked by Daoxin about the Buddha-mind, Sengcan asks Daoxin, “What kind of mind do you have right now?” Daoxin answers that he does not have any mind. Upon this, Sengcan asks Daoxin, “How that you have no mind, how can it be that the Buddha has any mind?” (Yoshikawa, *Sōdō shū*, 80).

ends with a comment on Sengcan by a meditation master called Jingxiu 淨修 (?-952+), a colleague of the two coauthors of *Chodang chip* (Jing and Yun) and who contributed a preface to *Chodang chip*.<sup>①</sup>

### 3.3.3. *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* 景德傳燈錄

About half a century after the appearance of *Chodang chip*, a standard Chan historic-biographical anthology, *Jingde chuandeng lu* (Record of Transmitting the Lamp, [compiled] in the Jingde Era [1004-1007]), was compiled under the direct supervision of the Northern Song government. *Jingde chuandeng lu* specifies the date of Sengcan's death as the fifth day of the tenth month of the second year of Daye era (November 10, 606), under the reign of Sui Yangdi (r. 604-617).<sup>②</sup> In general, *Jingde chuandeng lu* agrees with *Lidai fabao ji* in describing the end of Sengcan's life: after living as a hermit on Luofu for two years (in contrast to *Shenhui yulu* and *Lidai fabao ji*, which have three years) he came back to his former residence at Wangong and one month later he died at a great dharma-assembly he held near his temple. The *Jingde chuandeng lu* biography of Sengcan also contains the *Baolin zhuan* story of finding Sengcan's tomb and relics at Wangong.

### 3.3.4. *Chuanfa Zhengzong Ji* 傳法正宗記

The last textual Chan source related to Sengcan which is to be examined here is *Chuanfa zhengzong ji* (Account of the Authentic Lineage through Which the Dharma was Transmitted; nine fascicles) by the Northern Song Buddhist monk Qisong 契嵩 (1007-1072), which was submitted to the court in 1061.<sup>③</sup> As a whole, Qisong's account of Sengcan's life is based on *Baolin zhuan* and Fang Guan's epitaph included therein. He interpreted Sengcan's obscure background as his

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① This brief comment is fashioned into a *gāthā* to the effect that Sengcan, as a true son of the Dharma-king, uttered delicate words and made no distinctions whatsoever in his mind (Yoshikawa, *Sōdō shū*, 80-81).

② *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T 51: 3.222a1-2.

③ References made to the edition included in T no. 2078, vol. 51. The latest study of this text is provided by Elizabeth Morrison's dissertation (*Ancestors, Authority, and History*), which has newly come out as *The Power of Patriarchs Qisong and Lineage in Chinese Buddhism*.

deliberate effort to forget the mind, since “the Realized Persons (*zhiren* 至人) take the material traces as hindrances to the Great Way.”<sup>①</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS



The study presented in this article reveals that some Chan followers at the turn of the eighth century attempted to link their second and fourth patriarchs (i.e. Huike and Daoxin) by the following strategies. First, they identified Meditation Master Can, one of Huike’s disciples, with the miracle-worker and meditation master Sengcan, who was known to have performed a miracle at Mount Du before dying there afterwards. Then, by virtue of the geographical proximity between Mounts Du and Wangong, at the latter of which Daoxin studied with two unspecified monks, they further identified one of these two monks at Wangong as Sengcan. As we can see, this identification has the advantage of finding a monk who was not only a successor to Huike (the second patriarch) but also a teacher of Daoxin (the fourth patriarch), thus establishing Sengcan’s status as the third patriarch who could connect the second and the fourth patriarchs like a string of pearls. In spite of this, we noted that when the meditation master is introduced by Daoxuan as the first successor to Huike (to be accurate, Huike’s *Laṅkāvatāra* tradition), he is simply called “Meditation Master Can”. With the first character in his name omitted, the full name of this Meditation Master Can is not actually known. Therefore, in principle, Meditation Master Can could have been any monk with the character *can* as the second part of his two-character dharma-name.

The “Third Chan master Sengcan” turns out to be no more than a “shadow figure” that was a conflation of the following three unrelated figures: (1) Meditation Master Can (a *Laṅkāvatāra* master and a disciple of Huike), (2) Sengcan the Meditator (also a miracle-worker), and (3) one of Daoxin’s two obscure teachers at Wangong. While there is no evidence to support or disapprove the identification of any of these three monks with either of the other two, we do have sufficient

① *Chuanfa zhengzong ji*, T 51: 6.745c20: 至人以物迹爲大道之累。

evidence against the assumption that Sengcan the Meditator was one of Daoxin's two mentors at Wangong. Accordingly, all the later Chan stories which depicted Sengcan as the third patriarch (a disciple of Huike and a master of Daoxin) must be viewed as legends without any historical basis.

We then proceeded to review and interpret the majority of the Sengcan-related legends emerging through the ages. This review leads to the following conclusions. First, all these sources acknowledge the obscurity of Sengcan's background in the secular world: his native place, his age, his patronym and given name are all unknown. His full name seems to have also appeared rather late. A comparison of two Chan chronicles (*Chuan fabao ji* and *Lengqie shizi ji*) reveals that one gives the name of the third patriarch as Sengcan, while the other merely records him (numbered as fourth patriarch) as Meditation Master Can. This discrepancy indicates that even at the time when *Lengqie shizi ji* was composed (sometime between 712 and 716), some Chan traditions represented by *Lengqie shizi ji* had not yet found a full name for the patriarch between Huike and Daoxin and that at that time Chan followers had not even reached a consensus as to the number of their patriarchs and their relationships, leaving Sengcan (or Meditation Master Can) sometime counted as the third and sometime as fourth patriarch. This also suggests that naming this Chan patriarch as Sengcan did not happen until shortly before the composition of *Chuan fabao ji*, which represents the first Chan source to name the third patriarch Sengcan.

Second, it seems that in manufacturing these stories/legends related to their third patriarch, the later Chan ideologues availed themselves of stories from *Xu gaoseng zhuan* and some fictions that were strongly colored by, and continued to shape, some characteristically Chan ideologies. Despite the multitude of these stories/legends and their rich details, few if any of them can be proved to have any historical veracity. The only plausible point that all these stories/legends contain is probably the five-character statement in *Xu gaoseng zhuan* to the effect that a meditation master called Can was a disciple of Huike. However, it is far from certain that the full name of this meditation master was Sengcan.

Finally, this does not mean that all the Chan legends and ideologies which

were created through the ages to support the existence of such a “Chan patriarch” and to strengthen his importance are meaningless. With their patterns, structure, nature and underlying ideologies appropriately deciphered, these stories are useful, sometime even revealing, in understanding the development and transformation of Chan Buddhism. The virtually identical stories attributed to Sengcan and Huineng, for example, might prove important in reconstructing the configuration of Huineng as a Chan, especially “Southern Chan”, patriarch.



## Bibliography

### I. Abbreviations


- QTW *Qitang wen* 全唐文 (see Bibliography II).  
SKQS *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 影印文淵閣四庫全書 (see Bibliography III).  
T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Takakusu, et al., comps., 1924-1932; see Bibliography III).


### II. Primary Sources

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